THE ASSOCIATE TEACHER IN THE PRESERVICE PRACTICUM

by

Katherine Ellen Wainman

A thesis submitted in conformity with the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education
Department of Curriculum, Teaching and Learning
Ontario Institute for the Studies in Education of the University of Toronto

© Katherine Ellen Wainman (2011)
Abstract

This study explores the perspectives of associate teachers (also known as cooperating teachers, host teachers, mentor teachers) during the preservice practicum. The study was conducted over the span of one school year (2008-09) in one school district. Ten associate teachers consisting of primary, junior, and intermediate elementary teachers, who had been associate teachers during the 2008-2009 school year, were interviewed once for approximately one hour.

Based upon the responses of the participants and related literature, the study reveals that overall associate teachers found the practicum experience to be positive. However, the varied responses also reveal that there is room for improvement. The findings indicate that the practicum experience would be greatly enhanced through allowing associate teachers more input into the preservice program, and increasing the collaboration amongst university supervisors, teacher candidates, and associate teachers. The findings also indicate that associate teachers seek a more defined and structured role description, which takes into account the reality of classrooms and their emotional work. Further, the study highlights the need for preservice programs to rebuild and promote professional practice that supports on-going learning for associate teachers.

Suggestions for improvements in the preservice practicum are given as well as implications for
future research. It is concluded that associate teachers need to be considered as real partners in preservice education, which can be achieved by preservice programs seeking programmatic coherence, rethinking institutional patterns and re-envisioning the role of associate teachers. It is suggested that a collaborative and innovative direction is required that takes into account the complex work of teachers and associate teachers.
Acknowledgments

Many people contributed to the completion of this study over the years. I would like to recognize and thank them for their encouragement and support. First and foremost, I would like to thank wholeheartedly my thesis advisor, Dr. Clive Beck, for his guidance, patience, and unending kindness. Unbeknownst to him, he planted the seeds of intellectual curiosity many years ago in a graduate course. Thank you to my committee members for their support and interesting questions, Dr. Clare Kosnik and Dr. Clare Brett. Their interest in preservice education is much appreciated. Also, thank you to Dr. Andrea Martin for acting as my external examiner and asking such thoughtful questions. I would also like to thank the study participants who gave up their valuable time to meet with me and share their experiences. To all my colleagues over the years, I thank you all for the thoughtful and reflective discussions.

Also, many thanks are extended to my friends and family who never seemed to doubt that I would be successful. Thanks to my parents, who provided me with a quiet place to work and were supportive along every step of the journey. To my children, Hanna, Jonathan, and Taavi, who contributed to this study by keeping me grounded in the real world. To Rein, my husband and greatest supporter, who unflinchingly stood by through the many years it took to complete this study.

I am so thankful to all who believed in me. Yes, even though it was long and it was hard, I did it!
## Contents

Abstract ................................................................................................................................. ii  
Acknowledgements ........................................................................................................ iv  

Introduction: Refining the Picture .................................................................................. 1  

Chapter One: Theory, Research, and Issues Regarding Teacher Learning, the Practicum,  
and the Associate Teacher’s Role .................................................................................. 5  
1. Significance of Constructivism, Reflective Practice, and the Apprenticeship of  
   Observation ................................................................................................................... 6  
   Constructivism and Preservice Education ................................................................. 6  
   Reflective Practice and Preservice Education ......................................................... 9  
   Apprenticeship of Observation and Preservice Education ..................................... 12  
2. The Complex World of Teachers, Teacher Candidates, and Associate Teachers .... 14  
3. The Problematic Practicum ....................................................................................... 20  
   Theoretical Perspectives on the Problematic Practicum .......................................... 21  
   General Issues with the Practicum ........................................................................... 24  
   The University Supervisor and the Practicum ......................................................... 26  
   Innovative Practicum Structures ............................................................................. 28  
   a. Professional development school model (PDS) .................................................. 28  
   b. Cohort model ......................................................................................................... 30  
4. The Associate Teacher and the Practicum ................................................................. 32  
   The Role of the Associate Teacher .......................................................................... 33  
   Associate Teachers Learning from Teacher Candidates ........................................ 37  
   Emotional Work of the Associate Teacher ............................................................... 38  
   The Role of the Associate Teacher .......................................................................... 33  
   Associate Teachers Learning from Teacher Candidates ........................................ 37  
   Problematic Aspects of the Associate Teacher ....................................................... 41  
5. Concluding Thoughts ................................................................................................. 42  

