

Strengthening Partnerships:

Improving the Quality of Teacher Candidate Practicum Experiences in Manitoba

Document developed by:
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A c k n o w l e d g e m e n t s

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INTRODUCTION

The school's role in providing an environment for practicum experiences is essential in the development and preparation of future teachers to the profession. By working with experienced and exemplary teachers, teacher candidates will be best prepared for their future career in education. This process is best supported when universities/colleges and school divisions work in partnership.

Under *The Public Schools Act*, one of the responsibilities of a teacher in Manitoba is to be a cooperating teacher for teacher candidates. This legislative provision is set out in APPENDIX A. On an annual basis, requests to teachers are made for their support of teacher candidate programs. Through a consultative process, teachers and school principals will discuss teacher involvement for a particular school year.

The Manitoba Teachers' Society builds upon this legislative requirement with a comprehensive policy position regarding the purpose of the teacher candidate practicum experience, the role of cooperating teachers, and the financial and human resource requirements needed to support the process. This policy is set out in APPENDIX B.

ROLES OF PERSONNEL

Regardless of the role one plays, working with teacher candidates can provide important opportunities to grow as an educator, to reflect on professional practice, and to engage in ongoing professional conversations. In reading this section, please note that the terminology for the roles described does vary across institutions (i.e. the role of "cooperating teacher" is referred to at some institutions as "collaborating teacher". The role of "faculty advisor" is also referred to as "faculty supervisor").

The Role of School Boards

School Boards play an important albeit indirect role in the education of teacher candidates. Through policy, they ensure that school division personnel – superintendents, principals, and teachers – are aware of their responsibilities regarding the teacher candidate practicum. School boards also ensure that resources and other supports necessary for school division personnel to meet their obligations are in place.

The Role of Superintendents

Superintendents play an important role in the education of teacher candidates. They are involved in:

- discussing with principals, on an annual basis, the importance of their professional responsibility to accept teacher candidates

- discussing with principals, on an annual basis, the importance of encouraging the participation of cooperating teachers who have classroom learning environments and teaching practices that provide the best possible educational experiences for teacher candidates
- reviewing and signing letters of agreement/participation from the faculties
- reviewing the summary of placements to ensure that there are appropriate learning environments for teacher candidates
- collaborating and communicating with the faculties to ensure that teacher candidates have positive and productive learning experiences
- intervening in teacher practicum placements when necessary.

The Role of Principals

School principals oversee the practicum experiences in the school by:

- being the contact with the faculties regarding potential teacher candidate placements
- knowing about the practicum configurations and expectations of all institutions represented in their schools
- sharing information about the need for quality practicum placements with staff including information about the placement process
- encouraging the participation of teachers
- welcoming teacher candidates into the school and coordinating meetings with the cooperating teachers prior to the start of the practicum experience to introduce the candidates to school personnel and providing an overview of the school philosophy, as well as routines and procedures
- encouraging experienced cooperating teachers to take on a leadership role in the school by supporting those new to the mentorship role
- being involved partners on teacher candidate teams which include faculty advisors, lead teachers, cooperating teachers, and teacher candidates
- supporting the needs of the cooperating teachers and assisting with the documentation process
- consulting with superintendent or director when necessary
- providing written documentation to the university/college regarding an evaluation of an at-risk teacher candidate and recommendations for the candidate's continuation in the school or in the program.

The Role of Cooperating Teachers

A cooperating teacher is an important mentor and role model for the teacher candidate. He/she is an experienced and competent professional who offers advice, encouragement, and constructive criticism, and engages in conversations about practice. The teacher is perceptive as to when the candidate requires more intensive involvement and when it is appropriate to pull back support, allowing for confidence and

responsibility to develop. Cooperating teachers play a vital role in the education of teacher candidates by:

- welcoming teacher candidates and faculty advisors, providing a facility tour, an overview of routines and expectations as well as an understanding of the culture of the classroom, school and its community
- supporting teacher candidates in developing professional and caring relationships with students, staff, parents, and others
- providing teacher candidates with the experiences, resources, and support necessary to develop their own professional identities
- modeling effective teaching to support learning (see “Qualities of Exemplary Teaching Practice”)
- discussing, documenting, and reflecting on teaching performance with candidates and providing constructive and critical feedback on an ongoing basis
- providing opportunities for teacher candidates to confidently take on increasing responsibility for the learning environment
- helping teacher candidates make links between theory and practice
- helping teacher candidates articulate their own philosophies of teaching
- collaborating and communicating with faculty advisors to create positive and productive learning experiences for teacher candidates
- knowing the parameters of their responsibilities regarding reporting and documentation.

