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Deficiencies in the Practicum Phase of Field-Based Education: Students' Views

Edwin Ralph
University of Saskatchewan

Keith Walker
University of Saskatchewan

Randy Wimmer
University of Alberta

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ABSTRACT

A supervised practical experience of on-the-job training forms an essential part of the pre-service preparation of professionals across disciplines. This article reports results from a recent study examining the views of 234 teacher candidates regarding the most negative aspects of their experiences in the 16-week extended-practicum.

Four broad themes reflected the post-interns' responses on the negative elements: (a) individual personal/professional challenges, (b) site-based interpersonal concerns, (c) university-related policy/procedural problems, and (d) practicum-office difficulties. Implications are discussed for the practicum leaders of this program and those from other institutions interested in preventing or reducing such limitations from hampering the effectiveness of their respective practice-based programs.

There is a growing and universal demand for well-prepared professionals in all disciplines (Cochran-Smith, 2003; Little Progress, 2008). Society delegates to the professional faculties of post-secondary institutions the task of preparing its physicians, lawyers, engineers, teachers, social workers, and other professionals; and the status and responsibility of these practitioners have acquired an increased sense of importance and urgency in recent years (Aguayo, 2004; Ralph, Walker, & Wimmer, 2007). For example, a serious shortage of professionals in the health care and the teaching fields is imminent in Canada (Canadian Council on Learning, 2006) and worldwide (McKiever-Lowell, 2003).

Prospective practitioners regularly report that the practicum/clinical experiences in their pre-service education were critical in preparing them for accepting their first position in their respective professions (Carnegie, 2006; Goodlad, 1984; Linn, Howard, & Miller, 2004; Lortie, 1975). The importance of this practical component, together with a growing global shortage of professionals in a variety of fields, require that professional education institutions evaluate the effectiveness of the practicum/clinical components of their programs. They need to do so to meet the emerging pressures and challenges inherent in supplying well-trained professionals to enter their practice in the rapidly changing world of the twenty-first century (Canadian Council on Learning, 2006).

We, the authors of this article, contend that institutional organizers must also respond collaboratively in order to adjust their programs to flex with the substantial innovations of:

advanced technologies and media, growing global competition, increased political unrest, expanding threats of terrorism, and the vagaries of the new economy. We believe that past and current practices of institutional administrators, for which they often made simple trial-and-error program adjustments, could be reformed, if these leaders would consider implementing

the recommendations we provide in the present study (Ralph, Wimmer, & Walker, 2007, 2008a).

This present article shares findings from a study that we recently conducted concerning the views of post-practicum students regarding the 16-week extended-practicum (or internship) experiences in the Teacher Education program offered by one Western Canadian university. In one portion of our broader study, we examined the students' perspectives on what they reported to be the most positive and the most negative features associated with their practicum experiences, the latter of which we address in the present article. We focus on the deficiencies, here, because: (a) we have dealt with the positive dimension, elsewhere (Ralph, Walker, & Wimmer, 2007, 2008a, 2008b); (b) we were constrained by page limitations in the present paper; and (c) we believed that to improve the practicum/clinical experience requires leaders to identify and ameliorate its negative elements.

BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

Even though students rate the practical phase of their pre-service programs highly (Ehrlich & Greenberg, 2002), there have been persistent weaknesses associated with the practicum cited in the research literature (Clift & Brady, 2005; Hughes, 2004; Lortie, 1975). In Table 1, we summarize nine deficiencies that have been previously identified.

Table 1

Common Deficiencies of Practicum Programs in Professional Education across the Disciplines, as Identified in the Related Literature

-
1. Relative isolation/independence of practicum programs
 2. Fragmented and incoherent programs within and outside of faculties/universities

3. Chronic theory/practice gaps between course-based and the field-based components
4. Competing interests of campus-based faculty and field-based clinical personnel
5. Hastily conceived/implemented reform initiatives that were not sustained
6. Inadequate program conceptualization/integration among stakeholder groups
7. Downplaying/ignoring the voice of practicum-students to improve programs
8. Absence of a clear mentorship/supervisory model to guide practicum mentors
9. Insufficient cross-professional or interdisciplinary research on practicum programs

One weakness was that, traditionally, field-based/clinical programs have been conducted in isolation and often independently within each discipline. However, recent global events and current societal pressures require professional schools to explore innovative ways to collaborate, across the professions, in creating new means of providing this pre-service practical preparation for their novice practitioners (Kecskes, 2006, Linn, Howard, & Miller, 2004). Professionals need to learn from one another to better serve the needs of their constituents in creative ways.