Chapter Two: Context and Methodology of the Research ........................................... 43  
1. Context of the Study ................................................................................................. 44  
   My Context ............................................................................................................... 44  
   Participants ............................................................................................................... 46  
   Setting and Technical Terms .................................................................................... 48  
2. Research Approach .................................................................................................. 50  
3. Study Structure ........................................................................................................ 52  
   Participant Selection ............................................................................................... 52  
   Limitations ................................................................................................................ 54  
   Ethical Considerations ............................................................................................. 55  
   Interview Questions ................................................................................................ 55  
4. Data Analysis ............................................................................................................. 56
Chapter Three: Findings and Discussion: The Associate Teacher in the Preservice Practicum ................................................................. 62

1. Helpful ......................................................................................... 63
   Heightened Awareness of Practice ................................................. 64
   Reciprocal Learning .................................................................... 66
   A New Set of Eyes Brings a New Perspective ............................... 68
   Lessening the Workload .............................................................. 70

2. Not Helpful .................................................................................. 71
   Issues of Time .............................................................................. 72
   Other Concerns ......................................................................... 73

3. More Role Clarification ............................................................... 76
   Mentor ......................................................................................... 78
   Discloser of Secrets .................................................................... 80
   Guardian of the Profession .......................................................... 83
   Evaluator .................................................................................... 85

4. Wishful Thinking ......................................................................... 87
   More Awareness .......................................................................... 87
   More Presence ............................................................................ 88
   More Responsiveness .................................................................. 90

5. Emotional Practice of Associate Teachers ................................... 93
   Sympathy .................................................................................... 94
   Responsibility ............................................................................. 95
   Disappointment ......................................................................... 96
   Anxiety ...................................................................................... 97
   Guilt ......................................................................................... 99
   Attachment ................................................................................ 101

6. Connections ................................................................................ 103
   Connections to the Past .............................................................. 103
   Lack of Connection .................................................................. 106

7. Conclusion ................................................................................... 109

Chapter Four: Implications and Recommendations ............................. 112

1. Time to Take a New Tack ............................................................. 112
   a. Understanding Schools and Structure ....................................... 113
   b. Communication and Connection ............................................ 115
   c. Pedagogical and Practical Considerations ............................... 118
   d. Program Philosophy .............................................................. 119
   e. Time ..................................................................................... 120
   f. Teacher Candidate Preparation ............................................ 121
   g. University Supervisor Role .................................................... 122
   h. Associate Teacher Role ......................................................... 125
   i. Evaluation .............................................................................. 127
   j. Meaningful Practica ............................................................... 128
      k. Status of the Associate Teacher and the Practicum ................ 130

2. Areas for Future Research .......................................................... 131

3. Conclusion .................................................................................. 133
References..................................................................................................................136

Tables

Table 1 Summary of Associate Teachers’ Role Conceptualization..........................35
Table 2 Summary of Participants’ Experiences...........................................................47

Appendices

Appendix A Letter of Invitation ...........................................................................150
Appendix B Phone Script......................................................................................152
Appendix C Participant Consent Form ..................................................................153
Appendix D Interview Questions..........................................................................154
Appendix E Interview Topics..............................................................................155
Appendix F Probing Interview Questions..............................................................156
Introduction:

Refining the Picture

You become aware of what to you seems very simple and when you see a student teacher attempting to do the same thing, you realize that it’s really all those things that you’ve learned over the years. You actually have to be able to articulate that to someone and sometimes it’s really hard to explain it. It really makes you reflect on things.

(Interview with Natasha reflecting on being an associate teacher)

Associate teachers (also known as cooperating teachers, host teachers, mentor teachers) play a key role in the preservice practicum period. If it had not been for the support of my associate teacher during a final practicum placement many years ago, it is very doubtful that I would have remained in teaching. My faculty supervisor at the time was more interested in taking note of grammatical errors than providing feedback on my work with students as I grappled with learning to teach. Fortunately, my associate teacher during that challenging practicum was very comforting, supportive, and helpful, providing feedback that enabled me to look at my practice from a reflective stance. After spending many weeks in her class, we had developed a relaxed and strong rapport. She would closely observe my lessons and offer feedback regarding not only my teaching in a very practical sense, but also my place in the classroom, the school, and the community in a much broader sense.

Many years later in the role of curriculum leader within my school board, I had a chance to work intimately with a small group of new teachers as part of the provincially mandated New Teacher Induction Program (NTIP). While my role in working with these new teachers was not as an “associate teacher” per se, I do feel I practiced a similar role and shared the very same responsibilities including: providing feedback with regards to
specific teaching strategies, promoting and allowing for opportunities to reflect, conveying the importance of social responsibilities in teaching, and sharing and cultivating the board’s directives.

