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## Partnership as educational policy imperative: An unquestioned good?

**Abstract:** “Partnership” is often promoted as an unquestioned “good” for higher education institutions in relation to its various stakeholder organizations. This paper seeks to problematize this uncritical valorization through a critical interrogation of the concepts and socio-material practices associated with partnership. In the name of partnership, new forms of governance are inaugurated that have far-reaching effects. More specifically, this paper is concerned with a critical analysis of partnership in relation to a longitudinal study of the relational practices between a university and five local authorities within a Scottish educational context. In particular, we trace how a “signature event” transformed a partnership assemblage, from one characterized by a grammar of participation, to a formal partnership aligned with a set of principles that we characterize as a grammar of representation. We argue that this transition led to a new assemblage that enacted new accountabilities, performativities, and alignments under the sign of partnership.

**Keywords:** Partnership, signature event, professional accountability and responsibility, socio-material practices, teacher education

“Partnership” is often promoted as an unquestioned “good” for higher education institutions in relation to its various stakeholder organizations (e.g., Scottish Government, 2011). Whilst critical commentators have questioned assumptions informing a number of other key concepts in the policy lexicon, such as “excellence,” (Reade, 1997) “quality assurance,” (Ball, 2003; Harvey, 2005) and “accountability” (Strathern, 2000; Popkewitz & Wehlage, 1973; Wagner, 1989) partnership as a more recent policy imperative appears to have largely escaped such scrutiny and in much of the literature it remains under-theorised. Such neglect is all the more surprising given the extent to which partnership and collaboration have become foregrounded in public service delivery, whether in education, health, social care or criminal justice (Cardini, 2006; Carnwell & Carson, 2009). The intention to put service users at the center of programme design and delivery appears to detract from the possibility of a critique of the practice of partnership itself. This, coupled with a theoretical orientation that has tended to valorize a community of practice approach (e.g., Lave & Wenger, 2002), may have also contributed to this (Guile, 2010; Hughes, Jewson, & Unwin, 2007; Roberts, 2006). Such critical readings of partnership that have been undertaken, such as Hopwood’s (2014) analysis of partnership in an Australian healthcare context, suggest that there is widespread confusion around the very concept of partnership itself and a need for greater theorization in the light of this (Taylor & Le Riche, 2006).

The aim of this study is to contribute to this conversation through bringing theory to bear at both a conceptual level and in relation to thinking through a four-year empirical study that was focused upon an educational partnership. This partnership

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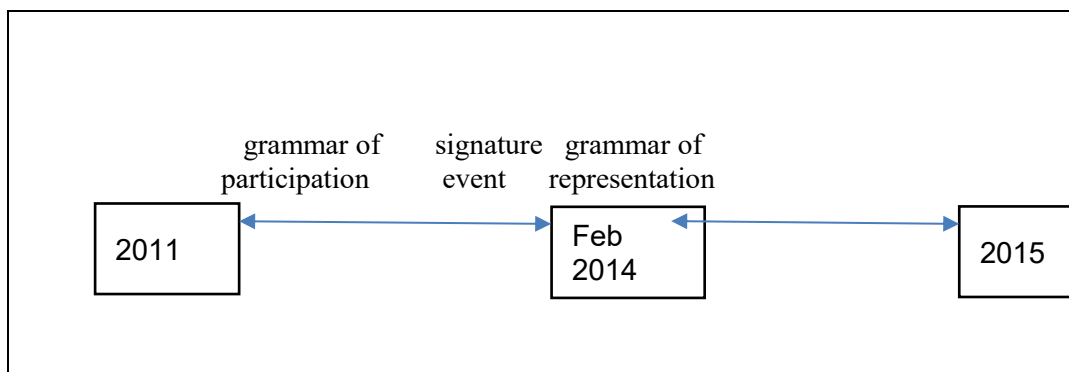
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was between organizations that were implicated in teachers' professional development, in relation to both initial teacher education (ITE) and professional development within the context of on-going practice. We are specifically concerned with addressing the questions:

- How might partnership be conceptualized?
- How might an empirical approach to partnership be theorized?
- And then, in relation to a four-year longitudinal study:
- How might different partnership assemblages be characterized?
- What are the broader consequences and implications of the move from one partnership assemblage to another?

Here, we are interested in the impact that such change has in relation to broader accountability and governmentality agendas within higher education.

The paper, therefore, contributes to a theorization of partnership in four ways. Firstly, in an effort to move beyond the conceptual confusion that has characterized thinking in relation to partnership to date, we begin by identifying a tripartite typology that comprises of lexical, stipulative and empirical approaches, each of which refracts partnership in distinct ways and orientates analysis in different directions. Secondly, through the analysis of a four-year, longitudinal study of an educational partnership between a university and five local authorities, we trace how these different orientations to partnership interplay in practice. Thirdly, we argue that it is possible to distinguish two distinct partnership assemblages that we characterize as a grammar of participation, which is predominantly relational and emergent, and grammar of representation, which, in contrast, is primarily concerned with aligning practice to a text (Candler, 2006).



*Figure 1: The signature event and the two phases of partnership*

Finally, on the basis of this particular analysis, we take a more critical line in relation to partnership, arguing that far from being an unquestioned “good,” partnership can, in practice, lead to new policy alignments that further extend regimes of accountability.

