

## UNIVERSITIES, SCHOOLS AND THE THIRD SPACE

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### Abstract

This paper explores relationships between universities and schools. It draws on the author's first-hand experience in a long career in the higher education sector working in, and with, many different kinds of universities. It is also informed by his direct involvement in research on school-university partnerships. It considers fundamentals such as the nature of education and the core purposes of both types of institution. Issues that arise in school-university partnerships are considered and the concept of the 'third space' in which there can be mutuality and collaboration is explored. The paper highlights challenges to both universities and schools as they navigate partnerships. From my point of view, it is entirely reasonable for schools and teachers to be the dominant partners and for university academics to see themselves as supporters, servants and consultants.

In the late 1990s, the author had been asked by the University of Cambridge Faculty of Education to work with a new partnership with schools in the country of Hertfordshire. The HertsCam Network, as it began to be called, established a Steering Committee with members who were school principals and a representative of the district authority. This worked well until the university took steps to try to impose higher fees, compulsory training in quantitative research methods and an end to experienced teachers in the MEd teaching team. The Steering Committee found this unacceptable so took decisive action and declared independence. HertsCam became a registered charity (NGO) governed by a Board of Trustees which is dominated by school principals. This enabled the network members to embrace more fully the idea of non-positional teacher leadership.

**Key words:** education, schools, universities, partnership, third space

## УНИВЕРСИТЕТТЕР, МЕКТЕПТЕР ЖӘНЕ ҮШІНШІ КЕҢІСТІК

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### Аңдатпа

Бұл мақалада университеттер мен мектептер арасындағы қарым-қатынас қарастырылады. Ол автордың жоғары білім берудегі ұзақ жылғы мансабындағы жеке тәжірибесіне негізделген, ол әртүрлі типтегі көптеген университеттерде жұмыс істеген. Мұны оның мектеп пен университет арасындағы серіктестікке бағытталған зерттеулерге тікелей қатысуы да дәлелдейді. Ол білім беру сипаты және екі типтегі оқу орындарының негізгі мақсаттары сияқты негізгі аспектілерді қарастырады. Мектеп пен университет арасындағы серіктестікте туындайтын мәселелер қарастырылады және өзара қарым-қатынас пен ынтымақтастық болуы мүмкін "үшінші кеңістік" тұжырымдамасы зерттеледі. Құжатта серіктестік орнату кезінде университеттерде, мектептерде кездесетін мәселелер көрсетілген. Менің көзқарасым бойынша, мектептер мен мұғалімдердің басым серіктес болуы және университет ғалымдары өздерін қолдаушылар, қызметшілер және кеңесшілер ретінде қарастыруы әбден орынды.

1990 жылдардың аяғында Кембридж университетінің білім бөлімі автордан Хертфордшир округіндегі мектептермен жаңа серіктестік аясында жұмыс істеуді өтінді. HertsCam желісі басқарушы комитет құрды, оның мүшелері мектеп директорлары мен аудандық билік өкілдері болды. Бұл университет жоғары ақы төлеуге, сандық зерттеу әдістерін міндетті оқыту және магистратура

командасында тәжірибелі оқытушылармен қызмет етуге тырысқанға дейін жақсы жұмыс істеді. Басқару комитеті мұны қолайсыз деп тапты, сондықтан батыл әрекет етіп, тәуелсіздік жариялады. HertsCam мектеп директорлары үстемдік ететін Қамқоршылар кеңесі басқаратын тіркелген қайырымдылық ұйымына (ҰЕҰ) айналды. Бұл желі мүшелеріне мұғалімдердің позициялық емес көшбасшылық идеясын толық түсінуге мүмкіндік берді.

