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# The Perceptions of Teacher Education in Relation to the Teaching Practicum

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# ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the perceptions of the student teacher, the associate teacher and the visiting lecturer regarding the adequacy of the practicum for the preparation of the first year primary school teacher. Six triads, or case studies, comprising a student teacher, a visiting lecturer and an associate teacher were selected, each within a different school setting. Using grounded theory, the collected data were analysed and sorted until a conceptual framework emerged. Three key themes were identified: the emotional nature of the teaching practicum; the practicum as situated learning; and the practicum as a professional learning community.

Each member of the triad viewed the final teaching practicum as critical to teacher preparation. To a large extent understandings of the roles played by each member of the triad had been implicit rather than explicit. This study highlighted the importance and complementarities of the roles the members of the triad play. It found that student teachers often rely on the solutions provided by the associate teacher and/or the visiting lecturer, and that they lack confidence in their own ability to solve challenging classroom problems. A professional learning community requires each member of the triad to collaborate actively as a member of the teaching team and collectively reach solutions posed in the teaching of the class. Finally, the student teachers experienced difficulty in meeting the challenges of student needs, particularly in low decile schools; for some the challenges were overwhelming.

The study has implications for other initial teacher education programmes regarding practices to meaningfully bridge the gap between the classroom context and the university programme. It provides insights into the requirements for the implementation of practicum that promote a professional learning community. It challenges the assumptions teacher education providers may have about the current models of teaching practicum in which it is perceived as a site where student teachers simply practise teaching and prove their readiness to assume the mantle of a first year teacher. It contributes to the debate of the role and function of the practicum in pre-service teacher education and the need for a deeper understanding and expectation in its implementation by the university and the school, who should be viewed as professional partners in this endeavour.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

For many teachers and teacher educators, the classroom continues to be the source of rich learning and professional development. T. S. Eliot's famous lines capture the sentiment.

> We will not cease from our exploration
> And the end of our exploring
> Will be to arrive where we started
> And know the place for the first time.
> (Little Giddin: *Four Quartets*)

The search is to discover again what has been found before, and to adapt this to our current needs. It has been an interesting journey. For all the participants, I owe a particular debt of gratitude for their willingness to share their perceptions of the practicum and to help draw fresh insights from the complex, social dynamic of the primary school classroom.

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