Neophyte professionals must be educated to resolve the serious problems that are arising worldwide – in fields of health care, education, business, labor, economics, politics, international relations, agriculture, and the environment (Senge, Scharmer, Jaworski, & Flowers, 2004).

A second deficiency identified among some practicum/clinical programs has been

that the state of these practical components has often been characterized as fragmented and incoherent, not only cross-departmentally at single universities, but also between and among universities. One group of educators has called for more relevant comparative and widely-disseminated research that is grounded in field-based practice, in order to inform decision-makers outside of each others' professions as they seek to enhance pre-service programs of professional development (Ralph, 1996; Statistics Canada, 2002).

Of course this fact does not mean that all practicum programs must be made to fit an identical mold: in reality, their specific paradigms, purposes, and structures are unique, as they should be. However, an exploration of the many excellent types of practical learning experiences that already exist may provide much needed information for organizers and researchers in different professions to consider as they seek to re-formulate their offerings to better equip their graduates to face the challenges and opportunities emerging in the twenty-first century (Alcaly, 2003; Kelly, 1999).

A third limitation of field-based programs identified in the literature has been the chronic theory-practice gap that exists between the university-based coursework and the daily routines of professional practice in the field (Beck & Kosnik, 2002; Rogman & Hopp, 1999). This gap is often accentuated by a lack of involvement in many practicum programs by full-time faculty members (Waddell, 1999), or by a shortage of field-based practitioners who are adequately trained to effectively deliver the practicum (Wolfensperger Bashford, 2002).

Fourteen years ago, when Ralph (1994, 1994-1995) investigated post-practicum students' views of the internship experience at the same university of the students surveyed in the present study, he found that teacher candidates previously identified many of the same weaknesses currently existing in the program. The earlier reported complaints included: (a) a theory/practice discrepancy

between what interns learned on campus and what they experienced in the daily routines of school; (b) a questioning by interns of perceived inequities in the policies/practices in the office of field experiences, regarding such processes as practicum placement procedures; (c) a lack of clear and consistent communication among all participating sub-groups (i.e., the university, the school districts, and the teacher-candidates); and (d) a perceived unfairness in the treatment of the interns by their supervisors (e.g., inconsistent evaluation criteria of interns' progress among supervisors; or incompatibility between some supervisors and their proteges). Often this compromised university-field partnership was further eroded by a fourth weakness revealed by other research on practicum programs. This problem was the existence of competing roles, duties, and interests of both the faculty and the field-based mentors (Abdal-

Haqq, 1998; Ward & Saylor, 2002). Campus-based and/or field-based participants were often unable to sustain the expected level of commitment and support for the practical/clinical program over time (Ralph, Wimmer, & Walker, 2007). As a result, students enrolled in these programs sometimes became dissatisfied and frustrated with their disconnected learning experiences within them (Kosnik & Beck, 2003; Larson, 2005).

A fifth challenge sometimes appearing in clinical programs was that there were vestiges of ill-conceived and hastily implemented reform initiatives in some programs that were not properly initiated and/or maintained (Bullough & Kauchak, 1997). A sixth, but related limitation in some practicum programs was a pervasive problem of inadequate communication and collaboration that seemed to persist among the various participating stakeholders involved in the experiential learning experience (Silva & Sheppard, 2001; Zeichner, 1996). There was lack of a clear conceptualization of a systematic teaching-learning framework that integrated the practicum, the prior coursework, and the neophytes' first position in the profession (Solomon Cohen & Milone-Nuzzo, 2001).

A seventh difficulty that hindered the improvement of some practicum/clinical programs was the apparent reluctance of program administrators to consider "the voice of the student" in the process of program change. We were in full agreement with Gall, Gall, and Borg (2006) and Clift and Brady (2005) in censoring the practice of some educational program leaders, who seemed to ignore or dismiss the views of students concerning the conditions existing in the practicum. Rather, we believed that students are ideally situated to observe and experience all the intricacies of a program's operation throughout its duration (Angelo, 2004; Ory, 2001). We therefore conducted the present study to highlight the importance of students' voice, as we explored the current state of, and future innovation in, the whole realm of clinical education (Ralph, Wimmer, & Walker, 2007, 2008a, 2008b).

