

Problematising Practicum Arrangements. Sharing Experiences from Different Traditions and Contexts

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Abstract

Our 2016 ATEE presentation was an active presentation where arrangements of practicum from four different countries were presented, discussed and problematised. Based on the conclusions drawn in the volume “A Practicum Turn in Teacher Education” (Mattsson, Eilertsen, & Rorrison, 2011), these arrangements would be situated within current and emerging theories related to professional experience. After the presentation delegates would be invited to present their own experiences of practicum arrangements or models, through interactive activities, then situate them within the emerging theories and concepts.

The introduction was based on the above edited volume and the concept of renewed interest in practice knowledge and frameworks for organizing practicum. A major contribution of the volume is a list of practicum ‘models’ that emerges and is theorised as ways of describing how practicum learning might be organised (Chapter 12). As our international collaboration has developed and our discussions have widened we remain committed to developing a deeper understanding of these practicum arrangements both within our local contexts and with a wider lens. We are aware that practicum arrangements are developed incorporating several models and consequently we are suggesting a move from a descriptive view based on ‘models’ to a process-oriented view based on ‘arrangements’. We see this as a natural evolution, as what is actually happening in different contexts is that those responsible for professional learning are creating their own arrangements to meet the needs or constraints of their context.

The different arrangements of practicum were presented by members of the International Network of Practicum Research and Development, representing four countries. An arrangement that combines theory and practice in a curriculum was presented (Paul Hennissen, Netherlands), followed by emergent partnerships and technology (Philip Bonanno, Malta), then Doreen Rorrison (Australia) provided an overview of a range of different programs and finally mentoring dialogues within practicum (Sirkku Männikkö Barbutiu, Sweden) were discussed.

Participants were asked to respond to the emerging concept of ‘evolved’ practicum arrangements by presenting their own stories of practicum situating them within the key elements of the conceptual models. Unfortunately the next step of aligning their tentative ‘models’ with one of the presented models and theorising the ‘arrangements’ within the new concept of evolving models was cancelled due to the scheduling change that allowed only one hour.

Our brief was to provide a presentation that was empowering for teacher educators who were interested in sharing and problematising their practices related to practicum. By sharing what works and what kind of arrangements there are in practicum learning, it was hoped participants would develop their understandings of their own emergent arrangement. Through guiding delegates to an evolving view of practicum, it was hoped that they would be in a position to build new theories to share and critique and take back to their workplace. Although the range of countries represented (20 delegates from 12 countries) added to the richness of the discussion it also limited the impact where quite different arrangements were described with traditions and language so disparate that sharing and problematising was difficult.

Keywords: practicum, preservice, models, arrangements, evolve, context

Introduction

The four presentations from four different countries follows. As you will see from the table, each of the four examples of arrangements is based on several models.

	Netherlands Sittard Combining theory & Practice in a curriculum	Malta Emergent Partnerships & Technology	Australia Over 40 institutions and over 400 courses!	Sweden ...Mentoring dialogues as an integrating aspect of practicum
1 Master- Apprentice model.		Evident between students and course subject methodologists, University-based teacher educators and mentor-teachers.	Still very common especially now with many courses on line	
2 Laboratory model		Evident in methodology areas where practicum- related 'micro- teaching' sessions are delivered by excellent professional teachers	Teaching schools have been popular but exhausting for teachers- claims of burn-out	
3 Partnership model	Trained Mentor teachers facilitate learning experiences in classroom	Association and collaboration with different stakeholders including formal Institutional partnership between UoM and different schools; interdisciplinary partnership of teacher educators at the FoE; partnership with Faculty students, within subjects of specialisation and with subject experts from within and outside University; Student peer partnerships; partnership with Mentor teachers and with technical staff at IT services.	Supported by AITSL the recently constituted Institute- reduces the control of the universities	Practicum placements require a close collaboration between teacher education and schools.
4 Community development model			Has been successful employed in challenging schools and supported by scholarships aimed at preparing teachers for particular groups (e.g. refugees, indigenous, remote schools)	Focus includes community of practice
5 Integrated model	Integrated curriculum to combine T&P		Popular to a greater and lesser extent depending on staff involved	Integrated curriculum to combine T&P
6 Case based model.	First two years to combine T&P	Discussion of authentic situations during tutoring sessions with university-based	Narratives and case studies are important tools and strategies for	

