Side-by-Side Learning: Teacher Candidates Triads Transforming Practice Through Peer Assessment During Field Experience

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Abstract

The School of Education at the University of Northern British Columbia (UNBC) has four Teacher Candidate cohorts: Year 1 and Year 2 for the secondary years and elementary years. Teacher Candidates engage in four practicum sessions. The first practicum is *observational*, the second is *experiential* (3-weeks), the third is *formative* (4-weeks), and the last is *summative* (10-weeks) in nature. This paper looks at the implementation of triads for the Year 2 Elementary Years Teacher Candidate Cohort. The intention behind triads was to provide Teacher Candidates with opportunities of ongoing formative feedback, collegial support, and professional learning opportunities of shared experiences with their peers during practicum. Teaching can be an isolating profession and being vulnerable with their Coaching Teacher (CT) or Practicum Mentor (PM) may not be practical or viable because of the supervisory, evaluative roles of the CT and PM. Triads were designed for Teacher Candidates to sense-make, share, problem-solve, and collaborate on lesson planning, behaviour management, assessment practices, and pedagogy development. This was the first year of implementation of triads at UNBC School of Education. Professional learning occurred for the Teacher Candidates and UNBC Instructors. Coaching Teachers also reported that they learned from Teacher Candidates by participating in the post-observation conferences with triad members. The UNBC School of Education continues implementing triads in a second iteration with Year 1 Elementary and Secondary Teacher Candidates during their 3- week practicum; and, formally with the Year 2 Elementary Teacher Candidates and informally for the Year 2 Secondary Teacher Candidates during their final 10-week practicum. This paper uses the *Spirals of Inquiry* framework to depict our story, teaching and learning intentions, and shared learning experiences with Teacher Candidates using peer-oriented triads during practicum.

Introduction

> "A major part of the vision for future teachers must involve efforts to help them see that being a professional involves not simply "knowing the answers" but also having the skills and will to work with others in evaluating their own performances and searching for new answers when needed, both at the classroom level and the school level. Helping teachers learn to work in teams where they learn from one another is therefore extremely important."
>
> Darling-Hammond & Bransford, 2005, p. 364

The University of Northern British Columbia (UNBC) School of Education is one of nine teacher education programs in BC. We are situated in the central interior of BC with four cohorts of teacher candidates. We are a two-year program and cater to elementary and secondary teacher education programs. This paper describes the beginning of a teaching and learning journey where we use the Spiral of Inquiry as a framework for educational reform. Teacher Candidates' are identifying their learning needs and the UNBC School of Education is learning to respond to authentically meet those needs through the use of Halbert and Kaser's (2013) *Spiral of Inquiry*. The Spiral of Inquiry was developed with Helen Timperley and focuses on educators creating action on specific learners' needs. The *Spiral of Inquiry* has six phases: scan, focus, develop a hunch, learn, take action, and check. Once the first cycle is complete, the Spiral of Inquiry reiterates and continues to create learning change, with the first focus being found after scanning, and that newfound focus is directly linked, with newfound learning spiralling for both educators and the learners. At UNBC we are still learning from our inquiry and have already embarked on our second iteration of the process. Each iteration of the spiral is being held within the first, with learning connected to the learning community's needs.

We chose Spiral of Inquiry as a framework for learning and means to transform learning in the school for three reasons: (1) our Teacher Candidates are familiar with the language used within the Spiral; (2) one of our university instructors is a NOIIE (Networks of Inquiry and Indigenous Education) teacher leader; and as such was familiar with the process and, (3) it is an inquiry-based, evidence-based approach to design and implement change. The Spiral of Inquiry helps university instructors and Teacher Candidates to scan what is happening in the classroom, collect evidence about what is really happening, and answer why it matters in order to improve teaching and learning at the university. Furthermore, the Spiral of Inquiry assists

university instructors and Teacher Candidates to approach teaching and learning with a reflexive and adaptive mindset.

In our case, our initial *scan* indicated that Teacher Candidates were not feeling supported during their practicum and they felt isolated and judged. We wanted to *focus* on developing a more meaningful practicum experience for our Teacher Candidates that was grounded in current theory and practice. Our *hunch* revealed the level of influence Coaching Teachers (CTs) and Practicum Mentors (PMs) have on Teacher Candidates and their actions during practicum. We *learned* that our Teacher Candidates had a strong understanding of BC's New Curriculum and research and theory around adaptive practice and reflexive teaching (Timperley, 2018). The *action* we took was creating a support group (or peer-oriented triad) during practicum where they would partake in ongoing formative assessment, risk-free collaboration, and opportunities to collectively sense-make about their transformation as emerging educators. We would *check* with our Teacher Candidates and their CTs of the worthwhileness and impact of peer-oriented triads. We realized new learning for ourselves, Teacher Candidates, and practicing teachers.