**Түйін сөздер:** білім, мектептер, университеттер, серіктестік, үшінші кеңістік

## УНИВЕРСИТЕТЫ, ШКОЛЫ И ТРЕТЬЕ ПРОСТРАНСТВО

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### Аннотация

В этой статье исследуются взаимоотношения между университетами и школами. Она основана на личном опыте автора за его долгую карьеру в сфере высшего образования, когда он работал во многих университетах различного типа. Об этом также свидетельствует его непосредственное участие в исследованиях, посвященных партнерству между школой и университетом. В нем рассматриваются такие фундаментальные аспекты, как характер образования и основные цели обоих типов учебных заведений. Рассматриваются вопросы, возникающие в партнерстве между школой и университетом, и исследуется концепция "третьего пространства", в котором могут существовать взаимопонимание и сотрудничество. В статье освещаются проблемы, с которыми сталкиваются как университеты, так и школы при налаживании партнерских отношений. С точки зрения автора, вполне разумно, чтобы школы и учителя были доминирующими партнерами, а университетские ученые рассматривали себя в качестве сторонников, лиц, оказывающих услуги, и консультантов.

В конце 1990-х годов факультет образования Кембриджского университета попросил автора поработать в рамках нового партнерства со школами в графстве Хартфордшир. Сеть HertsCam, как ее стали называть, создала Руководящий комитет, членами которого были директора школ и представитель районных властей. Это хорошо работало до тех пор, пока университет не предпринял шаги, чтобы попытаться ввести более высокую плату, обязательное обучение количественным методам исследования и покончить с опытными преподавателями в команде магистратуры. Руководящий комитет счел это неприемлемым, поэтому предпринял решительные действия и провозгласил независимость. HertsCam стала зарегистрированной благотворительной организацией (НПО), управляемой попечительским советом, в котором доминируют директора школ. Это позволило членам сети более полно осознать идею непоозиционного лидерства учителей.

**Ключевые слова:** образование, школы, университеты, партнерство, третье пространство

### Introduction

In 2020, I was awarded a Senior Fellowship of the Higher Education Academy. The process of being examined for this fellowship was satisfying because it required me to collect evidence of my work in the higher education sector over a period of more than thirty years. It also required an in-depth reflection on the experience which I draw on in this article.

My career in education began in the 1970s in the UK when I enrolled as a student at a Teacher Training College. Having qualified as a teacher, I taught in schools for about 10 years. I was passionate about teaching and wanted to engage in discourse about it. I ran workshops for colleagues in school, wrote discussion papers and enrolled on a part-time masters degree course. I gave talks at our local teachers' centre and the university where I studied for my masters.

In the mid 1980s, I was invited to become a full-time teacher educator in the university. My role for the first couple of years was to teach on the one-year course that enabled graduates to become teachers. My recent experience as a teacher seemed to be an asset. I chose to volunteer to teach once a week in a school and invited the student teachers to come along and watch me in the classroom. This could not be sustained indefinitely but I was determined to hang on to my identity as a teacher. When, after a year or two, the university asked me to take over a Diploma course for inservice teachers, I was forced to widen my perspective and learn new skills. The challenge, as I saw it, was to enable experienced teachers to analyse problems associated with school leadership and the school as an organisation. This gave me a dilemma concerning my professional identity. Could I continue to see myself as a member of the teaching profession or would I have to reconstruct my identity as a university academic? My dilemma raised questions about the nature of universities and what distinguishes them from schools.

### **Methodological questions**

*What do schools and universities have in common?*

Perhaps the most important feature that schools and universities have in common is that they are both committed to educating people, mostly young people<sup>1</sup>, in social settings. This commitment to educating raises a fundamental question about the nature and purpose of education which are much contested.

A sociological perspective suggests that education functions as a mechanism for reproducing the structure of an unequal society. A very determinist analysis would have it that the so-called meritocracy is merely a means to justify the way that the unequal distribution of qualifications serves to maintain the structure of society (Young, 1958). This is unfortunately reinforced when we hear about the policy, in England at least, of adjusting the grade boundaries for the national examinations at age 16 to ensure that the pattern of results is similar to previous cohorts (Ofqual, 2022). I studied these sociological perspectives as part of my masters course in the early 1980s (e.g. Bowles & Gintis, 1976). The analysis was compelling, but, as a practicing teacher, I felt obliged to adopt a more optimistic and hopeful view.

