Teacher Candidates’ Perceptions of the Benefits and Challenges of Three Innovative Practicum Models: Peer Mentorship, Service Learning and International Placements

HEQCO-Funded Project

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Background to the Project

• Consistent with many other professional preparation programs, teacher education generally includes a combination of course-based and field-based learning experiences.

• Most commonly, teacher candidates complete their field-based practicum experiences in classrooms, under the mentorship of experienced associate teachers.

• This session will describe a project examining three innovative models of field-based learning experiences provided as part of a 5-year Concurrent BA/BEd teacher education program offered by Nipissing University.
Innovative Practicum Models

Model 1: Peer Mentorship Practicum

Model 2: Alternative Community Service Learning Placements

Model 3: International Practicum Placements
Peer Mentorship

Peer mentorship pairings of novice (first-year) and mentor (second- or third-year) teacher candidates are created, with each mentorship dyad most often placed in the same classroom setting in order to scaffold the learning of the novice teacher candidate and to develop the collaborative teaching skills of both teacher candidates (Grierson, Wideman-Johnston, Tedesco, Brewer & Cantalini-Williams, 2013).
Alternative Community Service Learning

Alternative service learning placements in community agencies and non-traditional learning environments are arranged by the teacher candidates for the purpose of applying their teaching skills to diverse settings and engaging with community and cultural partners in education (Maynes, Cantalini-Williams & Tedesco, 2013).
International Placements

International practicum placements in Kenya and Italy, with faculty facilitation, are provided to create global awareness and provide opportunities for the development of pedagogical and second-language teaching skills (Tessaro, Brewer & Cantalini-Williams, 2013).
Purpose of the Innovative Models

• The practices being investigated expand the norm of placing a ‘teacher candidate’ with an ‘associate teacher’ in a school setting, to more creative and alternative models of mentorship and field-based learning.

• These innovative practices acknowledge the need for teacher candidates to become contributing members of learning communities in diverse environments (Feiman-Nemser, 2001).

• To provide future educators with experiences that will assist them to become knowledgeable, culturally aware, collaborative, resilient, resourceful and employable professionals.
The development of a teacher is a complex process (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999), and research affirms that the practicum component is an integral part of teacher education (Cohen & Ball, 1999; Schulz, 2005).

Practicum placements are essential for promoting cohesion between theory and practice in teacher education programs (Falkenberg & Smits, 2010; Le Cornu & Ewing, 2008).
Related Literature

• According to Schulz (2005), effective teacher education incorporates knowledge of a range of educational systems, families and agencies within the community, and teacher candidates need to have opportunities to engage and interact with these diverse partners.

• Practicum placements, in both traditional and non-traditional settings, foster the opportunity for students to work to learn as well as learn to work (Cooper et al., 2010).
Research on Peer Mentorship

• Research has documented that paired practicum experiences are effective in providing increased support for teacher candidates (Bullough, Young, Erickson, Birrell, Clark, & Egan, 2002; Bullough, et al., 2003; Gardiner & Robinson, 2009).

• The practice of peer mentorship between candidates who are at different junctures of their teacher education program is emerging in the literature, but further exploration is required (Grierson, Cantalini-Williams, Wideman-Johnston, & Tedesco, 2011).
Research on Service Learning

- Eyler and Giles (1999) note the need to balance the objectives of the organization, the institution and the participating student. Alternative service learning in teacher education can aid in achieving a deeper understanding of the necessary program learning outcomes (Astin, Vogelgesang, Ikeda & Yee, 2000).

- There remains a need for more research on the benefits of community-based practicum components in teacher education (Chambers, 2009; Maynes, Hatt & Wideman, 2013).
Research on International Placements

• Much evidence of resulting benefits such as global awareness and increased linguistic sensitivity for teacher candidates (Bryan & Sprague, 1997; Clement & Otlaw, 2002; Cushner, 2007; Mahon & Cushner, 2002; Stachowski & Chleb, 1998; Stachowski, Richardson & Henderson, 2003; Stachowski & Visconti, 1997).