An eighth persistent weakness that appeared to arise in the delivery of many experiential-based programs was the lack of a clear supervisory model to guide the overall mentorship process (Goodlad, 1994; Hughes, 2004; Ralph, Wimmer, & Walker, 2007, 2008b). Often, we observed that mentoring relationships, interactions, expectations, and results seemed disorganized, unsystematic, and ineffective. However, one supervisory model that did appear to have potential to improve this situation was one called Contextual Supervision (Ralph, 1998, 2004a, 2005). This model has been used in a variety of disciplines, and has been shown to add clarity and direction to the process of mentoring neophyte practitioners as they developed their professional knowledge and skills (Posner, 2004; Ralph, 1993, 2004a, 2005). A ninth limitation--and perhaps the most serious concern--was the relative lack of comprehensive research examining these types of questions in practicum programs across disciplines (Canadian Council of Learning, 2006; Carnegie, 2006). In our view, educators need to work collaboratively to compare, contrast, and study these experiential-learning programs across a variety of professional

fields, and to explore what future best practices might look like from a more holistic and global perspective (Jones & Ewing, 2002; Ralph & Konchak, 1996).

METHODOLOGY

In conducting our pan-Canadian study on the future of the practicum/clinical component of professional pre-service education, we were in accord with Clift and Brady (2005), who maintained that the voice of practicum students is seldom welcomed in educational reform research, but that it must be considered by administrators as they design field-experience innovations. In our view, to exclude students' ideas and perspectives would not only be immoral, but it would deliberately ignore critical information related to program enhancement. Recently, we solicited written responses to two short questions from 234 teacher candidates, who had just completed their 16-week extended practicum (internship) in schools throughout a Western Canadian province. There was a 96.6% return rate for the survey, and the respondents were representative of the entire pre-service student population in the College, in terms of gender, age, subject major/minor, elementary/middle year/secondary grade teaching-level, urban/rural practicum placement, and Aboriginal/non-Aboriginal program stream. The two questions on the print survey were: What for you was the most positive aspect of the internship experience? and What for you was the most negative aspect of the internship experience? In the present paper, we discuss the findings related to the second question.

We collated and categorized respondents' written comments into patterns and themes, using the constant comparison technique of analytic induction (Gay, Mills, & Airasian, 2005; Glaser & Strauss, 1967). In this process, we examined and re-examined the data, by searching for regularities and common patterns, and by placing the comments into emerging categories (McMillan & Schumacher, 2005).

FINDINGS

We summarize the data categories in Table 2, and we also provide sample comments to illustrate teacher candidates' views. Consideration of these results may not only be useful for the administrators in the respondents' own institution, but for other program leaders interested in examining the present and the future state of their own field-experience offerings.

TABLE 2

Teacher-Candidates' Views of the Negative Aspects of Their Extended-Practicum Experiences (N=234) Category Percent of Respondents

1. Personal Challenges and Frustrations	
Financial concerns	32
Workload issues	20
Feelings of isolation	15
Travel problems	7
Instructional/Management difficulties	9
Long-range planning trouble	3
Other (unique individual situations)	6
2. Site-Based Interpersonal Concerns	
Excessive negative criticism	27
Conflict with cooperating teacher	26
Feelings of non-acceptance (not appreciated)	20
Staff cliques/unprofessional demeanor	7
3. University-Related Logistical/Procedural Problems	
Program and organizational	

inequities	30	<p>practicum placements from this institution each year are in rural areas). Evidence for this fact was that many respondents reported incurring double costs, as illustrated by the following response: “The negative aspect was my having to relocate. Even though I loved the school and community I was in, it was very stressful financially to have to pay rent in the town and in [the city], which was necessary. I obviously could not have a job to help because of time limits.” Another post-intern wrote: “The most negative was the cost of having to move and to live in another town for four months”.</p> <p>In a second sub-category, one fifth of the respondents reported that the extra workload of the practicum proved to be negative. Typical comments were: “...the extracurricular time expected of interns, when there is so much prep time required during the four months.” and “The negative part was how busy I was, and the long hours.” In a third sub-theme, fifteen percent of the post-interns (probably those who had received rural placements) cited their feelings of isolation as being most difficult, as illustrated by these responses: “the time away from my family,” “living away from our support system,” and “moving away sucked and there was not any financial support”.</p> <p>Four smaller sub-themes in this category reflected some teacher candidates’ negative views on such personal frustrations as: (a) travel (e.g., “I had to move my family two hours from the city and then relocate back for the last semester” and “I paid tuition for no instruction, and my transportation/living expenses were not alleviated at all”); (b) various instructional concerns (e.g., “It was assessment of students. I had no knowledge of it until the internship” and “Class management was hard. I had a tough time with some classes. I was told by other teachers that these classes were tough”); (c) planning (e.g., “Long-range planning was overwhelming at the beginning of the practicum—due to lack of preparation in university courses”); and (d) unique situations (e.g., “I had to deal with health issues and also a death in the family”).</p>
Concerns with post-practicum term	27	
Practicum is too short	6	
First year courses inappropriate	4	
4. Concern with the Practicum-Office		
Policies/Roles Problems with practicum in-service seminars	18	
Unprofessional treatment by practicum-office staff	12	
Negative manner of college supervisors	9	