## How might partnership be conceptualized?

As noted above, partnership, as a particular form of knowledge exchange between university departments of education and other stakeholders, has been promoted as a desirable outcome at both European and national levels (Caul & McWilliams, 2002; Dahlstedt, 2009; MacAllister, 2015; Scottish Government, 2011; Smith, Brisard, &

Menter 2006). Given the ambiguities that are associated with understandings of partnership to date, we identify three different approaches that are characterized as lexical, stipulative, and empirical orientations respectively. As will be seen below, each type has its own characteristic focus for analysis and questioning that distinguishes it from alternative approaches. Having briefly outlined each approach, we will then analyse how these intersect in practice within the context of an empirical study that follows.

### ***Lexical definitions***

A lexical definition is concerned with “the setting of bounds or limits” or rendering “an object or image distinct to the eye” (Tweed, 2006, p. 33). As noted by Taylor and Le Riche (2006), the search for some such conceptual clarity in relation to partnership has in practice proved to be somewhat elusive. One might begin such an exercise through the act of distinguishing different kinds of partnership such as those of a marriage or business. It is noteworthy that in this kind of legal contract the precise details are frequently worked out in practice; in other words, the partnership is performed into being. This might be contrasted with, for example, contract theory in law, where—typically—precise expectations are set out in advance of signing an agreement. Following on from this, one might begin to draw an initial contrast: if contract implies precise roles and responsibilities, partnership in practice might appear to enact more open, and some might even say, equal and reciprocal forms of collaboration. Then, in terms of distinguishing concepts, there is a question as to how and when collaboration translates into partnership. There would appear to be considerable slippage between the two terms, such that the two are sometimes used interchangeably; however, the former might appear less formal and thereby possibly pre-figuring the latter. Given such apparent vagueness, it is perhaps not surprising that within the literature, approaches to the concept of partnership tend to be resolved into a variety of “models of partnership” approaches, such as the six models of school-university partnerships proposed by McLaughlin and Black-Hawkins (2004) or the area groupings outlined by Baumfield and Butterworth (2007). In relation to this study, we were somewhat suspicious of the precise ways in which a models of partnership approach appears to definitively “cut” a given network in precise ways (Barad, 2007); our own analysis of the data below did not appear to warrant the production of such clear boundaries and demarcations. However, a somewhat less definite lexical approach did appear to be useful in pointing up a contrast between different relational configurations, which we characterize as a move from a grammar of participation to a grammar of representation.

### ***Stipulative definitions***

A stipulative definition provides a series of specific statements or principles that set out what a particular partnership *should* be or adhere to. To this extent, a stipulative approach is concerned with issues of power and politics in regard to whose understandings get promoted and in practice. It is in this sense that partnership becomes linked with policy and can itself become a gathering point for the enactment of new forms of governmentality (Dahlstedt, 2009). An example of a stipulative definition can be seen in Billett, Ovens, Clemans, and Seddon (2007, p. 637) where, based on their study of ten longstanding social partnerships, they identify five principles and practices that appear most likely to support and guide the development, continuity, and evaluation of social partnerships that are judged to be effective. According to Billett et al.’s (2007) study, these principles and practices consist in shared goals, relations with partners, capacity for partnership work, governance and leadership, and trust and trustworthiness.

Within the study that we report on here, a stipulative account of partnership became associated with the aftermath of a “signature event” (Gherardi & Landri, 2014)

where partners signed an agreement to co-operate and to become constituted as a formal partnership. This, we argue, re-configured practices around a set of principles that distilled certain features that *should be* translated into practice, if the partnership was to be deemed effective through its alignment with policy.

### ***Empirical definitions***

Empirical definitions of partnership work are concerned with how a concept of partnership is mobilized in practice within specific contexts and with identifying particular issues, tensions, and understandings that emerge. Another way of putting this would be to approach partnership as a situated practice within specific organizational settings, exploring the kinds of material arrangements and practices to which this gives rise. An example of such an approach would be the act of analysing particular models of partnerships in practice, teasing out particular traits, such as in McLaughlin and Black-Hawkins' (2004) study that outlines six models with specific traits that frequently represent school-university partnerships.

Although three distinct orientations to thinking about partnership can—for heuristic purposes—be outlined, in practice each of the three orientations mutually informs the subsequent analysis, characterization, and critical evaluation of the effects of partnership in the longitudinal study that is analysed below.

### **Theoretical and methodological framework: how might an empirical approach to partnership be theorized?**

Before describing the empirical study in greater detail, it is necessary to say something more about the kind of theoretical and methodological framing that informs our account. In terms of theory, we draw upon recent work in empirical philosophy that maps the movements, gatherings, and outcomes associated with mobilizing projects associated with partnership. Much of this draws upon Bruno Latour's (1999; 2013) work on relations and translations that has, in recent years, become influential within educational circles (e.g., Fenwick & Edwards, 2010; Fenwick, Edwards, & Sawchuck, 2011; Sorensen, 2011). Gherardi and Landri (2014) is of particular relevance here, as a study that draws upon socio-material theory to make sense and to identify the new (and binding) relations that emerge as a consequence of an act of signing. We argue that Gherardi and Landri's (2014) approach provides insight into some of the different grammars of partnership as these became enacted and differentiated. So, in what ways might such a theoretical and methodological orientation be resourceful?