		teacher educator, methodology work groups in subject of specialisation, and discussions with the teacher mentors.	preparing preservice teachers	
7 Platform model			Previously important but with recently mandated 80 days in classrooms not feasible.	
8 Community of Practice model		Students develop their identity in academic, school-based, area of specialisation and on-line communities.	Philosophy of socialising preservice teachers into a community of practice critical to most arrangements	
9 Research and Development model	Last two years to combine T&P	The innovations in the Faculty of Education guided by the 'Inquiring-Reflective Practitioner' model, emphasis on Partnerships and the adoption of technology-enhanced approaches necessitates a research-based approach involving a partnership between University, Education Directorates, Schools and the local communities.	Still popular but restricted through the mandated 80 days of classroom teaching.	

Table 1: Arrangements in four countries

Netherlands: Combining Theory and Practice in a Curriculum

Within the teacher-training institute of primary education in Sittard in the south of the Netherlands, the main part of the curriculum is based on a combination of four models.

Partnership-model: Practicum as the Possibility to Learn in Practice

Within the four-year initial teacher-training program a new curriculum was developed. Within the partnership several agreements were realised. Right from the beginning until the end of their four-year course each preservice teacher spends Thursday in a school and the other days at the university. At every school there are trained mentor teachers to supervise the preservice teachers within the classroom and trained school-based teacher educators to ensure a good educational environment within the school context.

Integrated-model: Practicum as an Integrated Element to Combine Theory and Practice

Every year the program consists of four periods of ten weeks, with an alternation between activities located at the university and at primary schools. Every period consists of three 'ABC-weeks' using a five-step procedure (Korthagen, 2001). During the A-week at the university, preservice teachers prepare from different subject angles (Dutch, Arithmetic, Geography, Physical education and Pedagogy) for their experience in the school, and combine this with theory appropriate to their preliminary knowledge. To help the preservice teachers to focus, teacher educators of each of the five subject angles have formulated several suggestions or assignments, which can be worked out during practicum. The B-week is spent at the school during which preservice teacher 'Experience' specific

aspects of practice, like visible differences between children and differences in talent to do certain tasks. They realise that the mentor teacher is using several instruments (like tests) to measure difficulties, analyse data, using a plan for the whole group of children, giving each child a specific place within the classroom, etc. Finally, during the C-week, back at the institute, their experiences are deepened so their practical experiences can be developed and combined with theoretical knowledge. In order to offer preservice teachers more background, the teacher educator now adds Theories from the literature. The C-week is followed by a new A-week. At the end of each period after three 'ABC-weeks' there is one week for assessments.

Case Based Model in the First Two Years

Especially during the first two years, each A-week is started with an authentic case in order to learn to identify distinctive aspects of practicum. This case ends in the A-week with specific questions, which can be observed and discussed during the B-week at the school. Finally, during the C-week the answers will be shared and deepened with theory. Pre-service teachers learn how to analyse and interpret practicum cases in the light of research, theory and experience.

The Research and Development Model in the Last Two Years

Especially during the last two years (third and fourth), preservice teachers are part of a research group. The purpose of these groups within each school is to improve school development. The school chooses the topic of this research. It is necessary that there is a sense of urgency in the chosen topic. Within the research plan there is a combination of theory and practice. The group is searching for theory relevant to their specific problem, which can be used to develop practice. Finally the outcome of the research will be discussed with the whole team and elements are used to do it better next time.

Malta The Emergent Connectivist Model for the Practicum

The Faculty of Education, University of Malta, is currently passing through a period of intensive renovation both academically and administratively. Intensive and extensive discussions, reflection and consultations were carried out to update the underlying epistemology, vision and strategy, to review the organisational structure, the curriculum, the Practicum, the role of digital technologies in the professional development of teachers and teacher educators, and to determine the role of teacher educators in this evolving scenario. Key collective decisions are being taken about the adoption of the Learning School / School as a learning organisation. As a guiding educational philosophy, the 'inquiring-reflective knowledge worker' framework to organise the Initial Teacher Education experience and to structure the Practicum, has been adopted. The other initiatives include the upgrading of the initial teacher education programme to a Masters level, the restructuring of the Faculty into a new set of departments, the restructuring of the curriculum to promote knowledge society competences together with subject content and methodology and the restructuring of the Practicum within professional partnerships. An ePortfolio framework based on a Connectivist methodology has been adopted to address and organise these various proposals.