• Little research investigating a model whereby teams of teacher candidates and faculty advisors engage in teaching and professional activities together in international settings (Cantalini-Williams & Tessaro, 2011; Quezada, 2004).
Research Questions

1. What are teacher candidates’ perceptions of the benefits of participating in each practicum model?
2. What are teacher candidates’ perceptions of the challenges of participating in each practicum model?
3. What are teacher candidates’ perceptions of implications for further implementation of each practicum model?
A Conceptual Framework for Work Integrated Learning

- A conceptual framework of work integrated learning (Cooper, Orrell & Bowden, 2010) includes seven dimensions that can be aligned with the practicum component of a teacher education program.
- Cooper et al. (2010) proposed that successful implementation of a model needs to include all seven dimensions.
- This conceptual framework provides an appropriate lens through which to examine the innovative practicum models in the concurrent education program.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dimension</th>
<th>Description</th>
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| Purpose             | • Intended outcome for all stakeholders  
                      • Expectations and goals                                                  |
| Context: the workplace | • Diverse settings  
                      • Within a community of practice                                          |
| Integration         | • A learning process through dialogue, reflection, tutorials and accessible work  
                      • A two-way application of theory and practice                             |
| Curriculum          | • Functional knowledge integrated with declarative knowledge  
                      • Alignment of learning objectives with assessment  
                      • Workplace curriculum is valued                                           |
| Learning            | • Experiential and situated learning  
                      • Transformative process that leads to growth in understanding of theory and personal/professional identity  
                      • Opportunities for observation, review and reflection                    |
| Partnerships        | • Multiple stakeholders at various levels in numerous contexts  
                      • Support for partnerships on an institutional level                        |
| Support             | • Ongoing assistance and guidance for interns, supervisors and organizations  
                      • Practical, administrative, educational and emotional components          |
Context

• Teacher education in Ontario includes two different program structures: concurrent and consecutive education (Ontario College of Teachers Act 347/02, 1996; Ontario College of Teachers, 2013).

• The concurrent education program is offered at two campuses of the same university, in slightly different structures.

• Ontario law requires teacher candidates to participate in a minimum of eight weeks of practicum (Ontario College of Teachers Act 347/02, 1996).

• The concurrent education program studied in this project includes 17 to 20 weeks of practicum in schools, in addition to the equivalent of four weeks of alternative service learning/international placements as part of the Observation and Practice Teaching credit course.
Peer Mentorship Model

• Teacher candidates in years one, two and three of the concurrent education program participate in one campus.
• First-year teacher candidates participating in peer mentorship are paired with a second- or third-year teacher candidate.
• Occurs in the second term of the novices’ first academic year and most often, the mentorship pair is placed in the same classroom setting for the purpose of enhancing support, collaboration and cooperative teaching skills.
Alternative Service Learning Practicum Model

• Teacher candidates are required to arrange an alternative service learning placement of 120 hours.
• A site supervisor is responsible for completing the necessary paperwork and evaluations.
• The structure of practicum differs in that one campus requires a four week block and the other allows the 120 hour requirement to be fulfilled in a variety of time periods.
International Practicum Placement Model

• Teacher candidates may apply for an international teaching practicum placement, to be taken in lieu of an alternative service learning practicum placement in the fourth year of the program.

• Choices for destination countries are Kenya and Italy, with each international practicum placement being facilitated by two faculty members.

• The international placements on this campus have been implemented for eight years with approximately 30% of eligible teacher candidates participating each year.
Methodology

- Each study used responses provided by participating teacher candidates as the data sets for analyses. Cresswell (2012) was used for overall analyses.
- The peer mentorship model study included a longitudinal analysis of quantitative Likert-type responses and qualitative responses to pre- and post-practicum surveys administered across three years on one campus.
- The alternative service learning study used a survey tool to collect the perceptions of teacher candidates across both campuses.
- The international practicum placement study used a qualitative methodology including focus groups, interviews and analyses of journal entries to ascertain the perceptions of teacher candidates from one campus who participated in two separate international placements.
Methodology of Peer Mentorship

- The potential participant population eligible included approximately 200 mentor candidates and 200 novice candidates each year. Over one-third of potential participants responded to each of the surveys each year with a total of 986 respondents over all three years.