Scanning - What is going on for our learners?

> *"...professional development, though well intentioned is often perceived by teachers as fragmented, disconnected, and irrelevant to the real problems of classroom practice."*
>
> Lieberman & Mace, 2009, p. 226

Teacher Candidates would return from practicum feeling judged, isolated from each other, and unsure of themselves. This informal feedback is shared with Practicum Instructors and the experience is not specific to any specific practicum course. There are four practicum courses in the UNBC teacher education program: (1) *observational* in Term 1, *experiential* in Term 2, *formative* in Term 3, and *summative* in Term 4. Teacher Candidates are observed formally and informally by their Coaching Teachers (CTs) and Practicum Mentors (PMs) during the experiential (3-week) practicum, formative (4-week) practicum, and summative (10-week) practicum in which they are teaching, planning, and assessing students in K-12 schools. The TCs and PMs provide feedback and guidance to Teacher Candidates during these observations to focus on the candidate's understandings of success and suggest ways to improve practice.

However, at some level, what CTs and PMs have to offer Teacher Candidates does not support Teacher Candidates in ways they need during practicum. This might be due to the fact that PMs may not be currently practicing teachers and not be fully immersed or versed in BC's New Curriculum. TCs may also be learning in their own practice about BC's New Curriculum and how it may shift their pedagogies and assessment practices while coaching Teacher Candidates in their classroom with their classes. CTs and PMs may be well-versed in our previous curriculum and habituated in routine practices. As teacher practices are changing in BC due to the revised Curriculum, Teacher Candidates report more frequently that CTs and PMs are using 'self' as an exemplar of good teaching, regardless of current theory and research, and direct Teacher Candidates to emulate them as feedback.

Our Teacher Candidates stated they needed ongoing support and formative feedback during practicum that would support their explorations of strengths, areas for growth, and progress without evaluation or judgement. There was some incoherence between what the Teacher Candidates were doing, what they thought they were expected to do, and how they were being assessed and evaluated by the CTs and PMs. Engaging in ongoing, informal self- and peer-assessment during practicum with their peers who have the same experiences as they did was one avenue for Teacher Candidates to bridge the gap from routine oriented teaching to a place where they would like to be during their practicum. They needed to able to build their confidence, teacher efficacy, and sense-making abilities to learn how to become teachers at the end of two-years.

Our Teacher Candidates needed ongoing formative feedback that allowed them to access professional learning and professional development that was meaningful, purposeful, and worthwhile during practicum. Wiliam (2016) suggests that "the best way to improve student achievement is through greater use of classroom formative assessment" (p. 98). This would apply to Teacher Candidates during practicum where the Practicum Instructors believed that ongoing formative feedback from peers, based on their experiences which is in the language known by and used by Teacher Candidates would move our Teacher Candidates forward.

Focussing - What is going to give you the biggest impact?
> *"... traditional practicum relies heavily on the classroom teacher to model how to teach*
> *so that the student teachers can reconstruct those practise... the term 'routine expert'...*

describe(s) teachers who sees teaching and learning to teach in this way… (and) this approach is problematic because it does not encourage examination of the efficacy of teacher practices."

<div align="right">Timperley, 2018, p. 220</div>

Teacher Candidates needed a different kind of learning experience during practicum that would create multiple understandings of what it means to be a teacher, make connections between theory and practice, and develop their identity as an educator. They needed to develop their understandings of what was happening while they were teaching, not only with learning for students, but also with learning for self. Teacher Candidates were compelled to prove themselves to their CTs and PMs during practicum because they were being evaluated and consequently found themselves adapting to Coaching Teacher's routine expectations. Being vulnerable was not a viable opportunity for Teacher Candidates during practicum with those whom they perceived to have "power over" them and their success in practicum that is graded with a pass or fail.

Where and when do Teacher Candidates ask uncertain questions about teaching and learning, play with possible solutions or ideas, or share one's thoughts or feelings about practicum that may not be perceived as positive in a community that is safe, supportive, and productive? Teacher Candidates needed to work with one another during practicum to develop their understandings of teaching and learning that was not dependent or influenced by their performance reviews from CTs and PMs. Moreover, feedback that Teacher Candidates received from CTs and PMs were interpreted as expectations that tended to emulate aspects of the CTs' and PMs' routine practice or teaching expertise as an exemplar, which may not be current.