Another, far more contemporary perspective is one adopted by the World Bank where education is seen as key to the creation of human capital which is explained on one of their web pages as follows:

Human capital consists of the knowledge, skills, and health that people invest in and accumulate throughout their lives, enabling them to realize their potential as productive members of society. Investing in people through nutrition, health care, quality education, jobs and skills helps develop human capital, and this is key to ending extreme poverty and creating more inclusive societies.

(World Bank, 2019)

Unsurprisingly, the World Bank is committed to promoting economic growth by judicious investment. Critics highlight how this instrumentalist view supports private financing and encourages policies that may be at odds with more liberal and emancipatory views of the aims and

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<sup>1</sup> There are exceptions of course, most notable is a Kenyan gentleman named [Kimani Maruge](#) who came forward to claim the right to attend primary school at the age of 84, following legislation to make primary education an entitlement for all. Many others followed suit.

purposes of education (Hunter & Shafer, 2021; Parkinson & Kester, 2017; Nussbaum, 2011). The bench-marking system based on the World Bank's 'Human Capital Index' enables a quantification of progress and any country's score has far-reaching consequences for such things as credit ratings. Some critics offer an alternative view based on Amartya Sen's capability theory (Mehrotra, 2005; Sen, 2001). The title of Sen's seminal book 'Development as freedom' strikes a note that is antithetical to message coming from the World Bank. It is tempting for a government which seeks to advance their country's position in the international rankings to take an instrumental view on education, one which foregrounds vocational curricula linked to government's priorities. This carries with it the danger of narrowing the scope of the curriculum.

A third perspective focuses on education's function to prepare young people for participation in society.

Education is one of the most important predictors .... of many forms of social participation – from voting to associational membership, to chairing a local committee to hosting a dinner party to giving blood. The same basic pattern applies to both men and women and to all races and generations. Education, in short, is an extremely powerful predictor of civic engagement.

(Putnam, 2000: 186)

Putnam was building on what John Dewey had explained many years previously about how schooling prepares young people for life in democratic society. Many schools provide opportunities for young people to practice public speaking and debating, but participation in democratic society also requires learning about the value of evidence, rational argument and consideration of ethical issues (Dewey, 1916).

A fourth perspective is usually referred to as 'a liberal education'. My own reading in this regard focused on sources emanating from what has been called the London School – a group of philosophers of education in the 1960s & 70s located at the University of London. They argued that the aim of education is to develop the mind in a comprehensive way and that there are a number of distinct ways of knowing or forms of knowledge which serve this purpose (Hirst, 1965; 1974). For Hirst, a liberal education is not vocational or instrumental; it is a broad induction into values associated with reason, enquiry, critical thinking, self-discipline and civic engagement. One of the most valuable contributions from the London School, in my view, was from Michael Oakeshott who said the following:

As civilised human beings, we are the inheritors.....of a conversation, begun in the primeval forests and extended and made more articulate in the course of centuries. It is a conversation which goes on both in public and within each of ourselves. Of course there is argument and enquiry and information, but wherever these are profitable they are to be recognized as passages in this conversation... Conversation is not an enterprise designed to yield an extrinsic profit, a contest where a winner gets a prize, nor is it an activity of exegesis; it is an unrehearsed intellectual adventure. . . Education, properly speaking, is an initiation into the skill and partnership of this conversation in which we learn to recognize the voices, to distinguish the proper occasions of utterance, and in which we acquire the intellectual and moral habits appropriate to conversation. (Oakeshott, 1959: 11)

This is important, not only because of its breadth, including as it does the idea that the great conversation of civilisation is fed by 'argument and enquiry and information', but also because of the emphasis on dialogue. We can interpret this as dialogue between teachers and learners, dialogue between learners, dialogue around the kitchen table, dialogue within the media and academic dialogue as it is manifest in the ever-growing literature. So, this conversation is one in which all of us can, and should, participate.