As Gherardi and Landri (2014, p. 7) observe, "signature is a mechanism to reduce uncertainty and distribute accountability, to validate documents by proving professional competence, and to assign responsibilities." This derives from the fact that professional signatures are not only social fabrications, but also "'stable traces resistant to disputation that 'make' the professional accountable" (Gherardi & Landri, 2014, p.1). In other words, an act of signing (whether by pen, seal or digit means) can lead both to a new inauguration—revealing "complex negotiations among professional knowledges, practices, and identities" *and* work to stabilize these arrangements (Gherardi & Landri, 2014, p. 4). As such, the focus upon an act of signing provides a form of analysis that begins "in the middle of things" (Gherardi & Landri, 2014, p. 4; Latour, 2005) rather than with some outside framing or definition, which can then investigate what is achieved in and through the practice of signing for all that become implicated. To this extent, the analysis focuses upon socio-material effects of a partnership as these are played out within a particular association, network or assemblage.

A focus of our empirical inquiry into partnership is a signature event in which

five local authorities signed an agreement with a university to work together. From this event, we worked backwards and forwards; backwards, in terms of the kinds of relations that obtained prior to this formal agreement; and forwards, in order to trace the emergence of a new partnership assemblage as marked by the signing event. This enabled us to investigate the socio-material effects of this act of signature (Gherardi & Landri, 2014) so as to identify the new relationships and practices to which this gave rise. As such, our methodology also draws extensively upon Bruno Latour's (2005; 2010; 2013) ethnographic practice that is focused upon material, relational and human gatherings, together with tracing the various translations that take place and their effects. In taking an empirical approach to partnership, therefore, we explore some of the ways that human and nonhuman materialities combine to produce particular purposes and effects in education (Sorenson, 2009). Thus, rather than assuming a particular account of partnership *a priori*, the paper reports on the socio-material effects of a partnership as enacted through time. We then draw upon a lexical account in an effort to characterize some of the differences wrought in the aftermath of a signature event (Fenwick *et al.*, 2011; Fenwick & Landri, 2014).

More specifically, the paper is concerned with the effects of 'partnership' as the focus of recent policy imperatives within a Scottish educational context (Scottish Government, 2011). The partnership in question consisted of educational officers representing each of the Local Authorities, and lecturers representing initial and professional education programmes at the university. The authors, as university lecturers in the Partnership Steering Group thereby occupied, simultaneously, multiple roles as participants, observers, and analysts of the processes that are recounted here. This positioning as researchers was not, however, covert, and focused upon the socio-material relations that were in play as evidenced by the kinds of artifacts selected for this study. The data that was analysed between 2011–2015 includes

- field notes taken by the authors at the time;
- minutes taken from partnership meetings, as agreed by participants;
- notes from meetings with Directors of Education, by the Chair of the Steering Group;
- artifacts produced by Local Authority and University participants at scoping events;
- documentation produced in connection with a formal "Aspect Review" of the partnership;
- relevant emails and letters (between external stakeholders and the Steering Group);
- key policy texts.<sup>1</sup>

These data were analysed as an exercise in "practical ontology," to borrow Jensen's (2010, p. 5) description, so as to trace and explicate relations (Nespor, 1994) and the different ways in which people, materialities, and their interactions changed through time (Fenwick, Edwards, & Sawchuck, 2011). The challenge in all of this was to try and surface the taken-for-granted and to notice the emergence of new configurations within the traces left by these educational events. As such, the examples given might best be considered "case studyish" (Wortham, 1999) rather than as constituting a formal case study as such. Our analysis is, we hope, illustrative of some of the distinctions and contrasts that we draw in relation to the enaction of partnership.

## **Longitudinal study: How might different partnership assemblages be characterized?**

In this section, we initially provide some background to the policy context in Scotland in relation to partnership and teacher education as this bears upon the study in question. Within the Scottish context, *Teaching Scotland's Future* (often referred to

as *The Donaldson Review*) (Scottish Government, 2011) was a major review of teacher education in Scotland where a series of policy recommendations were made alongside a detailed discussion of the implications of this for future practice. Readers of the report become immediately aware of the key role that partnership plays in this imagined future; indeed, partnership is mentioned on no fewer than 70 occasions throughout the report, and a call is made for:

New and strengthened models of partnership among universities, local authorities, schools and individual teachers. These partnerships should (*sic*) be based on jointly agreed principles and involve shared responsibility for key areas of teacher education. (Scottish Government, 2011, p. 48)

Given the report's importance, a National Implementation Group was formed to implement its recommendations, especially in relation to identifying the principles that would, in turn, constitute "a new concept of partnership" (Scottish Government, 2011, p. 11). The National Implementation Board (NIB) (Scottish Government, 2013) was subsequently charged with identifying the ten overarching principles (see summary below, Figure 4) that would constitute partnership in relation to Early Career Partnerships between universities and local authorities, with the intention of ensuring closer working between initial teacher education and the induction year of teaching. Henceforth, partnership policy was to be "rolled out" in practice, with each university–local authority partnership expected to align with the aforementioned principles. This entailed each university–local authority partnership becoming formally constituted as such, and in the following section, we describe how this became instituted in one such partnership.