Teacher Candidates wanted to participate in a professional learning activity during practicum that would enhance their practice, pedagogical understandings, and skill sets needed to become a teacher. Coursework, practicum, and reflections led by course instructors were not enough to create coherence for our Teacher Candidates about the complexities and nuances of the profession. Moreover, when Teacher Candidates participated in self-reflection during practicum, it was an 'on-demand' performance to respond to CT's and PM's comments. It was never used as a vehicle for sense-making and they were perceived as summative rather than formative because self-reflections were required for formal lesson plans, formal observations,

and final evaluation. As a result, Teacher Candidates may not have been authentic in their self-reflections to effectively self-assess how they were doing and where they would like to go. Teacher Candidates wanted to have a discussion to unfold around their own abilities, dissect thoroughly their actions and their students, and ensure what was being discussed did not have any negative effects or influence on their formal observations by CTs and PMs during practicum. They wanted evidenced based observations by their peers in addition to their CTs and PMs.

Teacher Candidates received feedback, guidance, and support from CTs and PMs during practicum and, if needed, from Practicum Instructors. The traditional triadic model for teacher education included the student teacher, classroom teacher, and faculty advisor. It situated the Teacher Candidate as the recipient of teacher knowledge transmitted from the classroom. The Coaching Teacher role is to model good teaching as the expert practitioner while the faculty advisor liaises with the university and visited the classroom to observe the student teacher working with students (Trevethan, 2017). In the traditional practicum model, the student teacher (or in our case, Teacher Candidate) is situated in a hierarchical structure where they are the consumers of knowledge from the classroom teacher (or CT) and faculty advisor (or PM). There is little encouragement to examine their efficacy of teaching practices (Trevethan, 2017). Teacher Candidates were looking for something more to supplement their learning during practicum.

Developing a Hunch - What's leading to this situation?

> *"Teacher education programs must help teaching candidates to link the moral purpose that influences them with the tools that will prepare them to engage in productive change."*
>
> Fullan, 1993, p. 1

Practicum Instructors at UNBC were aware that Teacher Candidates were not taking risks during practicum. It seemed that they were becoming increasingly dependent on the CT and PM to direct their learning. As a result, Teacher Candidates were trying to recreate the CT's professional practices within the classroom, thus not considering new possibilities or opportunities to experiment with during their practicum. With BC's New Curriculum and its current implementation in BC schools, playing and experimenting with pedagogies that stepped away from the "stand and deliver" model or "sage on the stage" approach were encouraged.

However, Teacher Candidates were focussed on trying to achieve uniformity and conformity of the learning routines established by the CT (Trevethan, 2017). Furthermore, PMs were rarely current practitioners and tended to redirect any risk-taking by the Teacher Candidates to what they knew as "tried and proven true" practices. The traditional triadic model of the PM, CT, and Teacher Candidate initiated very little sharing between other traditional triads within the cohort, which in the end led to siloed teaching practices of our Teacher Candidates during practicum and ultimately disrupted the established shared understandings that all teachers are learners.

Teacher candidates felt isolated because the work in traditional triads with their CT and PM did not interconnect with other traditional triads within the cohort. Feedback from CTs and PMs were sometimes formative in nature, yet it was always perceived by the Teacher Candidate as evaluative and that it was expected for them to comply rather than share ideas, look into possible actions, or ask others for help. There was no opportunity to sense-make. Teacher candidates felt like they were being continually judged during practicum. There were no informal conversations about practice without feeling like their final evaluations were at risk. As a result, their self-assessments during practicum were potentially skewed because they were too preoccupied by how they were being evaluated. They did not have a "mirror" or peer to reflect with or to help them make sense of where they are and where they would like to be. Teacher candidates need the opportunity and space to develop their identity and efficacy as teachers.

Our hunch about the Teacher Candidates' learning experience within the UNBC School of Education Teacher Education Program was that transmission of knowledge and learning at the university during coursework was disrupted during practicum. Instead of connecting theory to practice during practicum, they adopted coaching teachers' existing practice. If Teacher Candidates were able to observe each other teaching during practicum and participate in a post-observation discussion in triads that are composed of their peers only, would they would gain a deeper understanding of teaching and learning, recognize the variability in lesson delivery and pedagogy, and make connections between theory and practice? Teacher candidates would find strength in understanding that there is no 'one way' to implement best practice because it is influenced by contexts, developmental levels, and values. Peer-oriented triads situate each Teacher Candidate in a learning community where they were able to provide ongoing formative feedback and support for one another, have informal conversations to

sense-make their teaching and learning experiences during practicum, and opportunities to observe one another to empathize and recognize their shared experiences.