## Results

### *Vocational v general education*

I hope I have demonstrated that the concept of education is contested and so the goals of any particular institution will be shaped by the internal debate about what constitutes education. A common tension in schools has been that between so called academic and vocational education and, in the UK, this has become entangled with questions of status, social class and occupational opportunities. Conscientious parents hope their children will achieve well in the traditional academic school subjects because they know that this opens the door to a university education and ultimately the professions. There is ambiguity here though. The foundation of the academic subjects is the concept of liberal education as alluded to above but arguably, the way assessment systems have developed means that the goals of liberal education are severely compromised. The ideals the philosophers of education set out for us so many years ago are reflected in more recent discourse about critical thinking (Davies & Barnett, 2015). Even though academic subjects are supposed to enable students to develop such capacities as critical thinking, argument and reasoning, these are undermined by the desperate chasing after good grades with all that implies about private tuition, exam preparation, revision and the memorisation of predicted right answers.

A key difference between so called 'academic' study and vocational education is that success in the former is more likely to lead to university entrance. The academic curriculum is assumed to develop the mind in general ways whereas vocational programmes are narrowly focused on techniques (Ashby, 1946). However, this has long been criticised as being a false dichotomy, John Dewey argued against the invalid oppositions of theory and practice and of body and mind (Dewey, 1916/1966).

The tension between vocational and academic education is also a feature of higher education (Loo & Jameson, 2017). Taking an historical perspective, we might look back to early days of the University of Cambridge when the purpose of the university was to prepare scholars for public service, which in those days could not be separated from the church (Hamlyn, 1996). There has always been a tension between the vocational function of universities and what has been referred to as general education. The distinction is not straightforward, however. Someone who had studied 'classics' has always been exposed to the values and insights embodied in ancient Greek and Roman literature which covered philosophy, politics, aesthetics, history and mathematics. The classics continue to be influential as the foundation of the humanities in the twentieth century. Such an education could be said to be quintessentially general, but it can also be construed as vocational because for many years it has been seen as a basic qualification for the British civil service.

So, while there is no doubt that universities have always provided vocational education, for example through a degree course in law, architecture or television studies, they could be said nevertheless, to be educating their students in general ways which are consistent with the concept of a liberal education. The quality standards for undergraduate degrees, for example, includes that on graduating a good undergraduate student will have demonstrated such things as: breadth and depth of knowledge and understanding, critical insight, the ability to make coherent, substantiated arguments, ability to consider, critically evaluate and synthesise a range of views, creativity and the ability to reflect critically on their work (QAA, 2019).

*Key distinctions between schools and universities*

It is generally the case that families are required to send their children to school. The idea can be traced back to Plato, but in a practical sense began in 16<sup>th</sup> century Germany. It came into law in the UK in 1880. Compulsory education was decreed in early days of the Soviet Union as part of the likbez campaign – to eradicate illiteracy. Now, it is the case in all but a handful of countries. Consequently, schools are either directly funded by the state or, in the case of private schools, are subject to government regulation. In any case, schools' autonomy is seriously restricted by the existence of the system of examinations which determines the content of the school curriculum and means that students' futures depend on successful outcomes. However, across the world, there is considerable variety in the level of autonomy enjoyed by schools. In England and Wales for example, schools appoint their own staff and procure their own resources. School principals are free to amend the organisational structure and determine the school's strategic goals. In comparison, school autonomy in Kazakhstan remains a work in progress (Yakavets, Frost & Khoroshash, 2017).

Universities, on the other hand, enjoy higher levels of autonomy. I was privileged to be a member of a "self-governing community of scholars". Universities regulated by the Higher Education Funding Council for England but nevertheless can choose their own curriculum, appoint staff, raise funds, and determine research priorities. Scholars in the field of Higher Education Studies tend to discuss four dimensions of autonomy: organisational, financial, staffing and academic (Kohtamäki & Balbachevsky, 2018). The European Universities Association is constantly monitoring autonomy and keeping up the pressure on policy makers to protect and advance it. Their most recent report indicates that university autonomy is under threat in Hungary and Türkiye (EUA, 2023).

