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Partnerships in Policing: on the lookout for best practices that work

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Key words: policing, research, education, partnership, best practice

Abstract

The New South Wales Police Force is constantly looking at enhancing its services from both strategic and operational perspectives. As a result of this ongoing search for best practices and evidence-based initiatives, a partnership with Charles Sturt University has been created. In addition to providing university learning to recruits, as well as their operational training, academics are regularly engaged in (field) research, and feed their results back to the Police and through the curriculum.

Two research projects particularly illustrate this ongoing cycle of information sharing between the Police and the University. The New South Wales School Liaison Police (SLP) and the Mental Health Intervention Teams (MHIT) programs were implemented in January 2007 and 2008 respectively. The SLP program, under a multi-agency commitment, aims to address rights, respect and responsibility amongst young people, whilst the MHIT project was designed to enhance police capacity to respond efficiently and safely to incidents involving people with mental illness.

Charles Sturt University has been evaluating both schemes since their inception. Using an action research approach, the research team engages police, schools, agencies and community representatives to find ways to improve practice as both programs unfold. The research team also seeks to contextualise the initiatives internationally, and within wider community policing approaches. This paper will describe the processes at stake in these research projects, and will illustrate the win-win situations created by this partnership.

1 The authors would like to thank Kim Pallot for her comments on earlier versions of this paper.

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No industry sector is spared from ongoing demands for best or evidence-based practices in their field. As such, Policing is an industry that faces constant challenges in answering public opinion demands, meeting political needs, fulfilling electoral promises and ensuring 'customer' satisfaction, in addition to dealing with their main core-businesses: law enforcement and peace keeping. Such a demanding portfolio cannot be fulfilled by police on their own. The increasing worldwide tendency is for police to reach out to various exterior agencies and build partnerships that have a potential to contribute, support and help them maintain a high quality service delivery.

The initial movement towards academic partnerships was a research-oriented enterprise, in which academics were consulted, helped police evaluate programs, identified new paradigms and, in some instances, contributed to the implementation of the latter in the field. Partnerships then became more active. Some academics became entrenched in the Policing landscape, and started to work hands on with police in various research areas: operational procedures, community policing and intelligence. All of this active engagement resulted in famous policing theories now well known and continuously developed by new generations of researchers.

This paper focuses on a relatively new type of partnership between police and academia. This partnership is not only research-driven, but also considers an important on going teaching component. We will begin by discussing the rationale for this type of partnership in the Policing area and will then illustrate its underlying principles with two concrete examples of how this partnership works in New South Wales, Australia.

**Rationale for partnerships between Academia and the Police Industry**

Reaching out to external agencies is not a new phenomenon for police (Crawford, 1997). Several decades have now seen the development of many partnerships meant to contribute to everyday police work. While policing (as an institution) has been seen, for quite some time, as a first port of call to solve far too many problems for us to describe here, police hierarchies have realised that always doing everything themselves is unrealistic (Fleming, 2008). Efforts have therefore been aimed at re-organising and re-allocating responsibilities into the hands of communities and other state and non-state agencies. Efforts have also been made to re-establish multi-disciplinary team-handling of problems, particularly since the development of community policing as a paradigm. For example: crisis intervention teams and appropriate referral protocols have been created to deal with offenders or victims of crime displaying signs of a mental illness; youth issues are dealt with in partnership with schools, parents, council youth services, departments of education and young people themselves; and traffic and transport issues are addressed in collaboration with transportation companies and road authorities. Partnerships have also been developed between police forces and private security companies. For example, the Australian Federal Police hires private security guards to monitor their entrance lobby. Extensive literature draws a picture of the various networks that have been developed for the past twenty to thirty years (see, for example, Goldstein, 1990; Skogan, 2004; Wood & Shearing, 2006; Wood et al, 2008).

The underlying principle in the drawing of partnerships is that of harnessing different skills, capacities and knowledge in the delivery of services. The rationale considers consultative
stakeholders who can not only bring new perspectives into the picture, but can also deliver a certain amount of quality control that is (eventually) destined to foster best practice and critical thought into the industrial practice. Partners never see the world in the exact same light and sometimes speak a different language. This disparity however does not mean that they are exclusive in their aims and objectives. Success and wealth often come as a result of culturally diverse institutions joining together to benefit each other in the mutual handling of some of their own core-businesses.

As mentioned previously, the (main) core-businesses of Policing are the maintenance of peace and the enforcement of the law. This is coupled with gravitating additional external demands, such as demands for (community and political) accountability, professional excellence and ensuring best practices in various domains. The main core-businesses of academia are usually perceived as three fold: advancing knowledge via research, disseminating knowledge via teaching and publication, and building stronger communities via community engagement and participation. The question is therefore asked: “How could these core-businesses be correlated?”