An emergent model for Practicum has been adopted, considering a number of key principles to create the necessary conditions for practicum learning. These principles are directly in line with the central themes of practicum models proposed by literature such as the book edited by 'A Practicum Turn in Teacher Education' (Mattsson, Eilertsen & Rorrison, 2011). The introduction of so many innovations (ie 'The Learning School' educational philosophy and the related 'Inquiring-Reflective Knowledge Worker' teacher model, Partnerships and technology-enhanced approaches) necessitates the adoption of a research-based approach involving research and development partnership between the University, Education Directorates, schools and the local communities. This is a 'Research and Development model' in the above-mentioned book. The drive to make research and development the main focus necessitated its upgrading to masters level (The Masters in Teaching and Learning).

A 'School as Learning Organisation' is being currently recommended (Kools and Stoll, 2016) as the organising philosophy and as such demands an inquiring, reflective and research-based approach so that novice and practicing teachers translate this theoretical concept into workable pedagogical strategies. The concept of a school as a learning organisation for many school systems will require "rethinking teacher and school leader professionalism in ways that allow them to become high-quality knowledge workers and changing organisational structures and processes in order to create the type of adaptive school organisation that can thrive in a continuously changing external environment" (p. 15). This is done by developing "the capacity to continuously learn, adapt and change" (p. 16). So basically the practicum has to be approached by university students having a 'learner-researcher' frame-of-mind. This is epitomised in the 'Inquiring-Reflective knowledge worker' teacher metaphor showing that university students have to adopt research tools to understand conceptual and profession-related innovations. The 'Teacher as Knowledge worker' identity implies a paradigm shift from 'teacher as instructor' (imparting of information) to one where the teacher organises knowledge acquisition (synthesis of information), knowledge elaboration, knowledge creation and knowledge sharing (UNESCO ICT-CFT; Hines, 2012). Knowledge workers in a knowledge society shift their pedagogical focus from developing competences for dealing with subject-content to ones that promote knowledge society competences (autonomous learning, digital competence, critical thinking, creativity & innovation, communication, collaboration, networking and multi-disciplinarity).

A Partnership arrangement has been developed to include association and collaboration with different stakeholders along different dimensions. Teacher Educators at the Faculty of Education are encouraged to adopt an interdisciplinary partnership, sharing and building on each other's expertise. But, moving beyond the 'apprenticeship model', teacher educators should also adopt a partnership approach with students considering them as co-designers and co-contributors to the course and the practicum. Partnership within the subject of specialisation should include subject-related teacher educators, university students and subject experts from within the university and those practicing in their fields beyond university. The Practicum should be organised within a formal institutional partnership between the University and a good representative sample of different schools, teachers and classroom contexts. This is in line with the 'Integrated model' for practicum learning where mentor-teachers and possibly school-based teacher educators guide university students in the daily tasks and interactions within the class and school, while university-based teacher educators focus more on tutoring and assessment-related aspects. Students on practicum also work within peer partnerships, organising themselves in discipline-related collaborating groups and in interdisciplinary work groups.

Partnership between faculty and practicing teachers is being formalised through a mentoring scheme that is being developed in consultation with all stakeholders. Learning during the practicum will definitely be the outcome of interaction between university students, mentor teachers and university-based teacher educators within the class and school context. Since all content and practicum interactions will be structured, managed and recorded through an ePortfolio system, this technology-enhanced approach demands further partnerships between academic, professional and technological stakeholders. Teacher educators, students, mentor teachers, Faculty and University administration have to collaborate closely with personnel from the Information Technology Services department to ensure the smooth running of the ePortfolio system.

The infusion of all aspects of life with technology, not least teaching and learning, and students' proficiency with digital technologies, compels us to analyse and subsequently organise the practicum in initial teachers education considering a connectivist, networked learning perspective. Also, considering the change in the epistemological, pedagogical and communications scenarios, the theoretical backdrop that supported education has changed so much that we need to reconceptualise the practicum from a more transformative perspective. The theories that up to now have driven education – behaviourism, cognitivism, constructivism, constructionism and situated-learning – are

becoming increasingly inapt to conceptualise and promote technology-transformed initiatives in professional development. Connectivism proposes a theoretical and epistemological framework based on leading emerging fields of knowledge like cognitive neuroscience, network theory, complex systems and related disciplines.