### ***Partnership signatures: A grammar of participation***

From our analysis, we provide three illustrations of the assemblage that was in place prior to the formal signing and constitution of the partnership that characterized the kinds of open-ended discussions and relational practices from 2011 until February 2014. The first traces how an evaluative framework emerged through partners' engagement with an academic text through time (November–December 2011), while the second illustration describes an artifact that was used at a whole day event between partners at the university and local authorities (16/5/2011). Our third example describes a specific dialogue between partners that emerged in relation to understandings of literacy that draws upon field notes taken at the time (20/5/2013). Each of these narrations is illustrative of an assemblage that we characterize as a grammar of participation, in which open-ended dialogue about matters of mutual concern informed the kinds of relational practices that took place prior to the signature event.

Prior to the formal act of signing, and in response to the publication of *Teaching Scotland's Future* (Scottish Government, 2011) conversations took place between local authority and university participants that were only loosely based around agreed principles, that were not written down in any formal sense. In addition, there were fewer boundaries drawn in respect of who might participate within the partnership meetings. Thus, the minutes of these early meetings record the participation not only of representatives from a wider range of local authorities than the five that subsequently became formal signatories, but also a broader range of university personnel, including several professors, who attended either out of interest, or when the topic was of direct relevance to their research. The Director of Partnerships summarised one such meeting on 2<sup>nd</sup> July 2012, noting that "the discussion was animated and we agreed that this kind of [open] dialogue is a useful partnership activity in itself." Thus, prior to the signature event, commitment to the partnership had not involved the signing of a formal agreement but was enacted through a series of specific actions and commitments, many of which appeared to be routine, such as agreeing to meet at a specific time, producing, reading, and commenting on records of

proceedings, and contributing to the discussions that took place.

Such a partnership assemblage also enabled and promoted an open-ended exchange of views around a series of matters of mutual concern. An illustration of this was a meeting (15/11/2011) where both local authority and university participants identified “evaluation of professional development” as a key theme and decided to draw upon an academic text to inform discussion at the following meeting. The text in question was Guskey’s (2002) five critical levels of professional development evaluation that was the focus of a meeting held on 19<sup>th</sup> December 2011, with the intention of both reaching a shared understanding and responding to a pressing concern as to how both universities and local authorities might, in practice, evaluate the impact of professional development. The minutes from this meeting describe a collective wish “not to simply share what we are doing, but ... working together to do productive things” (Minutes, 19/12/2011). It is noteworthy that the approach taken to “doing productive things” was to invite a gathering around a particular research text in which different participants shared their readings and translations in an open-ended way. As will be seen below, this offers an instructive point of comparison with the relational dynamics that informed the post-signature meetings that were instead concerned with alignment with an externally given text, with priorities set by the government, rather than with an open-ended scoping and exploration of an issue at hand.

Our second illustration is an artifact produced for a day seminar entitled *Curriculum for Excellence: Implementation Through Partnership*, that took place in 16<sup>th</sup> May 2011, designed to specifically address the questions: “What kind of partnership do we want to develop? What for? What are our expectations of each other? What are the issues?” (Minutes, 17/3/2011). These questions were characteristically open-ended, and it was up to the participants, working together in small groups, to discuss a specific thematic such as the focus of the artifact included here (Please refer to Figure 2).

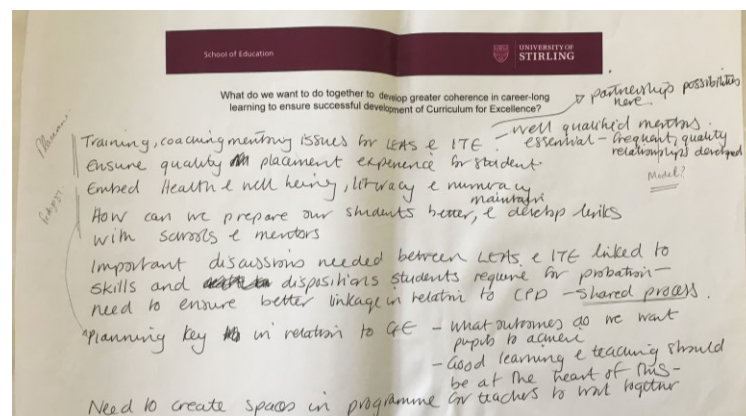


Figure 1. *Artefact from seminar event, 16th May 2011. The artefact illustrates the open-ended discussion that characterised events prior to the signature event.*

One of the outcomes of this seminar was a vision that foregrounded “partnership based upon collaborative learning rather than simply systemic efficiencies” (16/5/2011). A summary of the points raised by participants at this event was intended to inform the ongoing working of the partnership.

Our third illustration depicts how a shared matter of concern around literacy practices uncovered two radically different interpretations. Minutes from a meeting on 20<sup>th</sup> May 2013 note that one of the partnership local authorities had reported that “there is a gap in the probationer’s knowledge around the teaching of reading, so they have implemented a major literacy strategy.” In the light of this, it was agreed

that literacy become a shared focus of concern, especially given that this was also a priority issue that had been foregrounded in the Scottish Government's (2010) *Literacy Action Plan*. Literacy as a thematic was first discussed at a subsequent meeting held on 24<sup>th</sup> September 2013. However, it was only as the discussion progressed that participants realized that—although all present referred to literacy—they were not, in fact, talking about the same concept or token (Edwards, 2011). Whilst there was some overlap in terms of reference that included, for example, specific acts of writing, university colleagues assumed a more theoretical, multi-modal conception of literacy that included readings of practice in a broader cultural sense (e.g., Certeau, 1984; Jewitt, 2009) whereas local authority colleagues tended to draw upon more traditional understandings of literacy as currently practised within schools. The possibility of such an exchange led to an acknowledgment of the different forms that literacy can take, and, arising from this, a new appreciation of some of the tensions and challenges faced by education students and early career teachers, who have to mediate between these competing understandings.