Correlation occurs when both parties start building on each other's strengths. While police have an in-depth knowledge of the practical needs of the area they service and of their own operational procedures, academics can not only compare these needs to other situations, but also provide and compare examples of practice elsewhere, while contextualising practice to various policing theories. When synergy between stakeholders is achieved, identification of better practices can be achieved jointly, and on-going partnerships can be utilised to elaborate on what needs doing and how. Many partnerships exist between the NSWPF and universities in Australia. These partnerships can be clustered into three specific types: partnerships in education, research and professional development. Although the police remain the main stakeholder in these partnerships, it is important to stress that the relationship is not an exclusive one way street. Win-win situations have been systematically created for all, while maintaining and respecting stakeholders' identity and independent core-business.

Once best practices are identified and implemented, it is important to maintain their sustainability and to ensure that staff and/or resource changes do not damage previous efforts made. To facilitate this, some police forces have decided to develop another partnership layer, in which universities not only play the role of research partner, but also become an essential associate in the provision of recruit and continuing education. Although many examples of this relationship are to be found internationally, the following describes the unique partnership developed in Australia by the New South Wales Police Force (NSWPF) and Charles Sturt University (CSU).

The picture of the partnership - New South Wales Police Recruit and Continuing Education

It is a fact that police recruits need training, however, the educational needs of police have significantly changed since 'Peel's Bobbies’ and even since the inception of more modern forms of policing. Guy (2008, see also NSW Police, 1996), recently drew a narrative of this evolution in NSW. The education of police officers, in considering practicum and theoretical components of the role, has become multi-disciplinary. Recruits are now required to learn,
and more importantly, understand issues relating to socio- legality, professional ethics, tactical strategies, communications and investigations for example. Since 1998, the NSWPF has therefore turned to Charles Sturt University to deliver recruit education and training in these specific areas.

Specialty in academic areas is key in the delivery of recruit education. One would therefore find, for example, a former lawyer teaching law (Leahy et al, forthcoming), an ethicist teaching policing ethics or a criminologist teaching socio-legal issues and specificities about vulnerable populations. Teaching ventures further than the mere academic development of curriculum however. Particular care is given to bind the syllabus to the reality of policing. There is a constant flow of information between university lecturers and police members and an on-going negotiation and reciprocal evaluation of what teaching is required, and importantly, what needs update and review.

This said, in order to respect each other's role and core business, academics and police members steer clear of specific functions relating to the dissemination and delivery of particular information. That is, whilst academics teach theoretical policing and practicum (strongly relating to his/her specialisation), practicum is an area that is mostly reserved for serving or retired members of the police. Although through negotiation and consultation in the writing of courses there is flexibility for a certain amount of role morphing, it is important to highlight that practicum is in itself a specialisation best left to its legitimate owners.

There are currently 5 sessions of three months duration in the education of police recruits in New South Wales. The first two are completed on campus, while the final three sessions are completed by distance education mode, whilst students are on probation in the field. Table 1 outlines the structure of the Associate Degree of Policing Practice and highlights subjects taught by Police Practicum Specialists only (*), Police and Academics jointly (∞) or Academic specialists (†)².

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² We mean by ‘academic specialists’ lecturers who have obtained a specialised degree at a level including and higher than a Master's Degree.
Table one – Outline of the Associate Degree of Police Practice, NSW

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SESSION 1</th>
<th>SESSION 2</th>
<th>SESSION 3</th>
<th>SESSION 4</th>
<th>SESSION 5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Communications</td>
<td>Road Safety</td>
<td>Investigations</td>
<td>Problem-Oriented Police &amp; Vulnerable People</td>
<td>Ethics &amp; Leadership</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Police, Crime &amp; Society</td>
<td>Police, Crime &amp; Society</td>
<td>Ethical reasoning</td>
<td>Practicum *</td>
<td>Practicum *</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Criminal Justice</td>
<td>Ethical reasoning</td>
<td>Practicum *</td>
<td>Practicum *</td>
<td>Practicum *</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Investigations</td>
<td>Investigations</td>
<td>Practicum *</td>
<td>Practicum *</td>
<td>Practicum *</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Practicum *</td>
<td>Practicum *</td>
<td>Attestation as Probationary Constable</td>
<td>Graduation as Constable</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Continuing education is also provided at several levels. Generalist and specialised Bachelors degrees are offered for police officers who wish to advance their studies. Masters and doctoral degrees are also delivered. Specialisations include degrees in Investigation, Fraud, Intelligence and Police Management. A number of the most recent courses are delivered by CSU’s Australian Graduate School of Policing and usually include a research component. Another constituent of police continuing education is the creation of specialised courses delivered for police officers wishing to join specialist task forces within the police. For example: investigations groups; School-Liaison Police Officers and the newly developed Mental Health Intervention Teams where specialised training is delivered by specialists in investigations, education services (partnership with the NSW Department of Education, Association of Independent Schools and Catholic Education Commission) and doctors (University of New South Wales and NSW Department of Health). The latter two examples lead us to our next point: partnerships in research.