The fourth dimension of autonomy is the one that interests me most. In the 1990s, I sought a post at the University of Cambridge because I wanted to work in an environment where I believed that I would enjoy a greater degree of academic freedom. The idea of academic freedom relates as much to research as it does to teaching. Knowledge creation is a distinctive characteristic of universities although, in an age of what has been called 'supercomplexity', this function is no longer the exclusive domain of universities (Barnett, 2000). Indeed, there are many challenges to traditional forms of knowledge, for example, Mode II knowledge which tends to be co-constructed in social contexts (Gibbons et al., 1994). In his article of more than twenty years ago, Barnett discussed the 'end of knowledge thesis'; his conclusions highlight the challenge for universities:

...no longer can it be assumed that there are relatively clear categories of right knowing or that the university alone could determine their criteria and legitimate forms of realization.... the idea of university knowledge...can be reclaimed provided that the university is prepared to abandon its inbuilt sense of 'knowing' of what counts as truth and knowledge and grasp the epistemological possibilities that unfold in the wake of supercomplexity. What counts as truth and knowledge are open, as knowledges multiply and as frameworks for comprehending the world proliferate (Barnett, 2000: 420)

In spite of insights such as the one Barnett offered, universities, largely persist with a research orthodoxy which is prevalent globally. This is maintained through the criteria applied by referees for academic journals, the rubrics issued in a call for conference papers, guidance on



systematic literature searching, the frameworks for assessment in such activities as the Research Excellence Framework (REF) and so on. Then there is the normative pressure that PhD candidates are subject to as described in my recent blog post (Frost, 2023a). This orthodoxy has an important role to play in research, but it is potentially limiting; if it is the only legitimate way to conceive of scholarship, academic freedom is seriously compromised.

Of course, not all universities are 'research-intensive'. It is certainly the case that, in the UK there is wide disparity between institutions in relation to the balance between research and teaching. Some struggle to demonstrate that their staff are 'research active' and in spite of senior managers' exhortations, some identify themselves as teachers rather than researchers. A doctoral study of the identity of academics in one British university shone a light on the way that members of staff tended to construct themselves as either teachers or researchers.

..colleagues appeared to place themselves in one of two camps - those whose focus was undertaking research and producing publishable written outcomes – 'the clever ones' – or 'the others', who did not publish and who were characterised by their focus on teaching and supporting student learning. (Roberts, 2015)

This was also my experience when I worked in a university that was originally founded as a teacher training college. There, I was in a minority in seeing myself as a scholar with an obligation to publish.

An important distinction between universities and schools concerns the intensity of work, especially in regard to teaching. This is very striking when you make the transition from being a school-teacher to being a university academic. In school, a teacher would often arrive at school early in the morning – 7.30 am for example – and will probably be teaching classes of 30 children one after the other from 9.00am – 3.30pm. Then there will be meetings sometimes extending until 5.00 / 5.30. The intensity of the school day is increased because of the many interactions with children in the corridors, the playgrounds and in the breaks between lessons. In the evenings and at weekends, there will be marking of students' work and planning for tomorrow's lessons. This level of intensity seems to be rising in the UK according to [a recent study at UCL](#). In contrast, the university academic is unlikely to be arriving at the university at 7.30 am and their teaching commitment will be sporadic with some days when there is no teaching at all. Typically, a university academic will be invited to attend many meetings, but it is not unusual to send apologies and prioritise another activity. In my experience, it was not unusual for people in a meeting to leave part way through. The sort of differences in the use of time described above, has consequences for the way time is managed which become apparent in school-university partnership scenarios.

### *Partnerships between universities and schools*

Partnerships between university and schools have been recommended on many occasions and by many people (Handsome, Gu & Varley, 2014; Smedley, 2001), especially in relation to teacher initial teacher education. When I trained to be a teacher in the 1970s, it was a requirement to undertake a number of 'teaching practices' or placements in which the student teacher spends a number of weeks working alongside teachers in a school. This has always entailed a collaboration between the university and schools to ensure suitable placements. Some schools would welcome this while others would find it burdensome, distracting from the core purpose which is to educate children. In the UK, there was a strong policy push in the 1980s

towards partnerships in which the schools would be the dominant partners. In 1992, the minister demanded that a partnership should be:

one in which the school and its teachers are in the lead in the whole of the training process from the initial design of a course through to the assessment of the performance of the individual student (DES 1992).