Whilst in each of these three illustrations, the precise focus for deliberation differed, a common relational dynamic can nevertheless be discerned, which might be characterized as both open-ended and dialogical in form. We have summarised this relational dynamic in Figure 3 below.

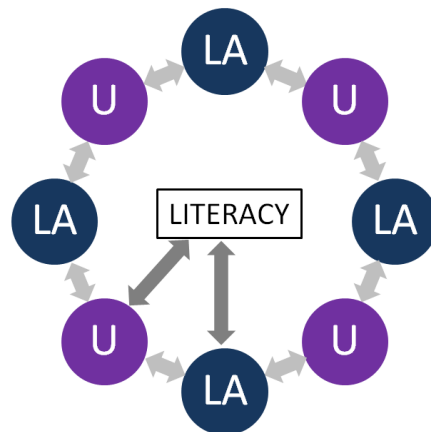


Figure 2. *A grammar of participation. The diagram illustrates ongoing relational practices focused upon a matter of mutual concern such as the evaluation of professional development, understanding of partnership or literacy (LA = Local Authority U = University).*

To this extent, a partnership assemblage was formed through engagement with—and collective working at—shared matters of concern. Partnership, and the new knowing and insight to which this gave rise, in other words, emerged through on-going relational practices that were not in any exhaustive sense pre-defined or aligned with stipulative principles. Such an approach to practice would appear to have affinities with a “grammar of participation” informed by “motion, pedagogy, and benevolent heteronomy” (Candler, 2006, p. 6). According to Candler (2006), a grammar of participation is a mode of inquiry in which relationality is foregrounded and in which knowledge and insight emerge fundamentally in and through the on-going exploration of those relations. In the context of our present discussion, we argue that such a notion also affords a contrast between different ways in which partnership might be assembled, as became clear when this university and local authority partnership became formally constituted.



## Partnership and a signature event

In September 2012 the National Partnership Group (NPG), which was set up to implement the recommendations of *Teaching Scotland's Future* (Scottish Government, 2011), issued a recommendation to the Cabinet Secretary which stated that

it is ... proposed that all local authorities and universities providing ITE should enter in formal partnership arrangements by the start of the August 2013 academic year. (Scottish Government, 2012, p.8)

From this point on, the minutes of the Steering Group at first note this recommendation (7/11/2012) and then begin to work out the implications of formally constituting such a partnership. Thus, a partnership meeting held on 22<sup>nd</sup> April 2013 was given over to discussing the implications of the draft *National Framework Agreement for Partnership*, and two subsequent meetings (22/5/2013 and 17/6/2013) also devoted a considerable time to this. In these minutes, it is noticeable that earlier topics of discussion, and the somewhat *ad hoc* way in which new issues emerged, no longer feature. In their place, the NIB Principles of Partnership (Scottish Government, 2013; see below, Figure 4) gain currency as a key focus of concern, and the local authorities attending now become restricted to the five that will enter into the upcoming formal partnership.

- *Quality of student learning experience.* All partnership arrangements should be aimed at enhancing the quality of the learning experiences of teachers in the early phase of their professional learning and arrangements should include a clear commitment to the evaluation of the impact of these arrangements.
- *Clarity.* All partnership arrangements should ensure that the roles to be adopted by the different parties are clearly stated and understood by all concerned.
- *Reciprocity.* The arrangements made for partnership should be based on the principle of reciprocity and care should be taken to ensure that there are clear reciprocal benefits to the schools/local authorities and the universities.
- *University academic standards.* All partnership arrangements must ensure that the resultant student learning can be assessed by processes that meet the universities' quality assurance standards.
- *Professional standards.* All partnership initiatives must have due regard to the professional standards and guidelines set out by the General Teaching Council for Scotland (GTCS), in order to ensure that programmes may be fully accredited by the GTCS.
- *Continuity.* Partnership arrangements should be designed in such a way as to enhance the continuity between Initial Teacher Education ... and Induction.
- *Collaborative engagement.* Partnership arrangements should be developed and implemented through the fullest possible collaborative engagement of all parties.
- *Joint assessment.* The assessment of student teachers during placement and, where appropriate, of probationers during induction should be a shared responsibility.
- *Training and support.* Partnership arrangements should be designed in such a way as to take account of the professional support, development and learning needs of those who take on the role of mentoring, supporting and/or assessing professional learning across the early phase.
- *Need for clear and consistent documentation.* All initial teacher education and induction programmes must provide a clearly documented account of the partnership arrangements in place

Figure 3. *National Implementation Board principles (summarised from Scottish Government, 2013, pp. 2–3).*