Note. Nearly all respondents reported two or more negative aspects; hence, the sum of the values reflects these multiple responses and thus totals more than 100%.

As we show in Table 2, the responses reflected the post-interns’ concerns with respect to four major categories. Ninety-two percent of the respondents identified various challenges they faced regarding their personal situations and instructional performance; 74% of the respondents reported interpersonal difficulties they encountered at their practicum sites; 67% of the respondents cited problems they attributed to faculty-based policies/procedures; and 42% of the teacher candidates mentioned concerns they related directly to the practicum field office.

PERSONAL CHALLENGES AND FRUSTRATIONS

Ninety-two percent of the respondents expressed concerns that fit into this first category, and nearly one third of this group identified financial concerns as being most problematic. Many of these post-interns, who cited funding frustrations, had been placed in rural schools (approximately one half of

SITE-BASED INTERPERSONAL CONCERNS

The second category of negative aspects summarized in Table 1 reflected teacher candidates' experiences with unpleasant professional relationships. Fifty-three percent of the respondents wrote either of receiving unproductive criticism from supervisory personnel or of having direct conflict with their classroom cooperating teachers. The following comments illustrated these situations: "I got little support from my co-op, yet a lot of negative criticism-- although how could I correct it when there was no direction?" "... the lack of support from my co-op. I felt completely lost and alone while doing all of my planning," "I felt my co-op was very negative. I feel I did some great things, but never received any positive reinforcement," "My cooperating teacher was sometimes difficult, and stated that my fate was in her control," "The co-op and I clashed, which made it more stressful," and "I had to compromise many of my ideas and teaching strategies because of my cooperating teacher!" One fifth of the respondents believed that the most troublesome aspect of the extended practicum was that they were not accepted nor appreciated for their professional contributions.

Examples of these perceptions were: "I liked the practicum, but it was stressful. I was just the intern," "The staff was divided into different groups. It was hard to fit in as an intern," "The most negative was being looked at as less than a professional by some of the other staff," "There was hierarchy of school authority structure, with the interns at the bottom," "I didn't like the lack of respect towards the intern as a person. My role and responsibilities outside of school were disregarded (my family emergency)," and "A select few of the teachers did not view me as 'a real teacher' and I wasn't respected as I thought I should have been". Seven percent of the teacher candidates identified the unprofessional deportment of the staff as the most negative aspect of the internship. This sentiment was reflected in such statements as: "I disliked the

staff talking behind each other's back," "The staff as a whole was very clique oriented and I had a hard time making social connections within my school community," and "I felt trapped in collegial infighting."

UNIVERSITY-RELATED PROCEDURAL PROBLEMS

Altogether, sixty-seven percent of the respondents perceived that the most frustrating aspect of the extended practicum was the existence of unacceptable or deficient university policies and procedures related to its operation. The largest sub-theme in this category consisted of comments from nearly one-third of the teacher candidates, regarding what they perceived as program weaknesses or inequitable procedures and practices. Examples of such comments were:

"I feel that the university in no way prepared us for internship," "The entire program should be re-organized to give us more time spent in several experiences in schools right from the first year, rather than all at once in a 16-week internship," "We had to keep a detailed record of professional growth, which our supervisors hardly even looked at. It was a waste of time that I could have spent on actual preparation for teaching," and "They originally asked us for our three choices for internship placement, but a lot of us did not even get one of them". A second sub-category, here, was related to a concern expressed by 27% of the post- interns about having to return to the College for the final semester of coursework. Illustrative comments were: "Some of the courses we took after internship would have been more useful before," "Having to leave the school and come back to sit in class, rather than to start teaching. I felt like I lost lots of confidence I had built up during Internship," "Having to return to university for four months of boring and useless classes after completing the fast-paced, intensive, and totally useful internship experience," and "It was coming back to university and being patronized, pigeon-holed, and kept from getting a job (i.e., subbing) for

no damn reason... ”.