The rationale for schools taking the lead included arguments about the need for student teachers to develop professional competence, a goal which was seen, particularly by some politicians, to be in tension with an emphasis on 'educational theory' on the part of the universities (Davies, 1992).

In spite of these significant developments in the 1980s and 90s, initial teacher education carried on mostly as before. There were however some new approaches in which schools could be granted the right to become a School Centred Initial Teacher Training (SCITT) provider in which student teachers and learn through experience. There have also been school-university partnerships for other purposes such as research. However, school-university partnerships continued to be asymmetrical with the universities having more power and respect. This is perhaps understandable in that universities have dictated what schools should teach to prepare for university entrance. In addition, universities have always been regarded as the source of expertise in the knowledge domains that shape school subjects. Thirdly, perhaps the most powerful factor is that the university has been the gatekeeper of the professions. That is to say that they have had the power to judge whether or not a student qualifies to be a teacher and therefore be employed.

### *Restoring the balance*

It might be helpful to consider what each partner brings to the table. One important consideration is concerned with pedagogical knowledge which is often quite advanced within schools and somewhat limited within universities. There is a nod towards this in a literature review conducted by Graham Handscombe and colleagues who cite Universities UK, an association which represents 140 universities in the UK.

University lecturers would benefit from schoolteachers' expertise in pedagogy with reluctant learners as well as their understanding of the context and circumstances of their pupils' families and communities (Universities UK, 2009:16).

I suggest that this is massively understated. There are many teachers who have sophisticated pedagogy. A good example is Rony Medina who I wrote about in my recent blog post (Frost, 2023b). I have also had the privilege of observing teachers who have taught on the part-time HertsCam MEd in Leading Teaching and Learning for serving teachers. They are all scholar-practitioners who are able to bring the conceptual tools gleaned from their own reading to the seminars and, drawing on advanced teaching skills, honed through years of reflective practice in schools, to facilitate learner-centred active learning strategies that empower the course participants. Their work, and that of the teachers who were students on the HertsCam masters programme, is well documented in a recently published book (Frost, Ball, Hill & Lightfoot, 2018).

In addition to the matter of pedagogical sophistication, schoolteachers can bring much more to the partnership table. Experienced teachers have learned to think strategically in navigating the day-to-day realities of maintaining their schools as organisations and leading improvement initiatives in the face of multiple challenges that include external policy initiatives,



the expectations of families and community representatives, the judgements of school inspectors and changes in society. From my point of view, it is entirely reasonable for schools and teachers to be the dominant partners and for university academics to see themselves as supporters, servants and consultants as I argue in a recent blog post (Frost, 2023a).

## **Discussion**

### *The third space?*

In spite of the evident asymmetry of relationships in school-university partnerships, commentators often refer to the importance of mutuality and reciprocity and have suggested that this can be construed as taking place in a 'third space'.

This is founded on the notion of creating a distinct partnership culture, a *third space*, outside the respective partner institutions in which mutual approaches can be grown and innovation can thrive. The power of this conception is that the differences between schools and universities are seen as a source of creative tension rather than discord. (Handscombe, Gu & Varley, 2014: 25)

Other constructions include the idea of 'edge community' (Gorodetsky & Barak, 2008) which refers to the idea that institutions are working at the edge of their boundaries which overlap with each other. The analysis in Gorodetsky and Barak's article, like so many others, indicates that the two institutions failed to establish cultural norms and instead each maintained its unique discourse.