These two experiences were pivotal in terms of piquing my interest regarding the practicum in preservice education and, in particular, the associate teacher within the practicum. While my initial experience as a student teacher alerted me to the importance of the associate teacher, my recent work with new teachers significantly magnified this sense of importance, leading me to earnestly reflect on both the tremendous responsibility of this role and my own practice as a teacher. I wondered if my thoughts were typical compared to other teachers in similar situations. Did associate teachers experience this same sense of awesome responsibility and critical self-reflection, and, if not, what exactly did they make of the practicum experience?

As an initial step in learning about the perspectives of associate teachers and to provide a comprehensive background, I began to review the general literature regarding the practicum in preservice education. I found a growing body of research conducted in recent years on the practicum (e.g., Beck & Kosnik, 2002a; Clift & Brady, 2005; Cochran-Smith & Zeichner, 2005; Darling-Hammond, 2006a; Darling-Hammond, Hammerness, Grossman, Rust, & Shulman, 2005; Feiman-Nemser, 2001; Levine, 2006; Schulz, 2005). I then narrowed my review of the literature to the associate teacher in the practicum, and while a burgeoning body of research was noted (e.g., Beck & Kosnik, 2000; Clarke, 2006; Kahn, 2001; Sanders, Dowson, & Thistleton-Martin, 2006), often much of the research focused on the importance of the associate teacher to the student teacher in terms of professional knowledge (Beck & Kosnik, 2000; Ganser, 2002; Guyton
& McIntyre, 1990; Loughran & Northfield, 1996; Sinclair, Dowson & Thistleton-Martin, 2006). Furthermore, it was noted that within the preservice literature frequent references are made regarding the absence of associate teachers’ voices (Clarke, 2006; Kahn, 2001; Sinclair, Dowson, & Thistleton-Martin, 2006). These references to gaps in the literature, along with my personal experiences, spurred me on to learn more about what associate teachers make of the practicum experience. It is in their, oftentimes neglected, perspectives that I wish to situate my study.

The district school board with which I am affiliated has 59 elementary schools and is partnered with at least eight different teacher education institutions in Ontario and the United States. These partnerships ensure an abundance of associate teachers available for interviews. To delve more deeply into what associate teachers take from the experience in the practicum, I recognized I needed to hear their voices, their thoughts, and their reflections on the practicum. Allowing the perspective of associate teachers to be heard and finding out what they make of the preservice practicum became the focus of my study.

The goals of my study are:

1. To expand and broaden the depiction of the practicum from the perspective of associate teachers.
2. To assist associate teachers in better understanding their role in the practicum.
3. To provide feedback and insight to associate teachers, teacher candidates, and university supervisors regarding the practicum with the intent of informing and improving practice.
The study is based on the following assumptions:

1. Associate teachers play a vital role in the practicum and their perspectives need to be heard.
2. The practicum is a valuable and necessary component of preservice education.
3. Learning to teach and teaching new teachers is very complex.
4. The practicum needs to be embedded within a broad conception of learning, namely, constructivism.
5. The ultimate goal of all educational research is to improve practice in order to positively impact student learning.

This study specifically seeks to expand the understanding of how associate teachers see the practicum experience by looking through their eyes and listening intently to their experiences, their insights, and their voices. My study aims to provide an even more refined picture and contribute to the emergent literature. Through semi-structured interviews, this qualitative study seeks to tap into the rich, contextualized experiences of associate teachers in order to reveal their oftentimes hidden world. This study recognizes that the contextualized nature of qualitative studies can reveal nuanced details that are all too often indiscernible to quantitative studies.
Chapter One:
Theory, Research, and Issues Regarding Teacher Learning, the Practicum, and the Associate Teacher’s Role

In fact, field experience is a staple of teacher preparation programs. Study after study shows that experienced and newly certified teachers alike see clinical experiences as a powerful—sometimes the single most powerful—component of teacher preparation. (Wilson, Floden, & Ferrini-Mundy, 2001, p. 195)

Research associated with the preservice practicum has increased in recent years. Despite many of these studies being “relatively small and interpretative” (Wilson et al., 2001, p. 17) and often conducted by faculty advisors (Cochran-Smith & Zeichner, 2005), it is widely agreed that the practicum is an important, even crucial, component of preservice education. This body of preservice research has enriched understanding regarding the complexity of teacher candidates’ experiences in the practicum and underscores that the practicum is a potentially powerful experience for teacher candidates (Broadbent, 1998; Ferrier-Kerr, 2009; Groundwater-Smith, Ewing, & Le Cornu, 2006).