Research

The New South Wales Police Force is constantly looking at enhancing its services from both strategic and operational perspectives. Therefore, in addition to providing university courses to police recruits, academics are regularly engaged in (field and fundamental) research and feed their results directly back to the NSWPF and through the curriculum. Many academics are consequently engaged in the research or evaluation of policing issues specific to policing in NSW or, more explicitly, to the delivery of education to police members. Table 2 provides
a brief, non exhaustive list of policing and criminology areas in which research projects are currently conducted at CSU³.

### Table 2 – an overview of policing research areas at CSU

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research on Policing Issues</th>
<th>Research on Police Education</th>
<th>Criminological and socio-legal research</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>School Liaison Police Initiative (evaluation)</td>
<td>Investigations</td>
<td>Child Sexual Abuse</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mental Health Intervention Teams (evaluation)</td>
<td>Ethics and Leadership</td>
<td>Young Offenders Act: an exploratory research of attitudes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perceptions of Police in the Media</td>
<td>Impact of curriculum on Policing</td>
<td>Aboriginal people and Police</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intelligence</td>
<td>Delivery of Distance Education in Policing</td>
<td>Ethical decision making</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transfer of Powers</td>
<td>History of Police Education</td>
<td>Criminogenic hotspots</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Policing of traffic offences</td>
<td>E-learning material</td>
<td>Methodology in Policing research</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community Policing theories</td>
<td>Problem-based learning</td>
<td>Crime prevention</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Policing and the Media</td>
<td></td>
<td>Civilian arrests</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Police solicitors</td>
<td></td>
<td>Youth crime issues</td>
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<tr>
<td>Vulnerable populations policing</td>
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</table>

The following two research projects (in particular) illustrate a unique aspect of the special relationship between the NSW Police and Charles Sturt University. In the absence of this particular element, the partnership would be slightly bland and not uncommon; however, these research projects have worked to create an ongoing cycle of information sharing between the NSWPF and the University that ultimately impacts strongly on the delivery of education material.

The New South Wales School Liaison Police (SLP) and the Mental Health Intervention Teams (MHIT) programs were implemented in January 2007 and 2008 respectively. The SLP program, under a multi-agency commitment, aims to address rights, respect and responsibility amongst young people, whilst the MHIT program was designed to enhance police capacity to respond efficiently and safely to incidents involving people with a mental illness. Charles Sturt University has been evaluating both schemes since their inception. Using an action research approach in the first case and exploratory methods in the second, the research team engages police, schools, agencies and community representatives in finding ways to improve practice as both programs unfold. The research team also seeks to contextualise the initiatives internationally and within wider community policing approaches.

The research team also systematically feeds back relevant and important operational information about these programs via the syllabus delivered to police recruits (session 1, 3 This list is not inclusive of student research.
particularly in the subject 'Police, Crime and Society', see Table 1). This immediately helps to familiarise police recruits with the specificities of NSWPF protocols and standard operational procedures, as opposed to other modes of policing. Recruits, when in the field as early as session 3, have already gained knowledge in current protocols relating to schools and mentally ill consumers. They can also further their capacities, instead of developing them from scratch or having to adapt to delays and de-synchronisation in information sharing, when confronted to these very recent initiatives. The three month session duration (Table 1), allows for a truly prompt update of the operational and legal material.

Concluding thoughts

The collaborative partnership between the NSWPF and CSU is unique in the way in which it creates an ongoing cycle of information sharing and reflective practice to improve the industry/profession of policing. It is also worth noting in the additional education layer added to move on from the normal research-oriented university-industry partnership. In the case described herewith, academia fuels teaching and research considerations, whilst policing contributes field protocols and perspectives regarding 'what works and what does not' from an operational standpoint.

This form of collaboration is not exclusive, and in fact, encourages the involvement of other universities in the provision of education and specialist feedback (for example, the University of New South Wales is involved in the training of Mental Health Intervention teams). The comparison between police services worldwide also allows for informed and varied perspectives on operational practice. This is worth mentioning as strict exclusive collaboration, though sometimes fruitful, still bears the risk to trigger mechanisms of autarchy, which in turn might lead to ethnocentricity and to a loss of the main stakeholders' autonomy. Multiple alliances are an effective way of avoiding such pitfalls.

The initiative in New South Wales can be likened to that of a bubbling cauldron, where needs are systematically examined and addressed with a resultant effect in mind of achieving best practice in police education and, from a more criminological perspective, best practice in tackling crime issues. Ten years on, the initiative is still relatively new; however, much is expected of this continuing (hopefully self-sustaining), collaboration and reciprocity.

References


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