According to Siemens (2005) learning is a process that occurs within nebulous environments of shifting core elements – not entirely under the control of the individual. Learning is defined as actionable knowledge and this resides outside of ourselves (within an organization or a database such as the ePortfolio system). It is focused on connecting specialized information sets, and the connections that enable us to learn more are more important than our current state of knowing. Within a connectivist context, Downes (2012) identifies three interrelated dimensions: Knowledge informs learning; what we learn informs community; and the community in turn creates knowledge. The reverse also constitutes learning; knowledge builds community, while community defines what is learned, and what is learned becomes knowledge. The three are aspects of what is essentially the same phenomenon, representations of communications and structures that are created by individuals interacting and exchanging experiences.

This Connectivist epistemology and the paradigm shift demanded by the knowledge society, changes the school from a teaching to a learning institution and necessitates a change in teachers' role from learning organisers to knowledge workers, especially as modellers of learning. Consequently the role of future teacher educators will be to model the teaching-learning process to prospective and practicing teachers. Teachers need to understand and eventually accept that in today's reality, where the walls of the classroom have become transparent and where everything is accessible, questionable and debatable, they have to become more accountable, accept responsibility and provide explanation for their choices and actions. Therefore, they are required to develop the competencies in planning, managing, recording and evaluating their own professional development and practice using relevant digital tools to organise and manage these competences. This implies the need to develop competences in managing their own learning, together with assessment-related competences involving both 'Assessment OF Learning', 'Assessment FOR Learning', and 'Assessment AS Learning'.

The ePortfolio framework provides the optimal pedagogical context and tool to promote and organise the professional development and professional practice of student teachers during the practicum. The ePortfolio will serve students to organise, manage and record their professional development along two dimensions: (a) the methodology in the teaching-learning component of their area of specialisation; (b) the organisation of the practicum experience involving all interactions within the proposed school partnerships model with mentor teachers, school based teacher educators and university-based teacher educators.

The dynamic emergent model for learning during the practicum draws on various central themes from the models proposed by Mattsson et al (2011). The Master-Apprentice dimension will be evident when students interact with course subject methodologists, University-based teacher educators and mentor-teachers. These will serve as inspiration, a source of knowledge and model for competence development to novice, preservice teachers. Aspects of the Laboratory model are evident in methodology areas where practicum-related 'micro-teaching' sessions are delivered by expert professional teachers. The tutoring sessions with the university-based teacher educator, the methodology adopted in the subject-based work groups and most of the discussion with the teacher mentor will definitely be Case-based oriented. Authentic cases and situations that arise in class or other educational contexts are analysed and interpreted in the light of research, theory and experience. Meanwhile, adopting a connectivist perspective to the practicum enables preservice teachers to consider the proposed practicum models, partnerships and the ePortfolio as vehicles of knowledge residing in these systems that can be used, elaborated and manipulated. Personal

knowledge is just a node in the extensive network of knowledge. Learning during the practicum is a process of creating connections with relevant nodes of knowledge and knowledgeable persons.

Australia: A Range of Models and Challenges

Current research in Australia suggests that the arrangements or settlements agreed upon for practicum are dependent on the context or the setting. Local and university policies are different between regions and states despite the recent “Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership” (2009). This nationalisation was the outcome of the reforms agreed to in the National Partnership on Improving Teacher Quality (2009) and the goals and commitments set out in the Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians (2008). All schools and university departments of education must comply with the seven National Professional Australian Standards for Teachers. These are divided into three areas; Professional Knowledge, Professional Practice and Professional Engagement and these are in turn arranged into four career stages from Graduate Teacher to Lead Teacher. There are thirty-seven descriptors for each stage and these are naturally focussed on and interpreted in a range of ways depending again on context.

The skills, personalities and dispositions of the employed staff in universities and schools play a major, yet variable role in the learning of preservice teachers. Teaching and learning are both enabled and constrained due to the effects of transience, leadership styles, the school culture, its ethnic and gender mix as well as the political background and socio-economics of the setting. How the curriculum is interpreted and the local expenditure on resources and technologies also plays a major role. The influence of national testing and international ratings, and other tensions around assessment, have been recently an important contributor to staff moral.