Learning - What do you need to learn? How will you design new learning?

" ...the challenge is to figure out how to provide students with the valuable lessons and learning experience of collaborative work while avoiding the common pitfalls."

Murray, 2017, p. 1

We wanted to learn if creating peer-oriented triads would be an effective way for Teacher Candidates to collaboratively sense-make their teaching and learning experiences during practicum. We wondered if working with peers in triads would alleviate their feelings of isolation and judgement during and after practicum. Moreover, we wanted to know if these peer-oriented triads would minimize the disruption from university coursework and practicum such that they would be able to make meaningful connections between theory and practice, observe each other in real-time, develop their teacher identity and efficacy, and provide each other with ongoing formative feedback and support within a safe and respectful learning community.

When the idea peer-oriented triads was introduced to Year 2 Teacher Candidates, it was met with resistance. Peer-oriented triads during practicum was perceived as "new," added workload, and another formality or "hoop-jumping task." Year 2 Teacher Candidates had expectations of what their final two practicums would be like based on last year's cohorts' lived experiences. The idea of peer-oriented triads was presented conceptually to our Year 2 Teacher Candidates with the intention and expectation that they would co-construct and co-define triad norms with Practicum Instructors and members of their triad. Unfortunately, the Year 2 Teacher Candidates demanded that the Practicum Instructors sort out the details with clear expectations and establish step-by-step processes before they were willing to implement for practicum. Without this information, they were reluctant to adopt this notion of additional work of peer collaboration.

During the period of negotiation prior to practicum, Practicum Instructors continued to reiterate the rationale for peer-oriented triads for practicum and why the details for triads were not constructed for them prior to implementation. We wanted them to personalize their learning communities and develop their own norms. Not all Teacher Candidates were placed in the same school district and not all Teacher Candidates were teaching the same grade level or subject

areas. We wanted to diversify their learning experiences during practicum so we wanted them to diversify the composition of their triads. Our "why" was ongoing, informal formative feedback, teacher identity and collective efficacy of selves as learners, and collective self-efficacy for them to succeed as teachers.

There was a growing recognition by our Teacher Candidates that there was a team approach to this work. The Practicum Instructors formed a triad of professionals where we were working together. Before practicum, instructors Gretchen Vogelsang, Christine Ho Younghusband, and Deborah Koehn were moving in and out of classrooms, team teaching during seminars and proposing the same outcomes, and working collaboratively demonstrating constant feedback and communication as the Practicum Instructors of the UNBC Teacher Education Program. Teacher Candidates became increasingly aware that discussions were taking place, we were constantly negotiating curriculum between instructors and Teacher Candidates and involving the Teacher Candidates in the conversation. We were shaping our learning and practice through this professional triad. We were following Helen Timperley's (2018) words of wisdom:

> *This focus on adaptive expertise requires that the knowledge building aspect of the inquiry cycle is developed by searching for new knowledge and integrating new and existing knowledge in flexible ways to meet particular teaching and learning challenges, rather than just simply applying existing knowledge more efficiently.*
>
> Timperley, 2018, p. 7

Over time, the Year 2 Teacher Candidates offered small steps to move forward with Triads. First, the Secondary and Elementary cohorts formed self-selected triads within their own cohort, with exception to one triad consisting of Elementary and Secondary Teacher Candidates. Any extensions or adaptations were optional. For example, some triads had Teacher Candidates who were teaching in two different towns so observing one another would not be possible (or expected). In this situation, members of the triad who were able to observe each other did and for those who could not made other plans such as observing another teacher in their school (or district) or another Teacher Candidate in another Triad. Second, members of triads stayed connected with each other using technology, such as *What's App,* or met face-to-face on a weekly basis. Finally, Teacher Candidates were expected to make the appropriate arrangements with their CTs to ensure that they were able to leave the classroom to observe a

triad member and conversely notify the CT in advance that someone from their triad was coming to observe them. No triad was the same, but each triad had the opportunity to exercise agency and autonomy during this experimentation phase.

We knew that Teacher Candidates would learn more from situated learning in addition to finding a way to offer a learning experience during practicum that was unbiased and non-judgmental. We also knew that Teacher Candidates needed to develop their own norms for self and peer reflection, develop an understanding of their differing expertise and ways to solicit feedback, and connect with each other in face-to-face settings. Teacher Candidates needed an opportunity to learn how to be a "good professional" through personalized, meaningful experiences.