- Likert-type questions asked candidates to rate the effectiveness of their preparation for this model, their frequency of engagement in the intended peer mentorship experiences and how beneficial they perceived the experiences to be for themselves and their peer.

- Four open-ended response questions solicited candidates’ perceptions of the benefits, challenges and suggestions for refinement of the peer mentorship practicum model. Quantitative analysis focused only on the 523 post-practicum survey responses. The variance in participants’ Likert-type ratings were explored with ANOVA. The data gathered through the open-ended response questions were analyzed through coding and categorizing of recurring themes.
Methodology of Service Learning

• The survey was comprised of six questions related to demographic information, five overarching sets of questions with a total of 42 sub-questions rated using a Likert scale, and three open-ended questions that focused on the benefits, challenges and the implications for implementation of the alternative service learning program.

• Ninety-one participants took part in this study (43 from one campus and 48 from the other campus). The response rate for participants on both campuses was a combined 37.2%.

• The responses were presented as percentages of agree/mostly agree for each question and each campus cohort to allow for comparisons across clusters of items and across program structures.

• All responses to open-ended questions were grouped and clustered to reveal themes related to the benefits and challenges of the alternative service learning model.
Methodology of International

• Three different elements: a summary of the reflection journal; a focus group interview; and complete a one-on-one interview with one of the researchers.

• Of the potential 36 teacher candidates who participated in the international placements in 2011, 15 participants volunteered for the study.

• The total response rate of those who completed at least one element was 41.67%. Research assistants gathered and analyzed data to reduce bias or conflict of interest. Open coding techniques were used to analyze data from all three sources.
Mentorship Findings

• The peer mentorship model fostered collaborative practice between teacher candidates and provided support that was perceived to be very beneficial to novice candidates and moderately beneficial to mentor candidates.

• Mentor challenges that were apparent in the first year of implementation of the model were followed by an increase in positive perceptions over subsequent implementation years. Collaboration in lesson planning, assessment, team teaching, teaching-related inquiries and professional development was perceived to provide beneficial support to both novices and mentors.
Mentorship Findings

• It is important to note that significant differences were found between the ratings of novices and mentors who worked in different classrooms with those placed apart providing less positive perceptions of preparation, collaboration and benefits.

• Open-ended responses in all three years of the study indicated that additional support through collaboration, an increased inquiry stance and growth of professional identities were beneficial to both partners in the dyad.
Mentorship Quotes

• It takes some of the pressure off to have someone at almost the same level of experience to discuss and plan with. When the mentorship program is working well lesson plans are easier to come up with, and lessons are less stressful to deliver. Team teaching is really a pleasure and I believe that the students really benefit from the partnership between the two teacher candidates and the associate. (Year 1 Novice, April 2010)

• As a mentor it got me to think more about what I was doing because I had to explain some of the strategies I used. Commenting on my novice’s strategies also got me to think critically. (Year 3 Mentor, April 2009)

• It gives mentors the chance to engage in teaching leadership roles and explain things to assist someone younger [less experienced] than them in teaching…Mentors also learn new things from their novices, and the partnerships encourage cooperation and teamwork. (Year 2 Mentor, April 2011)
Service Learning Findings

• The survey responses revealed benefits including opportunities for: connecting theory to practice; improving critical thinking and problem-solving abilities; developing in-depth thinking related to resources available in the community; engaging in diverse community agencies; developing social values; and preparing for various life challenges within the community.