My own work in relation to supporting non-positional teacher leadership (Bangs & Frost, 2015; Frost, 2017; Qanay, Frost, Kalikova & Zakayeva, 2023) began in the context of a school-university partnership but I discovered at an early stage, significant pitfalls and barriers to success. I began in 1989 by working in close collaboration with a senior teacher in a secondary school where we established a school-based programme which required the participants to engage in their own action research projects. Participants found that the challenge of writing academic papers led to inauthenticity and took energy away from the business of developing practice. The innovation of the portfolio of evidence rather than academic papers was a breakthrough, as was the shift in emphasis from inquiry to leadership. Another challenge was concerned with identifying the focus of participants' projects. A breakthrough here was the idea of a workshop activity to enable participants to reflect on and discuss with each other their values, concerns and personal priorities. This was used and refined through the 1990s and became part of a whole suite of tools included in a book (Frost, 1997). This clarification of values and concerns activity has proved to be a very effective tool which has been further refined and continues to be used in many non-positional teacher leadership programmes across the world. Strategies such as this eventually became part of a coherent methodology called 'teacher-led development work' (Frost & Durrant, 2003). This is distinct from action research in that it emphasises leadership rather than inquiry.

Further challenges rose. In the late 1990s, I had been asked by the University of Cambridge Faculty of Education to work with a new partnership with schools in the country of Hertfordshire. This was established through agreements between the head of my institution and the head of the district education authority. The Cambridge MEd programme would be taught in a building belonging to the district authority, which was symbolic of partnership, but the team teaching the course would be seasoned academics from the university. In the first year of its existence, participants were being disempowered because their everyday reality in schools and their professional knowledge seemed to be marginalised. It seemed to me to be disrespectful.

When I became coordinator in the 2<sup>nd</sup> year of the partnership's existence, I was able to make changes. One was to establish school-based groups that led to the award of a certificate

from Cambridge; another was to include experienced teachers as members of the MEd teaching team; a third was to create a network within which all participants on the masters and in the school-based groups could build knowledge together. The HertsCam Network, as it began to be called, established a Steering Committee with members who were school principals and a representative of the district authority. This worked well until the university took steps to try to impose higher fees, compulsory training in quantitative research methods and an end to experienced teachers in the MEd teaching team. The Steering Committee found this unacceptable so took decisive action and declared independence. HertsCam became a registered charity (NGO) governed by a Board of Trustees which is dominated by school principals. This enabled us to embrace more fully the idea of non-positional teacher leadership (Frost, 2017). The certificate for the school-based groups would be awarded by the HertsCam Network itself and we opened negotiations with another university so that we could design, teach and manage our own masters programme. The new university would provide quality assurance, examinations boards and the award of the degree. This was a more equal partnership and only functioned for one aspect of our work – the masters programme (Frost et al., 2018).

## Conclusion

Is HertsCam a manifestation of a ‘third space’ or an ‘edge community’? There have been fruitful episodes of collaboration and cooperation but the strength of the essence of partnership has ebbed and flowed over time. The organisation had to separate from the university in order to continue to build a community of innovators and change agents. However, HertsCam remains guided by a range of values and ideas that are championed in both types of institutions. For example, in HertsCam scholarship is at the heart of our endeavours. We do not ask our participants to engage in research, at least not in the sense that this is usually understood; rather, we enable participants to exercise leadership to bring about change and create knowledge in the process. Scholarship for us involves critical inquiry related to the development process. Evidence and conceptual frameworks derived from literatures such as those on pedagogy, leadership, organisational studies are drawn upon to illuminate professional problems and inform the process of change.

At the core of our programme is the idea that scholarship, which includes reading, dialogue and critical narrative writing, fuels the leadership of development work

(Frost et al., 2018: 161)

It is through the optimal blend of leadership and scholarship that participants are able to change practice in their schools and participate in knowledge building. We use the term *knowledge building* to denote a process rather than a reified notion of knowledge as a commodity. When participants construct and share narratives about their development projects, they join an ongoing conversation about pedagogy and leadership, an echo of Oakeshott’s conception of education referred to above. I am happy to report from my many observations of teachers in discussion groups and network events that, through this ‘unrehearsed intellectual adventure’ (Oakeshott, 1959: 11), whether it be in Cairo, Taraz, Sarajevo or Stevenage, teachers are engaging in critical, action-based exploration of the nature of education.

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