Effective peer-oriented triads to support Teacher Candidates during practicum require:
1. *A common language and approach that explicitly connects how teachers learn in initial teacher education, how they learn in professional development and what they do in everyday in classrooms;*
2. *A shared understanding of what new teachers need to learn that comes from K-12 curriculum.*

<div align="right">Jensen & Toon, 2017, p. 3</div>

Teacher Candidates were developing inquiry questions as they are participating in triad discussions. They moved past dissemination of information to focusing on their individual curiosity to determine what they needed to learn. In the end, members of the triad relied on each other, as well as CTs, PMs, and university instructors. Teacher Candidates triads were creating real life models that explicitly created conversations around teaching strategies and feedback. When they observed each other, they were able to see different interpretations and approaches to pedagogy, it served as a mirror to provide a reflection for self-assessment and implicit peer feedback, and the concept of keeping teacher identity to self shifted. The culture of practicum shifted. Teacher Candidates were more willing to learn as teacher, creating new norms allowed them to become more vulnerable, and they were better able to self-assess their strengths and progress from watching each other. Visualizing in person provided clarity to the Teacher Candidate in terms of teacher identity, teacher isolation, and shared experiences.

Identity is co-constructed. Teacher Candidates are forming their teacher identity within these triads because they act as a mirror for one another. They cannot develop their sense of identity as an educator alone or directly from experienced teachers, such as their CT or PM. The peer-oriented triads created a strong sense of empathy for one another, undergoing the same transformative (and disruptive) experience during practicum. The goal in teacher education is to have Teacher Candidates see each other as equals… as learners. This perceived equity created in triads during practicum allowed Teacher Candidates to wonder, question, share, problem solve, and collaborate; unlike the traditional triadic model where there is a power difference between the Teacher Candidate, CT, and PM where compliance is an outcome.

Teacher Candidates did not feel isolated or judged in their triads. They were able to connect regularly during practicum, observe each other at least once, and develop a deeper understanding of teaching, learning, and self as an educator. Furthermore, with informal conversations between Teacher Candidates within each triad, they were able to exercise their agency and autonomy to construct a learning community that was meaningful, purposeful, and personalized. Contemplating issues, sharing ideas, or collaborating on lesson plans were happening in real time. Teacher Candidates were becoming reflective practitioners within their triads as well as active learners and leaders of learning. They were co-developing their expertise in content knowledge and pedagogical content knowledge as novice teachers with their peers while teaching and learning during practicum with the support from their CT and PM. Because Teacher Candidates were sharing their experiences and collaborating on lessons or ideas, triads would inherently integrate the knowledge and expertise from their CTs and PMs.

Taking Action - What will you do differently?
> "*Faculties of education must redesign their programs to focus directly on developing the beginner's knowledge base for effective teaching* and *the knowledge base for changing the conditions that affect teaching.*"
>
> Fullan, 1993, p. 9

We implemented peer-oriented triads into our 3-week, 4-week, and 10-week practicums to provide our Teacher Candidates with the professional learning opportunity to have informal conversations with two classmates who are experiencing a similar transformative experience during practicum, to provide one another with ongoing formative feedback, and a safe place to

have respectful dialogue to sense-make through the complexities of teaching and learning. Our implementation started with the Year 2 Teacher Candidates during their formative 4-week practicum. Although we had considered many scenarios for our Teacher Candidates to engage it such as mixing secondary candidates with elementary candidates, using technology to record Teacher Candidates "in action" as a platform for sharing and analyzing, and formal check-ins from Practicum Instructors to assess progress and provide accountability, not all that was imagined was implemented. We did not mix cohorts, FOIPPA restricted technology use, and formal check-ins were intrusive and inauthentic because triads were self-sustaining.

The Year 2 Teacher Candidates self-selected who would be in their triads. For instance, the elementary cohort decided amongst themselves as a collective during the seminar session how triads would be formed. Criteria varied from teaching similar grade levels, teaching in the same school, and wanting to work with specific people. They managed to form their triads as a cohort. A similar process was taken by the secondary cohort as well. Because our cohorts and relatively small and learn together throughout the school year, they know each other very well in our Teacher Education program and they were able to form triads collegially and collaboratively.

Originally, we planned that Teacher Candidates were expected to create the time to observe their triad members two times during the three- or four-week practicums, meaning they would be out of the classroom during practicum for two half days. For the ten-week practicum, Teacher Candidates were invited to observe each other for a minimum of three times in addition to meeting with members of their triad at least once a week online or in person. We wanted the triad members to stay connected throughout their practicum experience to provide each other with the ongoing informal support, formative feedback, and sense-making opportunities.