• Results from the analysis of quantitative and qualitative data revealed that the role of alternative service learning to promote professional growth and development was dependent on the nature of the service learning practicum placement, with those candidates who utilized teaching skills in their alternative career settings reporting the most pronounced benefits.
Service Learning Findings

• Significant differences were found between the two campuses with regard to the remaining three areas of impact: links between theory and practice, challenges to think more deeply about day-to-day resource distribution and acquisition, the environment, fairness and justice, and preparing pre-service teachers to develop social values, knowledge, and the skills to live in a diverse democracy.

• The program structure that allowed the practicum to be carried out over an extended period of time showed higher impact in these areas
Service Learning Quotes

• *I became aware of all of the services that child/family services offer for individuals under the age of 18. As a practicing teacher this is imperative knowledge that I will now be aware of and know of these programs that are out there in the community. Prior to this placement I had no idea.* (Alternative Service Learning Student)

• *I would never have had the opportunity to experience this role if I had not had this placement. It has changed my career scope and direction.* (Alternative Service Learning Student)
International Findings

• The analyses revealed benefits, challenges and implications for implementation in four overarching themes that were clustered by category based on codes from across all sources.
• These themes included: professional growth, cultural and community connectedness, awareness of opportunities and practical considerations.
International Quotes

• I think when you go into another culture you can’t impose your own cultural standards into their structures; you just kind of have to be flexible and learn and adopt their ways. (Italy, interview)

• In Kenya I learned a lot about flexibility. We were told before we went to the placement to be flexible but I didn’t realize how flexible we had to be and, for example we would go into the classroom in the morning expecting to have certain things to teach throughout the day and generally throughout the day we would have at least one of those things change and we would have to shift our lessons around to accommodate that so definitely for me it was learning how to be flexible with the teaching. (Kenya, focus group)
### Table 2

**Summary of Benefits, Challenges, Implications for Implementation**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Benefits</th>
<th>Mentorship</th>
<th>Service Learning</th>
<th>International</th>
<th>Overall Benefits</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Preparation</strong></td>
<td>Preparatory activities such as workshops and previous experience</td>
<td></td>
<td>Preparation including group meetings</td>
<td>Preparatory activities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Collaboration and Support</strong></td>
<td>Collaboration and additional support increased in same classroom</td>
<td>Interactions within peer relationships and in a professional community with faculty support</td>
<td>Collaboration among peers and/or with faculty advisors increased support</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Professional Growth</strong></td>
<td>Professional identity and self-confidence as an educator</td>
<td>Professional growth and development was promoted within specific settings</td>
<td>Professional growth in resilience, flexibility and communication skills</td>
<td>Professional skill sets of teacher candidates were reinforced</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Employment Opportunities</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td>Awareness of employment options</td>
<td>Non-traditional opportunities related to teaching abroad and within Canada</td>
<td>Diverse opportunities beyond the traditional teaching model in a classroom</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Awareness of Diverse Perspectives</strong></td>
<td>An inquiry stance was developed</td>
<td>Critical thinking, problem-solving and informed citizenship</td>
<td>Cultural and community connectedness in both home and abroad contexts</td>
<td>Reflective practice, resourcefulness and/or global awareness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Consolidation of Teaching Skills</strong></td>
<td>Consolidation of learning and such skills as co-planning and team teaching</td>
<td>Opportunities to utilize teaching and communication skills</td>
<td>Awareness of teaching and learning strategies of other cultures</td>
<td>Opportunities to utilize and refine teaching skills in varying contexts</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Challenges</th>
<th>Mentorship</th>
<th>Service Learning</th>
<th>International</th>
<th>Overall</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Role Clarification</strong></td>
<td>Role clarification for the novices, mentors, and associate teachers</td>
<td>The value of roles that did not utilize teaching skills</td>
<td>Dissonance between expectations and practice</td>
<td>Roles needed to be clarified</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Time and Structure</strong></td>
<td>Mentors and novices placed in different classrooms was problematic</td>
<td>Benefits were dependent on context, structure and timing</td>
<td>Timing seemed appropriate in spite of costs</td>
<td>Timing and structure posed some challenges</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Preparation and Support</strong></td>
<td>More preparation and support for teacher candidates and associate teachers</td>
<td>Institutional support was needed in a block practicum placement</td>
<td>Clarify teaching assignment</td>
<td>Support from the institution needed to be increased</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Paradigm Shift</strong></td>
<td>Perception of teaching as an independent practice persisted,</td>
<td>The value of service learning in non-teaching contexts was questioned</td>
<td>Reinforcement needed regarding the value of the practicum model in some contexts</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Compatibility Issues</strong></td>
<td>Peer teacher candidate compatibility issues were sometimes evident</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Limitations and Areas for Further Research