The Role of Faculty Advisors

Faculty advisors are representatives of their respective institutions. A faculty advisor is an important mentor for the teacher candidate. He/she is an experienced and competent professional who offers advice, encouragement, and constructive criticism, and engages in conversations about practice. The faculty advisors’ role is to work in partnership with faculty, school administrators, cooperating teachers, and teacher candidates in all aspects of school experiences by:

- acting as liaisons between the faculties and the schools, and helping to interpret the specific programs in which they are working to school personnel
- becoming familiar with the structure, intent, and expectations of the programs in which they are working including expectations for evaluation of teacher candidates
- becoming familiar with school division and faculty policies and procedures on such matters as anti-racism, gender equity, and sexual harassment
- contacting and/or meeting with school administrators and cooperating teachers before the practicum block begins (whenever possible) to become familiar with the placements and the school community
- participating in orientation, debriefing, and professional development sessions provided by the respective universities/colleges

- organizing meetings with cooperating teachers, teacher candidates, and administrators to clarify roles and responsibilities and to provide an overview of the program's goals and objectives
- being accessible to teacher candidates and school personnel
- visiting teacher candidates regularly (according to program expectations) and providing constructive and critical feedback
- modeling the importance of ongoing inquiry and professional learning and assisting teacher candidates in developing their own paths for professional growth
- encouraging teacher candidates to search for links between theory and practice
- providing teacher candidates with support in planning appropriate instruction, for gradually assuming more classroom responsibility, and for developing their own professional identities
- anticipating potential problems related to the school experiences and conveying those concerns to the faculty while serving as an advocate and mediator where required
- providing ongoing feedback to their respective teacher education programs
- coordinating the collaborative writing of teacher candidates' summative evaluations reflecting both areas of strength and need for growth.

The Role of University Directors and College Coordinators

Faculty personnel oversee the school experiences of teacher candidates in their respective B. Ed. programs by:

- recruiting, supporting and monitoring the performance of faculty advisors based on identified criteria (See "The Role of Faculty Advisors")
- consulting with superintendents about those who have experienced an interest in being a faculty advisor to ensure that these individuals are exemplary teachers themselves and that they have the teaching experience required to advise at the level to which they are to be assigned
- organizing and facilitating the orientation of faculty advisors and teacher candidates
- providing clear role expectations and policies in written form to teacher candidates, cooperating teachers, school administrators, and faculty advisors
- providing professional development sessions for faculty advisors
- liaising with Manitoba school divisions and schools to identify suitable school placements
- acting as liaisons between faculty advisors and the respective universities/colleges
- placing teacher candidates in appropriate schools
- facilitating changes of school placements when deemed necessary after consultation with school personnel and/or faculty advisors
- mediating and resolving any school experience concerns raised by teacher candidates, cooperating teachers, faculty advisors, or school administrators

- working with faculty in the development, implementation, and evaluation of the practicum
- communicating with education partners
- encouraging teacher candidates to explore practicum experiences in rural and northern areas where qualified faculty advisors are available
- making ultimate decisions about candidates' final grades grading in their practica.

GUIDELINES FOR PLACEMENT OF TEACHER CANDIDATES

When matching teacher candidates to classroom environments, the following guidelines are provided to assist with the placement process. Two critical components to consider during the decision-making process are the “Classroom Learning Environment” and the “Qualities of Exemplary Teaching Practice”.

Classroom Learning Environment

It is of value to the teacher candidate if the classroom learning environment is one in which:

- learning opportunities are based on Manitoba curriculum (or in settings which meet the requirements of Manitoba Education policies concerning Student Teaching in Manitoba Overseas Schools)
- teaching practices incorporate an understanding of different learning styles, multiple intelligences, and ability levels
- students are encouraged to be reflective, creative, and critical thinkers
- students demonstrate engaged and on-task behaviour
- students demonstrate that expectations for learning and behaviour are clearly delineated
- students are involved in assessment practices that provide opportunities to improve understanding of concepts (assessment “for” and “as” learning), as well as summative assessment (assessment “of” learning)
- assessment instruments are reflective of classroom learning experiences and the individual needs of the learners
- conversations/dialogue are linguistically rich
- students feel safe in taking intellectual risks
- students and visitors feel welcomed and invited
- students from a variety of socioeconomic and ethno cultural backgrounds are included
- the culture is sensitive to the school and its community
- there are a variety of opportunities for learning.