Both the secondary and elementary cohorts opted to stay within their cohorts to form triads, even though is was considered in its early conception that integrating the two cohorts together would broaden their understanding of K-12 education in the context of teaching and learning. Logistically, it was challenging to schedule Teacher Candidates to observe one another during practicum, thus the two cohorts and Practicum Instructors mutually decided to keep the two cohorts separate for triads. However, as mentioned, one Teacher Candidate opted to participate in a secondary teacher triad and elementary teacher triad. The Year 2 Teacher Candidates

continued the next term with the same triads for their 10-week practicum. They self-selected these groups and advocated to keep them to the end of their teacher education program.

We wanted the Teacher Candidates for form their triad norms, create a learning community that was responsive to their professional learning needs, and personalize their triads so that they were meaningful and purposeful to each member of each triad. As mentioned earlier, the Year 2 Teacher Candidates were reluctant to adopt new change to their perceived expectations of practicum without clear and explicit rules and criteria for triads. For our first iteration, we remained nimble and created space for Teacher Candidates to learn experientially and develop triad norms that best suited their triad. We did have some basic guidelines such as make groups of three (with one exception of one group of 4), connect with one another at least once a week, and observe each other teach a lesson and provide feedback. As much as we wanted to provide more specificity with our expectations, it was increasingly evident that each triad was unique.

In our second iteration of triads with the Year 2 student for the 10-week summative practicum, we decided to set clearer and more explicit expectations for triads that were published in the practicum handbook for Teacher Candidates, CTs, and PMs to see. We responded to their initial reaction and concern regarding clear expectations, but we were met with more questions, resistance, and concerns. They wanted more flexibility. They wanted more autonomy. They wanted to make their own rules and expectations that best suited their triad. Ironically, they wanted the same freedom to co-construct, co-create, and co-define their triad like they did in the first iteration. The irony of this response did not escape us. We were first met with resistance when they were left alone to direct and design their own professional learning and we were met with resistance afterwards when we tried to direct their learning experience. In the end, the Year 2 Teacher Candidates recognized the importance of agency and autonomy while forming and maintaining triads. They exceeded our expectations and remained in their self-selected groups,

For the Year 1 Teacher Candidates, we introduced the concept of triads in the fall, their first term in the UNBC Teacher Education Program. We were met with no resistance. In fact, we met with both cohorts one day during the fall session and the Teacher Candidates self-selected their triads such that some were mixed with secondary and elementary. Given what we had learned with the Year 2 cohorts, we opted to keep the Year 1 elementary and secondary cohorts

separate and we created new triads for the 3-week experiential practicum. For the elementary cohort, we assigned Teacher Candidates to triads based on their teacher efficacy, leadership, and potential contribution to the group. Much like the original conception, we wanted to mix the cohorts to create the triads thinking that would diversify their learning experience within the triad. Therefore, we also wanted members of each triad to come from a different school knowing that Teacher Candidates who are placed in the same school would likely connect with each other during the practicum.

A similar approach was taken with the Year 1 secondary cohort but assigned triads was met with some resistance due to difficulties with transportation, subject specialty differences, and the assigned block in which they were teaching during practicum. Although we used similar criteria for the Year 1 secondary cohort as we did with the Year 1 elementary cohort, there were some clear logistical challenges that would inhibit the learning intentions we had for triads. As a result, we decided that the Year 1 secondary cohort would self-selected their triads for the 3-week practicum. They based their decisions of location of placement, which block they they taught, and accessibility to transportation. Most of the Teacher Candidates placed in Prince George were teaching in first period and first period for all secondary schools in Prince George are held at the same time. Despite this challenge and others, the cohort once again were able to create diverse groupings of two, three, or four for their 3-week practicum, with the understanding that these groupings will change in the 4-week and 10-week practicums due to change in placements and same logistics.

All Teacher Candidates are encouraged to visit other classrooms and schools, if possible, under the umbrella of triads. All four cohorts are engaged in triads during the winter term with different methods of composition. The Year 2 cohorts are self-selected triads, where Teacher Candidates may or may not be in the same school, and they are continuing into the second term with the same triads. The Year 1 elementary cohort have assigned triads and the Year 1 secondary cohort have self-selected triads and tend to be in the same school or in groups where all members of the triad are out of town or of far distance from each other. This is an opportunity for us to observe and determine what works and what does not work in triad composition.

Checking - Have we made enough of a difference?

"The goal is to create teachers who have the skills, knowledge and commitment to make a difference to the learning and the lives of their students."