Australian universities have always been proud of their autonomy and free speech but this control has also been eroded. Questions around who are the gatekeepers, what counts as evidence and what is equitable and just, are fortunately beginning to emerge to challenge nearly a decade of neo-liberal control and attempts to mandate all aspects of teaching and learning.

In terms of the practicum (or Professional Experience as we have been instructed to name it), the decisions were taken from those with the experience, research knowledge and authentic connections to teacher education, by the policy makers and controlled through marketplace policies of efficiency, proof and evidence. By simplifying all aspects of initial teacher education it became easier to control by those with limited understanding of the complexities involved in teaching teaching and learning teaching. Fortunately the leaders in the field are now (re) finding their voice and are beginning to fight back through challenges to the authenticity of treating human beings as commodities and educational research knowledge as non-rigorous/non-evidence based. It is possible that, through the control and rating of research and publications, an entire generation of early career researchers in teacher education have not been heard. Also, partly as a result of the cut-backs in funding, an entire generation of new teachers are now learning through on-line and e-learning courses, with little or no research evidence that this is a viable and authentic alternative.

As a response to the need to hear the stories of innovation and success in practicum programs a group of teacher educators representing 16 Australian Universities met to share their local, contextual responses to practicum/professional experience. Through submitting the ‘story’ of their initiatives/innovations to the organising committee, 30 participants were chosen and grouped for discussion through four themes that emerged from their narratives. Supported by two key-note speakers selected to provide a national and international context and some direction from the organising committee, these groups immediately connected through their shared experiences and conceptual frameworks. Their collaboration and forthcoming (Springer, 2017) publication provides significant evidence of how lived experiences are stronger than mandated directives.

An outcome of the massive increase of on-line and e-learning (120% increase in 10 years, 80% of Australian universities now offering totally external and mixed-mode teaching qualifications) is that the management of practicum placements has moved from the university to individual preservice teacher requests to individual schools. This has changed the dynamic considerably. One preservice teacher reported that she tried over 120 schools before she found a placement. Others found they needed to focus on non-mainstream or private schools. Clearly a result of this is very much a return to the 'master/apprenticeship' model of mentoring. This observation is not meant to be judgemental but is a reaction to the lack of alternatives enforced by the context- the likes of the partnership model, the platform model or the integrated model, all held in high esteem during the last decade, are just not possible when 150 preservice teachers are in 150 different schools over 8 states and territories of Australia (with a smattering of others as far afield as the UK, Russia and China). The local demands are also challenging- in some states and territories police clearances/working with children cards include full day courses and further assessment. The role of the classroom mentor now becomes even more critical and moderation of practicum assessment extremely challenging. Furthermore, in a user pays system like ours, there is more than questions of equity and justice at stake! Certainly further research is necessary.

Sweden – Stockholm: Integration through Dialogue

The role of practicum in teacher education has changed dramatically over the recent decades in Sweden. After a massive critique, the totally separate practicum was integrated into all the courses in teacher education programs in 2001. This integration of theory and practice led to substantial organisational and logistic difficulties and was abandoned in favour of a curriculum where practicum constitutes a separate course (Figure 1).

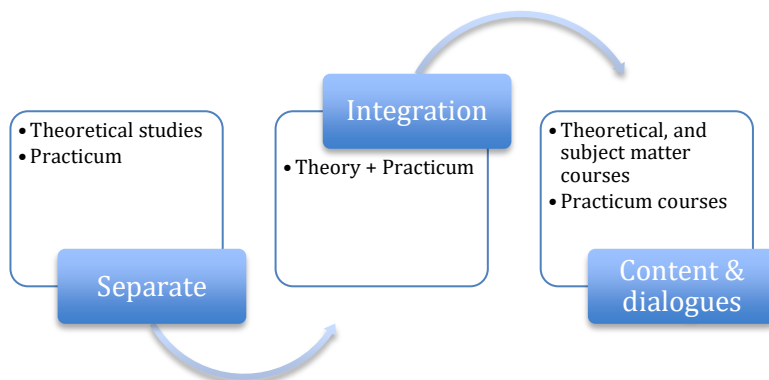


Figure 1. Practicum in Swedish teacher education

The latest reform (in 2011) intends to change the position of practicum from a fragmented part included in all the courses within a teacher education program into a separate but unified entity with its own specifically defined goals. Practicum architecture (Kemmis & Grootenboer, 2008) includes new features that are considered as supportive and developmental to the practicum experience of preservice teachers, such as the introduction of mentoring dialogues. These dialogues include preservice teacher, mentoring teacher at the practicum school and the teacher educator. Mentoring dialogues have an assessment purpose but they should also be developmental in nature and give preservice teacher guidance during the practicum (Jönsson & Mattsson, 2011).

