

Stakeholder Summary

Innovative teacher education practicums spark professional growth

Faculty of Education students (teacher candidates) who participated in innovative practicums said they grew professionally and developed resilience and problem-solving skills, according to a new report from the Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario (HEQCO).

The study, *Innovative Practicum Models in Teacher Education: The Benefits, Challenges and Implementation Implications of Peer Mentorship, Service Learning and International Practicum Placements*, examined three practicum models that are part of a pre-service, five year concurrent teacher education program on two campuses of an Ontario university.

The peer mentorship program pairs first-year (novice) education students with second- or third-year student mentors; the alternative service learning model includes placements for students in community agencies and non-traditional learning environments; international practicum placements for fourth-year students are undertaken in Kenya and Italy.

Program descriptions

The study explored teacher candidate perceptions on the benefits, challenges and program implications of participating in the practicum models and included a literature review on teacher education and work-integrated learning.

The **peer mentorship** study spanned 2009 to 2011 and used pre- and post-practicum electronic surveys of first-year students and mentors. The model fostered collaboration and support that was viewed as very beneficial to novices and moderately beneficial to mentors, according to the study. Collaboration in lesson planning, assessment, team teaching, teaching-related inquiries and professional development were cited as beneficial to both novices and mentors. “It takes some of the pressure off to have someone at almost the same level of experience to discuss and plan with,” one participant noted. The study found some challenges around compatibility between peers and lower perceptions of benefits when peers were placed in different teaching locations.

For the **alternative service learning** model, the study collected quantitative and qualitative data. A confidential online survey revealed a number of benefits including opportunities for connecting theory to practice, improving critical thinking and problem-solving abilities, developing in-depth exposure to resources available in the community and engaging with diverse community agencies. Participants said that they were exposed to many ways they could utilize their teaching and communication skills. “You realize there are so many options other than the classroom setting,” said one participant. Some noted that more institutional support in finding a suitable placement would be beneficial.

The **international practicum** model was examined with a qualitative study based on participant summaries of journals they kept during the 2011 practicum, focus group interviews and one-on-one

interviews. Participants said they increased their awareness of non-traditional teaching opportunities abroad and within Canada. They noted their immersion into the local community where they taught, the value of different cultural experiences and awareness of the teaching and learning strategies used in other cultures. “In Kenya, I learned a lot about flexibility,” said one participant. “We were told before we went to the placement to be flexible but I didn’t realize how flexible we had to be.” Among challenges were issues around practicum timing and costs.

Overall, the study found that professional growth and the reinforcement of teaching skills were consistent benefits across all three practicum models, as were opportunities for diverse perspectives and the development of resilience and problem-solving skills. The authors note that with Ontario’s extended teacher education program to begin in 2015, the required practicum length will double, offering the opportunity for more creative and diverse practicum experiences.

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