Toon & Jensen, 2017, p. 25

Our first check in with triads was during the fall term 4-week practicum with the Year 2 cohorts. An email was sent out to each triad to see how each triad was doing and how they were progressing as a learning community. One member from each triad responded to the email with greetings and a brief update. A second face-to-face follow up occurred with us and the Year 2 elementary cohort soon after their 4-week practicum ended. This was an opportunity to check in with these Teacher Candidates as to how practicum was for them, what they had learned, and how learning with and from each other in their triad was working. What was noteworthy, the response back to us from Teacher Candidates was underwhelming. This is good news.

We intended that the triads would be an informal setting where peers would provide ongoing feedback to each other, have opportunities to collectively sense-make, and collaborate on lesson planning and unit planning. The triads were safe places. They were not being evaluated. It was the place and time to be vulnerable with their peers while being professional. Therefore, what we should have seen or heard from each triad in terms of work, learning, and productivity would be minimal. Their professional learning was facilitated in real time and in confidence. A brief reporting via email or face-to-face should have been expected by university instructors.

What we did witness was the aftermath of triads for the Year 2 cohorts. The development of their teacher efficacy and teacher identity were noticeable. They were not operating in isolation or in fear of being judged. Generally, they enjoyed teaching during practicum and were resistant to returning back to the university. They were leading their learning on campus by orchestrating times, places, and electronic platforms to share their lesson plans with each other. They were eager to share their teaching and learning experiences in their classroom but also what they observed in each other's classrooms. Several Teacher Candidates said that observing another teacher candidate "in action" helped them to realize that they are having a shared experience. They were able to recognize what was happening for their peer while they were teaching was similar to what they had experienced in their practicum. Observing each other made them feel like they were not alone; and the post conference conversation led to connecting theory and practice . This self-actualization was achieved implicitly. Their peers served as a mirror to help

them to self-reflect and self-assess their own practicum experience. Observing each other became a sounding board for self.

The Year 2 CTs embraced triads and visiting each other's classrooms as a professional learning opportunity. It was stated several times to the BEd Program Coordinator that they wished for similar professional learning opportunities as practicing teachers because there is so much that could be learned from both observing teachers and post-observation conversations. Teacher Candidates stated that they valued this experience and it created opportunities to hold up a mirror to self, because they were all at the same place in their transformative journey and appreciated the freedom to develop their own triad norms, change the foci depending on specific individual needs and students' learning needs, and determine when and how to meet.

What we appreciate about triads is the autonomy and agency Teacher Candidates can embrace and exercise to create a learning community with peers that is meaningful and purposeful during practicum, but also transferable skills, mindset, and disposition beyond the triad. They were leading their learning when they returned to campus as a cohort. This was achieved without the instruction or direction from any university instructor. They were self-motivated to create these learning opportunities for each other when they returned to campus was this was an opportunity for them to expand their learning community from triad back to the cohort. They were leading and taking ownership for their professional learning in a *student-led* and *student-centered* way.

We will check-in again with triads from the Year 2 cohorts after their 10-week practicum. From what we observed and learn from their last practicum experience, checking in with them during practicum can be perceived as intrusive but also we did not get a sense of deep learning as the Teacher Candidates were so focused on pleasing the Coaching Teacher. We will get a better sense of their learning communities when they return back to campus. Thus, we will be checking in with all four cohorts at the end of their practicum this term to see how the Year 1 cohorts and Year 2 cohorts progress in their transformation during practicum with the support and ongoing feedback and sense-making in triads. Some of the Year 1 Secondary Teacher Candidates who are placed out of town during practicum inquired if they were able to use video recordings of their teaching as part of their triad experience. This request alone put us back to the beginning of our Spiral of Inquiry as we had first imagined that digital recordings would be

part of the triad learning experience, but we needed to comply to FIOPPA with each school district that the UNBC Teacher Education Program is affiliated with. This poses a challenge but something to consider when moving forward with triads.

University instructors hoped that Teacher Candidates would use inquiry skills to examine a problem of practice would increase pedagogical content knowledge and help Teacher Candidates develop a strong sense of teacher efficacy. We underestimated the abilities of our Teacher Candidates as learners and how they can get there "without us." Initially we hoped to have a more directive role as university instructors, but we did not anticipate the Teacher Candidates' abilities to make sense of opportunities and to own their learning.