In the process of reorganising practicum within teacher education, the role of mentoring dialogues is gaining a new kind of actuality and importance as a tool for supporting preservice teachers in their development from a novice to a professional teacher. They are being recognized as a collaboration tool in the 'integrated model' where teacher education institutions and municipalities/schools jointly share the responsibility for training preservice teachers in the practicum. In a teacher education model

where practicum placements are dispersed within the whole education program, mentoring dialogues have been developed as an instrument for follow-up, assessment and guidance. They have developed over the years towards an increasingly formalised and structured event where preservice teacher and the teacher educators come together for a discussion on the professional development

Mentoring dialogue takes place after each practicum placement and the overall aim is to give the preservice teacher an opportunity to reflect upon and self-assess their professional development during the given period. The reflection and assessment is done in relation to the expected learning outcomes for the practicum and to the specific matrix for professional development that has been created as a support.

In our earlier research (Männikkö Barbutiu, 2015), we have analysed mentoring dialogues as communicative action. We found that even if the preservice teacher should “own” the dialogue according to the guidelines of the teacher education program, the leading person in the dialogue usually is the supervisor. The preservice teacher and the mentoring teacher play only a minor part in the conversation. We also noted that these dialogues seldom engage in deeper conversations over the professional issues and could thus be described as affirmative and confirming rather than mentoring and counselling, the focus being on a summative assessment of the practicum period.

To further support and improve mentoring dialogues, more detailed and structured instructions have been developed. Here a program for preschool teachers is used as an example to illustrate how the content and progression are outlined. These instructions define the competences and skills that a fully professional teacher should gain during the teacher education program and they also convey the perception of how progression should take place. Four levels of progression have been defined: 1) novice; 2) advanced beginner, 3) competent teacher, and 4) professional teacher (see Figure 2).

Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4
Novice teacher Focus on own performance	Advanced beginner Focus on situation	Competent teacher Focus on the learning of children	Professional teacher Focus on the big picture

Figure 2. Levels of professional development

These four levels have shifting foci: at the novice level, the focus is on the preservice teacher’s own role and conduct with the aim of acquiring general knowledge of the teaching assignment and developing a professional approach based on inquiry and observation.

As advanced beginner, the focus is moved to the teaching and learning situation meaning that the preservice teacher acquires knowledge of the teaching assignment and develops his/her own practice through active observation, analysis, examination and reconsideration. Reaching level three and becoming a competent teacher means that the focus is now on the children and their learning. Preservice teachers are required to develop their ability to formulate the teaching assignment and to translate their teaching knowledge into action. They should also develop an ability to critically examine their own action and draw relevant conclusions. On level four, the focus is shifted to view education from a holistic perspective. Preservice teachers are now required to develop their ability to problematise and interpret their teaching assignment, find new perspectives for their teaching and the educational activities, and also develop goal oriented, long term strategies. They should also learn to understand their place and role as a part of the educational organization as a whole, and be able to participate in the development of the organisation and its activities.

In the design of the mentoring dialogue, three areas of focus have been identified as important and central for the monitoring of the progression of the preservice teachers from a novice teacher toward a professional teacher: (1) progression towards an analytical and reflective competence based on scientific evidence and proven experience; (2) progression towards a didactic competence, and (3) progression towards communicative and democratic leadership. These three areas of competences give an overall focus and structure to the dialogue, and help to link the dialogues to the other parts of the teacher education programs.

The introduction of mentoring dialogues can be seen as a feature in the development of a partnership model as well as a community of practice model where the preservice teachers are supported in their professional development and introduced into the community of practice by the teacher educators and mentoring school teachers in a collaborative effort, as teacher education institutions and schools increasingly seek partnerships for securing education of teachers.

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