Ten percent of respondents in this category complained either that the extended practicum was too short (e.g., “It could have been a full year” and “The four months at the high school doesn’t match the school’s semester. I wish I could have stayed right to the end of their term”); or that the first year of the undergraduate program was ill conceived (e.g., “We weren’t well enough prepared in Year 1” and “Finding out that most of what I learned in my first year of Education had little or no relevance in the school classroom”).

PRACTICUM OFFICE DIFFICULTIES

As shown of Table 2, a total of 39% of the respondents indicated that the most disconcerting aspect referred to a fourth key theme, namely, their concerns related to the faculty office in charge of field experiences. Eighteen percent of the respondents in this category identified problems with the monthly practicum seminars that were organized by the office for cohort pairs of 20-25 interns and their cooperating teachers. Statements illustrating this complaint were: “I found some of the seminars to be a bit useless at times. They were not scheduled for appropriate times during internship and often added to pressure rather than easing it,” “The internship meetings were pointless,” “... were a waste of time,” “...were redundant,” “...were useless, rambling and time consuming,” “... terrible! We had hours of down-time with scattered minutes of content,” and “The seminar days would have been better spent with your co- op teacher planning and evaluating together back at the school”.

Twelve percent of the post-interns expressed displeasure with how they were treated by the field-experience office personnel. Typical comments in this sub-category were: “The most negative aspect was the hostility and somewhat rude interactions with people in the practicum office,” “The rude people at the field office were sometimes helpful, but in a demeaning way,” “The internship office

was useless. They refused to update the rural housing registry, were belligerent to students, and were lazy (I have several anecdotes),” “The field office people were rude, impatient, belittling and had histrionic fits,” “...were uncooperative,” “... were grouchy,” “...did not treat us as professionals,” and “Dealing with the practicum center was so formidable that it made internship intimidating”.

Nine percent of the respondents identified that unprofessional treatment by their college supervisors was the most negative aspect of the internship. Sample comments in this sub- category were: “College supervisors sometimes have unrealistic expectations; they have forgotten what it is like to be an intern,” “I found the college advisor comparing interns to be negative,” “I had a poor college supervisor who was a very negative and non-encouraging person,” and “The college supervisor was very confrontational...not fit for the job...who didn’t get along with my co-op and that made it hard on me.”

DISCUSSION

We agreed with Clift and Brady (2005) and Gall, Gall, and Borg (2006) on the assertion that administrators must welcome the voice of students as a key consideration in the process of assessing and revising educational programs. In analyzing and reporting these post-interns’ views of the negative elements of the practicum, we wish to re-emphasize that these same respondents also identified many positive aspects of their internship experience. Any investigation of the practicum would thus be incomplete without examining all facets of the subject—a goal we pursue as we complete the larger research project on the future of the practicum across disciplines (Ralph, Walker, & Wimmer, 2007, 2008a, 2008b).

We made three rather troubling observations about the students’ views of the weaknesses of the program, which we synthesize below.

A GENERAL PROBLEM

One general observation was that many of these findings were consistent with the overall conclusions reached previously by prominent researchers regarding chronic problems that have been repetitively identified in teacher-education programs. It appears that little has changed during the past 34 years. For instance, Lortie (1975) reported that although student teachers relished this “learning-by-doing” type of apprenticeship of the practicum, they were also critical of: (a) parts of their campus-based program and some of their professors, as being too theoretical or impractical; and (b) some of their practicum experiences, in that teacher candidates were sometimes mismatched with supervisors who were not sympathetic or congenial to their proteges, or who may not have been selected for their ability in assisting novice professionals in the formation of a sound decision-making rationale (p. 71).

Fifteen years after Lortie’s study, Guyton and McIntyre (1990) also concluded that the practicum still often seemed disconnected from broader program goals. Later, a few years after this 1990 study, researchers found little evidence to indicate that the then-current field experiences were preparing teacher candidates who were any more reflective and knowledgeable than were neophytes prepared in earlier, more traditional programs (McIntyre, Byrd, & Foxx, 1996; Wideen, Mayer-Smith & Moon, 1998). Moreover, Clift and Brady’s (2005) more recent review of teacher-education research showed that although this university/school discrepancy persisted among pre-service programs, some resolution of the gap- problem was becoming more evident—especially in programs that emphasized mutual collaboration among teacher candidates, school-based mentors, and university faculty/supervisors.