In second term, the Year 1 Elementary Teacher Candidates were immersed in an elementary school one day a week. The instructor assigned Teacher Candidates to the classroom in groups of three. The Teacher Candidates were planning for and teaching Social Studies using inquiry strategies for small groups of 6 to 10 elementary students ranging from grades K to 7. Teacher Candidates planned individually or in groups of three. They interchanged primary group leaders and shared planning, teaching, and reflecting as an introductory activity to the triads. These Teacher Candidates had little protest moving into assigned groups of three after successfully participating in a teacher-directed triad. Besides working together during the week to plan the triads would gather for half an hour in the morning before teaching Social Studies to rehearse the unfolding of the learning and afterwards to unpack their experiences and develop a deeper understanding of the curriculum materials and to assess if students' outputs were evidence of the planned learning outcome. These conversations were based on peer and student feedback, which discussed their next steps. This cohort had developed shared practices from this school immersion, and more able to make sense of triads.

The Year 1 Secondary Teacher Candidates did not have the same immersion in a school as part of their coursework and learning experience. This cohort did not demonstrate the same flexible and reflexive reaction when triads were formed. They reacted more like the Year 2 cohorts and opted to self-select their triads to make it viable and not appear like it was "extra work" during practicum. A major difference the Year 1 elementary cohort was that they had the support of practicing classroom teachers in an elementary school setting who were encouraging and supportive of the professional learning opportunity of teaching and learning together as triads

and could see the value of planning, teaching, reflecting and problem solving in triads while learning how to teach. Moreover, these classroom teachers suggested theory and research based resources for Teacher Candidates to use to support their learning in triads. The Year 1 Elementary Teacher Candidates are familiar with the Spiral of Inquiry and use the language of scanning, focusing, and wonder why. They appreciate that learning must take place in the Spiral of Inquiry and that learning must be specific to the identified learning need. As a result, these Teacher Candidates view developing teacher efficacy as "action" in the Spiral of Inquiry.

Each member of the triad will assume roles in their learning community. A Teacher Candidate may adopt a coaching and mentor role within their triad based on their experience during practicum. Teacher Candidates within their triad can negotiate different roles to achieve a different kind of meaning making depending on which role they assume. There is no power over relationships within the triad. Each issue would be authentically addressed through the triad's ability to question, develop meaning, experiment, and move towards actualization. Teacher Candidates have reported that it is easier to transition to new practices after listening to their peers describe the steps they have taken to move forward. Teacher Candidates also recognize that members of their triad care for them, want them to achieve success, urge them to try new strategies, share materials and resources with them, and help them to create new knowledge for teaching.

Similarly, Practicum Instructors who formed a professional triad within the UNBC School of Education have refocused on what needs to be in place in the Teacher Education Program and practicum in order to promote ongoing formative feedback and sense-making opportunities for Teacher Candidates in safe and respectful peer-oriented learning communities. Understanding what foci the peer-oriented triads have developed has helped Practicum Instructors to focus on developing high-quality supports for the program and practicum. We learned that learning progressions, resources used in classrooms, behaviour management, assessment and evaluation, and ways to prioritize, sequence and effectively teach are shared foci for the triads. We will continue with the Spiral of Inquiry as a professional triad as we learn more about triads for our Teacher Candidates during practicum so that they can find coherence with what they have learned in the program and what they experience as emerging teachers during practicum.

Conclusion

"The reflective model of practicum is based on the premise that teaching is more than a learned craft and suggests that learning to teach requires the development of 'a set of dispositions ... about teaching, children and the role of the teacher."

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Hammerness, Darling-Hammond, Bransford,

with Berliner, Cochran-Smith, McDonald, & Zeichner, 2005, p. 387

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From our inquiry we have found our Teacher Candidates realized an increased benefit from shared learning with peers while in the act of teaching. Real life practice within classrooms and with fellow teachers at the same stage of professional development create an authentic learning community. Teacher Candidates need to help each other and teach each other, supporting their peers and deepening their knowledge in situ. Collectively, they are developing an understanding of the variables and complexities that enter every classroom and framing similar problems found in the field within the context of their students and classroom. We know that learning is social. Our Teacher Candidates are learning-by-doing in peer-oriented triads. They are developing participatory meaning with their peers, examining each other's practices, and demonstrating a sense of identity by using their learning experiences to examine who they are and acknowledge what is important to each member of the learning group. Shared beliefs develop over time by focusing on each other's learning experiences during practicum as both common to their own and different because of their specific context and students in their classrooms; regardless if each member of the triad co-planned a similar lesson. These small peer-oriented learning communities provide a different experience than the traditional triadic model of the Teacher Candidate, Coaching or Classroom Teacher, and Practicum Mentor. Coherence is created between theory and practice and Teacher Candidates deepen their teaching and learning experience from informal conversations, ongoing formative feedback, and peer support.

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