Qualities of Exemplary Teaching Practice

It is of value to the teacher candidate for the cooperating teacher to:

- have a wide variety of classroom management strategies based on respect
- be an experienced teacher who is a reflective practitioner and a lifelong learner, regularly involved in professional learning opportunities
- be cognizant of and well-versed in curriculum at the designated grade level/subject area and more generally knowledgeable regarding the curriculum of earlier grades and subsequent ones to the assigned grade/subject area
- integrate an understanding of cultural awareness and differences, including Aboriginal perspectives
- have a broad repertoire of effective teaching strategies
- be aware of and incorporate into curriculum implementation an understanding of the need for diversification to meet the variety of student needs in classrooms
- be aware of current research regarding teaching/learning theory and practice
- create a classroom that encourages risk taking, inquiry, creative and critical thinking, and opportunities to apply understanding of concepts learned
- provide a variety of student learning experiences
- assess students' understanding of concepts taught in the interest of improving understanding (“for” and “as” learning) and to determine summative understanding of concepts, and provide clear and accurate information to students and parents
- work supportively with parents and colleagues
- be a consultative and collaborative partner encouraging risk taking and critical analysis of the teaching/learning experience
- be willing to dedicate time to be supportive, providing regular, constructive feedback (both oral and written) based on reflection, practice, and dialogue.

GENERAL TIMELINES FOR TEACHER CANDIDATE PLACEMENT – Final Year Students

The following guidelines apply to the placement of teacher candidates in their final year and may apply to those in other years as well.

By February/March:

1. University/College advises the Superintendent(s) that they intend to contact schools regarding involvement of teachers in the teacher candidate practicum. The Superintendent would receive information reminding them of the importance of the role of principals and teachers in support of the program, the placement process, and an approximate number of placements needed in various areas. The Superintendent would then return to the university/college a signed letter of agreement for participation of the school division.

2. University/College issues an invitation to schools including detailed information about the types of programs, grade levels and subject areas needing cooperating teachers, the dates of practicum experiences, and the guidelines for the cooperating teacher selection process, including their responsibilities.
3. Principal apprises staff of their professional responsibility and encourages all staff to consider their involvement.
4. Principal engages in conversations with potential cooperating teachers regarding their involvement.
5. Interested teachers submit their names to the principal.
6. A list of names of potential cooperating teachers (inclusive of grade level, subject area) is forwarded to the university/college. In the event that the names of participating teachers are not available, the intention of the school to participate with an estimate of the number of placements would suffice.

By the end of May:

1. Universities/Colleges receive information from the schools and activate the process of placement of teacher candidates in schools throughout the province.
2. Principals are consulted to determine the fit of a placement to their school.
3. Information is sent from the university/college to the school to confirm placements for the following school year, including all relevant documentation.
4. A summary of placements is sent to the Superintendent.

In May/June:

1. Teacher candidates have contact with and/or visit the school to which they have been assigned. Connections are made with the designated cooperating teachers and a general introduction is made to the school (overview of school's philosophy and relevant policies, personnel, tour of the school, etc.).
2. Information is shared regarding the dates that the teacher candidates will begin their practica and when they will be in the schools.

In September:

1. Students in their final year: will begin on the first day of school and be in attendance for a full week. The teacher candidates will participate on an ongoing basis which would include a minimum of a block in the late fall and another in the winter term. The teaching experiences may not necessarily occur at the same school. The teacher candidates are to make regular and ongoing connections with the designated schools.
2. A general information session is held at the beginning of the first block in the interest of gaining understanding of the parameters of the program and to continue the collaborative relationship. The team of teacher candidate(s), cooperating teacher(s), principal, and faculty advisor would have time to discuss roles and to make initial plans for involvement.

MANITOBA LEGISLATION REGARDING PRACTICUM EXPERIENCES:

Legislative Responsibilities of Teachers:
The Public Schools Act

Part VII S.M. 2000 c.43 s.3

Duties of teacher

96 Every teacher shall;

- h) admit to his classroom student teachers enrolled in a teacher education institution approved by the minister, for the purpose of practice teaching and of observing instruction.

THE MANITOBA TEACHERS' SOCIETY POLICY

Note to Reader:

This policy outlines a consensus position on the teacher candidate practicum experience in Manitoba that is supported by all organizations that were represented on the Committee. It is not intended to replace the policies of individual organizations (where they exist) but rather to define shared goals and perspectives that, if acted upon, should contribute to enhanced teacher candidate practicum experiences in Manitoba.

The following information is included in the Manitoba Teachers' Society policy document:

1. The Practicum (p. 53)

a) General Principles

Supervised school practicum is an essential component of teacher education programs. Close liaison between a representative of a Faculty of Education and a co-operating teacher is essential.

b) Cooperating Teachers

- 1) Cooperating teachers shall be selected from among those teachers whose professional education, experience and willingness ensure that they will be exemplary models of a professional teacher.
- 2) Cooperating teachers and those appointed as lead teachers shall be provided with professional development opportunities and time to enable them to facilitate student teachers' self-discovery and transformation to becoming professional teachers. Funds to provide professional development and release time shall be made available by the teacher education institutions and employers.
- 3) Cooperating teachers shall receive remuneration and reimbursement of expenses incurred for their involvement. These funds shall be part of the Government's commitment to teacher education in Manitoba.