In response to these requirements, a formal act of signing up to a partnership agreement took place on 21<sup>st</sup> February 2014 between senior representatives of the university and the five local authorities (University of Stirling, 2014). This agreement formally constituted the Central Local Authorities Partnership (the acronym CLASP was subsequently used) as a distinct entity: through this signature event (Gherardi & Landri, 2014) the 5 local authorities and university committed to working together as a partnership. However, the understanding of partnership to which all signed was that enumerated in the ten NIB Principles (Figure 4)—a stipulative definition of partnership that had not, hitherto, played a significant role in this particular assemblage, as we have seen. Thus, the official signature event acted as a catalyst for recognizing the NIB principles, which would, henceforth, gain both currency and status, thereby becoming an undisputed way of both constituting and evaluating partnership. Through the act of signing, in other words, all became linked, professionally responsible, and accountable to these ten NIB principles. This act of signing, therefore, led to new alignments and translations that re-configured how partnership might—and should—be practiced in future.

### ***Partnership signatures: A grammar of representation***

Signatories, therefore, committed their respective organizations to work together in multi-lateral partnerships, and to a stipulative understanding of what mobilizing that partnership might consist in. In this connection, the language deployed in the ten NIB Principles (Scottish Government, 2013) is noteworthy: its forms of expression are non-negotiable, with the repeated use of command language such as “should,” “must,” etc. Beyond the specific choice of principles that, taken together, are taken as constitutive of partnership *per se*, it is also noteworthy how often the metaphor of clarity is deployed—both explicitly (on five occasions) and indirectly (at least twice)—in relation to the principles. This change in register from the informality that had preceded the signature event was also linked to the new directives and forms of accountability that followed in its wake.

An analysis of documentation showed that soon after the establishment of the formalised partnership, the Scottish Government issued an invitation for partnerships to bid for substantial funding to develop “sustained models of partnerships focusing on the early career phase” (Scottish Government, 2014), which would specifically address the beginning teachers’ transition from ITE to the first year of professional practice in school. Whilst there was no stipulation as to what form the project could take, a key condition of any bid was to show how that proposal would address the ten NIB Principles. An earlier statement from the Learning Directorate made it clear that:

[f]unds will only be released where there is evidence of progress in developing the particular partnership and that it is working to the principles set out in the National Framework Agreement for Partnership in the Early Phase of Teacher Learning (attached). (Scottish Government Learning Directorate, 2013)

As a consequence, the partnership now became subject to new alignments, expectations, and accountabilities as members constructed a proposal which would map the experiences of early career phase teachers in their first year of practice (after completing ITE). Thus, the discourse and dialogue of partnership working was now aligned to the principles and the agenda stemming from the recommendations of the Donaldson Review (Scottish Government, 2011).

Minutes of meetings from 24<sup>th</sup> January 2014, immediately prior to the signature event, onwards, document how the workings of the partnership assemblage became increasingly oriented to the ten NIB Principles. Regular updates from the National

Implementation Group, together with progress reports on the partnership's implementation of the principles, now took center stage; these principles were also implicated in the funded projects that now became a central concern of the partnership's work. To the extent that relations within the partnership became aligned *with a text* (the ten NIB Principles), the dynamics became structured around a "grammar of representation" (Candler, 2006). A grammar of representation is a relational economy in which (an independent) text is foregrounded, which becomes the arbiter and measure of truth.

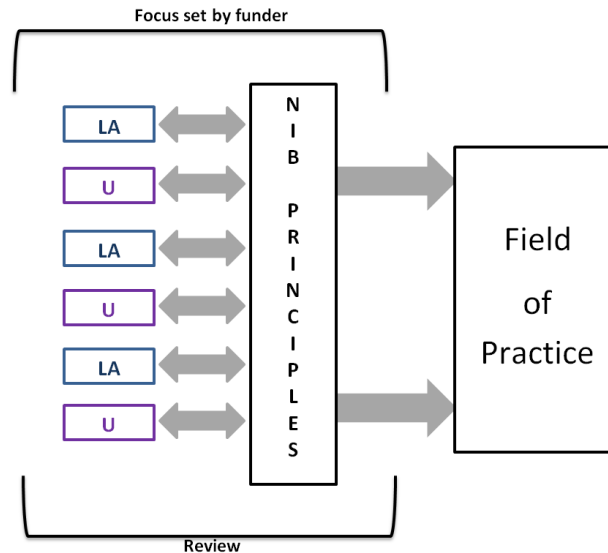


Figure 4. *A grammar of representation.* The diagram shows how the focus of attention is upon a text (the NIB Principles) rather than between partners (as in Figure 3). (LA = Local Authority; U = University)

According to Candler (2006, p. 34), within these terms:

Representation assumes a neutral and unequivocal register across which descriptions can be ferried from a code or tableau of knowledge to the mind, regardless of either the temporal identity of the mind or the temporality of texts themselves, which print is supposed to overcome. Representation, then, is a matter of immediate apprehension by virtue of an exterior sign and is removed from the variables of time and human communities. (Candler, 2006, p. 34)

To this extent, grammars of participation and representation can be regarded as two distinct orientations to knowledge and practice. In the following section, we will argue that the contrast between these different grammars can help in distinguishing the shift in partnership assemblage that the formal signature event brought about.