• Short-term versus long-term benefits
• Response rate
• Limited demographic information
• Self-reported data; perceptions of other stakeholders
Discussion

• Core benefits indicated that participants valued preparation, collaboration, support, professional growth, consolidation of teaching skills and options for employment

• Challenges included sufficient preparation, support, clarification of roles, need for a paradigm shift and appropriate context

• Implications for further implementation can be aligned with the seven dimensions for work integrated learning framework (Cooper et al., 2010)
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dimension</th>
<th>Implications for Innovative Teacher Education Practicum Models</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **Purpose** | • Broaden the perceptions of participants beyond traditional expectations with more value placed on work integrated learning in diverse contexts  
• Develop and articulate intended outcomes with input from all practicum partners  
• Clarify the roles of various participant groups  
• Provide effective preparatory activities and materials  
• Communicate purpose and outcomes in a variety of modes and venues  
• Include potential employment options as a purpose of the practicum |
| **Context: the workplace** | • Offer diverse settings to apply teaching/pedagogical skills and address varied interests/expertise of candidates  
• Consider the structure and timing of the practicum within the program for optimal learning  
• Ensure that the context allows for collaboration and reflection  
• Provide ongoing support and communication to the practicum setting |
| **Integration** | • Develop opportunities for integrated learning through dialogue, reflection, tutorials and authentic work experiences  
• Provide strategies for integration between theory and practice  
• Foster an inquiry stance for all participants |
| **Curriculum** | • Ensure that the curriculum of program coursework addresses the value and content associated with the practicum (e.g., topics related to mentoring, international teaching and service learning)  
• Plan practicum experiences that align with the curriculum and learning outcomes of the teacher education program  
• Include both theoretical knowledge (what) integrated with practical knowledge (how) in the curriculum  
• Ensure assessment strategies of the practicum align with related learning outcomes  
• Recognize the curriculum/culture of the practicum setting |
| Learning                      | Make explicit the value of experiential learning from the practicum setting and allow for implicit learning through related work experiences  
|                              | Provide opportunities for a transformative process that leads to growth in understandings of personal/professional identities  
|                              | Develop purposeful strategies for observation, review, reflection and refinement of learning  
| Partnerships                 | Plan the practicum with multiple partners at various levels of diverse contexts/settings  
|                              | Provide specific support for partnerships on an institutional level with clear multimodal communications  
|                              | Emphasize the importance of partnerships and professionalism through related policies and practices  
| Support                      | Ensure ongoing assistance and guidance for candidates from associate teachers/supervisors/advisors and the faculty/organizations involved  
|                              | Integrate support with practical, administrative, educational and affective components such as peer mentoring, informative materials, faculty facilitation and appropriate resources.  |
Conclusions

• These recommendations can be used by program planners and policy makers to ensure that innovative practicum models for any profession include the seven dimensions as appropriate.

• Recent publications demonstrate that the area of work integrated learning is of great interest to postsecondary institutions and the public (MacDonald, 2013).

• Ontario is experiencing a renewal in teacher education, with a new extended program legislated to begin in 2015.
Final Thoughts

• The findings are timely and significant for the effective implementation of diverse, authentic and relevant practicum models to promote the development of collaborative, reflective, resourceful, committed, culturally aware and enlightened educators with a range of pedagogical and community-building skills and dispositions.

• The outcomes, as evident from the responses of over one thousand participating teacher candidates, have enhanced the attitudes, competencies and employability options of a future generation of Ontario educators.
References