A PARTICULAR PROGRAM

Our second sobering observation was that many of the current deficiencies that the respondents delineated in the present study had apparently been in existence for many

years at this college (Ralph, 1994, 1994-1995, 2004a). We were encouraged, however, that the senior administrators in this faculty did advise us that they were not only well aware of these chronic problems, but that they had been recently engaged in implementing major initiatives designed to enhance their entire undergraduate teacher-preparation program. They were currently in the midst of significant re-structuring efforts, such that: (a) the coursework and its underlying theoretical frameworks were being more closely aligned with the latest research in teaching and learning; and (b) the field-experience operations were being re-vamped. At the time of this writing, the faculty leaders were creating and sustaining this spirit of cooperation among participating groups by promoting three specific efforts:

- arranging for field-based personnel to do more teaching of the pre-service coursework (thereby reducing the proverbial theory/practice gap, and demonstrating that members of participating sub-groups were collaborating as team-players);
- by embedding shorter, pre-internship field experiences within the education methods courses (thereby demonstrating, early, the connection between university coursework and classroom teaching in the schools); and
- by arranging for practicum supervisors to be better trained in: the mentorship process; the establishment of a positive rapport with partners; and the building and maintaining of trust with the teacher candidates (thereby alleviating the anxiety sometimes created by the toxic “us vs. them” stance).

PRACTICAL SOLUTIONS

A third troubling observation in this study was the fact that several promising solutions had previously been made available to the program leaders in this study, but (until lately) had not been fully implemented. We identified at least three sources of these solutions: suggestions from the current students themselves,

recommendations from earlier research on the program; and successful initiatives to consider from other institutions or from the broader research literature.

Respondents from the present study offered practical advice worthy of consideration for eliminating the negative aspects and improving the program. Examples provided by the post-interns were: “Give us more time in classrooms before we get out to interning, so we are prepared,” “Tuition should be waived or reduced for internship, or bursaries should be provided,” “There should be some kind of screening program involved in getting good cooperating teachers. Some are definitely not suitable,” and “The final semester after internship needs to be improved...make it more resource-based, more practical, more school-oriented—not having useless lectures”.

A second source of suggested improvements was the previous research conducted on this College’s practicum program (Ralph, 1994, 1994-1995, 2005). Specific recommendations from those findings included: providing supervisory training for all mentors; encouraging all rural school divisions to pay interns a monthly stipend to help them offset the extra practicum expenses; and promoting continued collaboration among all stakeholder groups to enhance the field experiences.

The third source for solutions was the set of examples of successful innovations implemented in other jurisdictions, such as using the school buildings not only to house the practicum experiences, but to provide a center of practice, where school-based personnel and university-faculty could work collaboratively with practicum students and school pupils. In such settings, university coursework could be integrated with classroom and school activity, and all three sub-groups could be present to share in creating a supportive context for learning to enhance one’s practice (Clift & Brady, 2005).

COMPLICATING FACTORS

A logical but perplexing question that arises, here, and which begs to be addressed and/or further researched by practicum administrators in all professional-education programs, is: Why are these seemingly-obvious suggestions not easily adopted? For instance, our previous research that investigated possible reasons for the difficulty in training supervisors to consistently apply a specific mentorship model within their practicum supervision found that some personnel were reluctant to modify their conventional mentoring practices, or were not persuaded of the effectiveness of the new approach (e.g., Ralph, 1996, 1998, 2004, 2005). In like manner, some of our previous work exploring why practicum stakeholder-groups do not easily collaborate to enact policy to provide stipends to practicum-students in their field-placements suggested that institutions’ traditional procedures, ingrained policies, and accustomed practices are resistant to change (Ralph, 2004b, 2004c). Indeed, Fullan (2005) and his colleagues (Fullan, Hill, & Crevola, 2006) have convincingly demonstrated that lasting educational improvement only occurs when all stakeholders form a critical mass of interacting leadership for change across all parts of the enterprise. Such results are not achieved effortlessly nor automatically.

In conclusion, however, we do commend the college involved in this present study for initiating current efforts to improve the overall teacher-education program, including the practicum experience. Furthermore, we would invite program organizers from other institutions and professional disciplines, who are interested in enhancing the field-based component of their respective programs, to consider the findings from this study in order to help inform their own deliberations for renewal. We agree with Ward Schofield (1990) that such considerations are useful for administrators “to help understand another similar situation” in the search for the

“What is...” or “What may be...” or “What could be...” (pp. 226-227)--especially with

respect to students' views regarding innovative practicum/clinical education.

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