### **New alignments, responsibilities, and performativities: What are the broader consequences and implications of the move from one partnership assemblage to another?**

One of the key translations that the shift from a grammar of participation to that of representation effects is the move from the uncertainties of practice to a 'readable space' (Certeau, 1984, p. 36, quoted in Candler, 2006, p. 30). This makes possible, in Certeau's (1984, p. 36) words:

[a] panoptic practice proceeding from a place whence the eye can transform foreign forces into objects that can be observed and measured, and thus control and 'include' them within its scope of vision. (Certeau, 1984, p. 36)

In other words, a move towards a grammar of representation can be regarded as strategic since once a defined understanding of partnership is produced it becomes possible to judge the extent to which particular practices conform and correspond to a particular text. In this connection, an aspect of the Donaldson Review (Scottish Government, 2011, Recommendation 19) that had not been especially noticed previously, came increasingly into view (minutes and field notes, 22/1/2014, 2/4/2014, 16/6/2014). This concerned measures to ensure the accountability of partnerships arrangements:

Stronger quality assurance of the effectiveness of partnerships should be applied by GTCS<sup>2</sup> through their accreditation procedures and HM inspectors in their inspections of teacher education and of schools. (Scottish Government, 2011, p. 44)

In the following section, we illustrate how policy imperatives were mobilized in ways that ensured alignment with official partnership discourse, thereby joining up governance apparatus with government intentions.

The extension of the quality assurance role signaled by "inspections of teacher education," marked a notable shift from the less formal *Aspect Reviews* that had hitherto been a feature of HMIE involvement in higher education. The increased role of the General Teaching Council for Scotland (GTCS) in relation to partnership arrangements led to revised *Guidelines for Initial Teacher Education Programmes in Scotland* (GTCS, 2013, p. 4) that reflect this change, with successful accreditation now requiring that programmes

have effective partnership arrangements which address the key principles of partnership as identified in the National Implementation Board... National Framework Agreement for Partnership in the Early Phase of Teacher Learning.

A formally constituted partnership arrangement aligned with the ten NIB principles was henceforth a necessary condition for universities being accredited to offer teacher education *per se*.

Soon after the release of funding to develop the early career phase, the Scottish Government announced that each university and local authority partnership would be subject to an Aspect Review of partnerships which would use the ten NIB Principles as a frame/benchmark from which to judge areas of good practice and to identify issues faced by the university and local authority partnerships. Whilst the formalization of partnership working around the early career phase had at first given rise to new opportunities and possibilities in terms of funding; this now ushered in new forms of governance and accountabilities not foreseen by the stakeholders in the partnership. Signing up to the ten NIB Principles embodied in the formalized partnership agreement, now issued in a new form of inspection that, in turn, would lead to a public report on the effectiveness of the partnership's working.

With the announcement of the Aspect Review, a new series of meetings took place that were focused on preparing for the review, and on two occasions an HMIE inspector attended partnership meetings in both an observational and advisory capacity for the upcoming review (2/4/2014, 16/6/2014). Preparation for the Aspect Review included work on setting up a series of focus groups that might reflect the work of the partnership for the inspection<sup>3</sup>. The focus of all these discussions at partnership meetings was now mediated via the NIB Principles, which became both a point of reference, focus, and means of evaluation (see Figure 4). In short, the perceived success (or otherwise) of the early career phase project was directly aligned to these principles. Thus, the socio-material translations that were made (in relation

to the principles) led to new working practices within the partnership assemblage, which also became subject to scrutiny and reporting.

Although at first it appeared that there would be some freedom and flexibility in identifying how the Aspect Review focus groups were to be constituted, it soon became apparent that specific groups of professionals such as Head Teachers, students, and core staff were preferred, so that the review team (from Education Scotland) might make clear judgments in relation to the ten NIB principles in relation to each stakeholder. Indeed, the questions used for each of the focus groups drew directly upon these principles. Whereas the university had hoped to constitute the focus groups around distinct partnership projects—which might give evidence of collaboration across stakeholder groups—it was clear that the review team had a clearly differentiated governance structure in mind that could be matched to the ten stipulative principles rather than being matched to the specificities of each project (Field Notes, 12/9/2014).

Through such measures, the CLASP steering group was now held directly accountable to the ten NIB Principles embodied in the formalized partnership agreement. The Steering Group meetings from 2<sup>nd</sup> April 2014 onwards, aligned their discussions to the NIB Principles and how best to prepare the focus groups for the upcoming Aspect Review, rather than open-ended dialogue around the newly created spaces and opportunities the early career phase had provided.

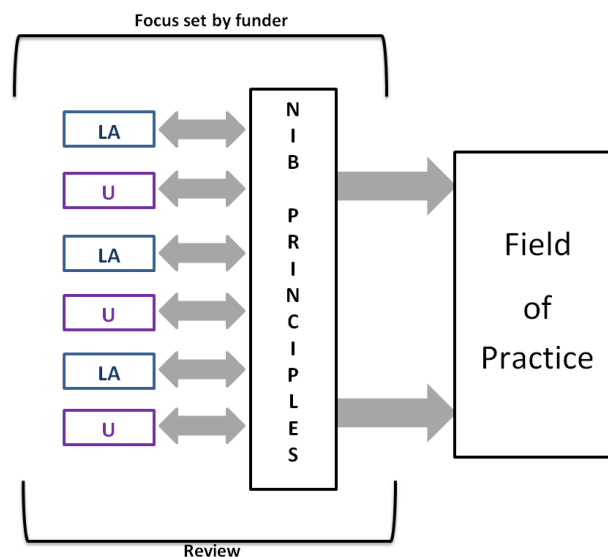


Figure 5. *A grammar of representation. The diagram shows how the focus of attention is upon a text (the NIB Principles) rather than between partners (as in Figure 3). (LA = Local Authority; U = University)*

The new accountability agenda thus translated a partnership assemblage, which was, in lexical terms, structured around an on-going practice of collaboration, into something that was quite different: a stipulative understanding of partnership that drew upon a grammar of representation. The partnership assemblage changed significantly through the addition of the ten NIB Principles as an authoritative text, with the new assemblage, in turn, becoming explicitly linked to official organizations such as HMIE and GTCS, that ensured accountability. In becoming accountable, clear and pre-defined principles identified by external actors became foregrounded, to which alignment was sought. If the partnership assemblage prior to the formal act of signing appeared closer to a grammar of participation in Candler's (2006) terms,

the formal act of signing henceforth committed stakeholders to a grammar of representation in which a stipulative text became a key element in the practice of partnership.

As noted above, the formal act of signing also became a precondition for access to new funding from the Government, which in turn led to new alignments, expectations, and accountabilities. The effect of this, at a strategic level, was to relocate thinking about future priorities away from each University-Local Authority partnership to the Government. Setting the future agenda was achieved through an official announcement that made available particular funding streams, whose focus was dependent upon current government priorities. Under the new arrangements, the partnership appeared to be guided at each step, with doors in particular directions being mysteriously opened and closed, producing a kind of *Alice in Wonderland* effect. And so this, in turn, produced both new forms of governance as well as new forms of unknowing. As regards the latter, if, under a grammar of participation, there were uncertainties as to what might transpire within a meeting, dependent upon which contingent matter of concern might arise, under a grammar of representation, the map of significant concerns was only available piecemeal, and in retrospect, once a new priority had been set by the government. Henceforth, the new partnership assemblage was not only beholden to a stipulative text and the grammar of representation which came in its wake, but stakeholders found themselves more closely linked to the whims of future government priorities.

Notwithstanding the Scottish Government's (2013, p.1) intention that the establishment of a principles-based approach "enhance consistency of standards, while at the same time allowing sufficient flexibility," since "the NIB is not promoting a particular model of partnership working," in practice, our analysis suggests that the new alignments and accountabilities associated with a grammar of representation that we trace here, qualitatively changed the practice of partnership in this setting. Thus, a research project (titled the Integrated Early Career Phase)—funding for which was awarded after the signature event—was formally evaluated according to its alignment with the NIB Principles rather than, for example, an increase in collaborative working—or the development of trust between partners. The shift from a grammar of participation to that of representation also brought significant change as regards the focus of ethical practice involved in becoming professionally responsible. In place of responsibility to fellow stakeholders to support professional learning and practice, as foregrounded within a grammar of participation (illustrated in Figure 3), the move towards clearer governance of partnership shifted professional responsibility to faithfulness to a particular policy lexicon instead (illustrated in Figure 5).

## Conclusion

This paper offers a distinctive approach to understanding educational partnership that is focused upon a reading of empirical happenings and their bearing upon a critical analysis of two successive partnership assemblages. Having initially distinguished between three types of approach to understanding partnership, the lexical, stipulative and empirical, which variously inform and interplay in the construction of partnership and the kinds of assemblage to which these give rise, we then traced how a new partnership assemblage came into being through a signature event. This partnership assemblage, in foregrounding a stipulative text, enacted a more formal approach in which its success or otherwise was judged according to how well practice might be aligned with an authoritative text; this we characterized, following Candler (2006), as enacting a grammar of representation. In direct contrast, the partnership assemblage that pre-dated this formal act of signing, and the new alignments and responsibilities to which this gave rise, was much less formal; partnership within these terms was characterized as enacting a grammar of participation, which was performed through a negotiation of emergent matters of concern.

The formal signature event both marked, inaugurated and bound stakeholders to a new partnership assemblage that materially changed ways in which partnership might be performed and the responsibilities—and accountabilities—to which this gave rise. Rather than uncritically assuming partnership to be an unquestioned good, our analysis encourages a more cautious approach. Partnership might be viewed as an ambivalent achievement in so far as this issues in new forms of university and local authority governance that involve subjection to externally produced, audit cultures without clear justification or critical rationale (Strathern, 2000). Partnership, depending on which grammar is mobilized, might be seen as giving rise to both new insight and relational possibility or a further extension and intensification of governance that issues in a more coherent regime of regulation (Ranson, 2003). As such, partnership may be a mixed blessing indeed.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Key policy texts produced during this period include Scottish Government (2011, 2013) and Education Scotland (2015).

<sup>2</sup> The GTCS (General Teaching Council for Scotland) is the official registration body for teachers in Scotland. All teacher education programmes are officially accredited by the GTCS.

<sup>3</sup> Although technically a 'review,' the 'Aspect Review' was an inspection in all but name; in the planning meetings with government officials that preceded this, there was repeated slippage between the use of the terms 'review' and 'inspection.'

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