Unfortunately, however, there is scant research regarding another significant participant in the preservice practicum, specifically, the associate teacher. Indeed, it is noted that, “there is little research that includes the perspectives, questions, and voices of [associate] teachers” (Cochran-Smith & Zeichner, 2005, p. 16). This study seeks to reduce this gap in teacher education research through exploring the perspectives, questions, and voices of associate teachers. While studies of teacher candidates in the practicum add to understanding the complex picture of preservice education, this picture is incomplete without exploring the views and experiences of associate teachers.

This chapter begins with an overview of constructivism, reflective practice, and apprenticeship of observation, to provide a theoretical context for preservice research on
The associate teacher in the preservice practicum

...the practicum experience. The second section contextualizes the complex work of associate teachers by exploring teachers’ knowledge with a focus not only on how teachers learn, but also on what teachers need to know. The third section examines the problematic nature of the preservice practicum by reviewing and considering research trends and conceptual models, investigating specific issues such as the role of university supervisors in the practicum, and exploring innovative trends in preservice programs that attempt to address the challenges noted. The last section begins with a broad focus on associate teachers’ conception of their role in working with teacher candidates, continuing with a narrower focus on specific key issues and concerns related to associate teachers.

1. Significance of Constructivism, Reflective Practice, and Apprenticeship of Observation for Preservice Education

The first section of this chapter seeks to illustrate the significance of the educational theories of constructivism, reflective practice, and apprenticeship of observation and how they shape an understanding of the practicum in preservice education.

Constructivism and Preservice Education

Constructivism is associated with several theorists including Dewey, Piaget, Bruner, and Vygotsky (Richardson, 1997). Its philosophic origin can be traced in part to the work of Dewey who rejected positivistic and transmissive approaches to education in the early 1900s (Beck & Kosnik, 2006; Richardson, 1997).
Many interpretations of constructivism exist in the literature (Beck & Kosnik, 2006; Driscoll, 2005; Richardson, 1997); yet debate is often centred on two more predominant forms, namely, cognitive constructivism and sociocultural constructivism. Cognitive constructivists, or Piagetian constructivists, perceive education as the means to support learning of the individual in terms of the child’s interests and emphasize cognitive development; hence, learning is viewed as being highly individualistic and idiosyncratic (Abdal-Haqq, 1998). This individualistic approach views development as a natural biological process and does not stress variables such as gender, class, race, or socio-cultural context (Vadeboncoeur, 1997). It is often criticized for its lack of focus on the social context of learning and its lack of attention with regards to power issues (Richardson, 1997; Vadeboncoeur, 1997).

The sociocultural or Vgotskyian constructivists have a different emphasis. Richardson (1997) claims that social constructivism highlights education for social transformation and is highly contextualized. The emphasis is placed on power relationships and cultural contexts. Individuals are seen as constructing knowledge through interactions with their environment in sociocultural contexts (Abdal-Haqq, 1998; Richardson, 2003).

While cognitive and sociocultural constructivists differ in emphasis, the two positions have much in common (MacKinnon & Scarff-Seatter, 1997; Oldfather, Bonds, & Bray, 1994). Some of the shared understandings of constructivism evident in the research literature (Beck & Kosnik, 2006; Flynn, Mesibov, Vermette, & Smith, 2004; Richardson, 1997; Richardson, 2003) include the following:

1) Learning begins with the interests of the student.
2) Learning happens when students construct knowledge by integrating prior knowledge with new information.

3) Learning happens best when students can apply new concepts and information to authentic tasks using problem-solving and critical thinking.

4) Learning should help to develop students’ meta-awareness

5) Learning through group dialogue helps lead to shared understanding.

6) Learning should be inclusive and equitable.

Constructivism has had a significant impact on preservice teacher education theory and practice. As noted by Richardson (1997), “Constructivist teaching and teacher education has clearly arrived. Discussions of these topics dominate scholarly and practitioner journals in most subject matters” (p. 3). For example, the pervasiveness of constructivism is evidenced in the work of practitioner/researchers Kosnik and Beck (2009) whose work in their cohort preservice program displays key elements such as, “engaging students, teaching for depth, integrating learning, connecting to students’ lives, building community in the classroom, and teaching inclusively” (p.157). Darling-Hammond (2006a), in her examination of exemplary preservice programs, describes how these programs have allowed for teacher candidates to construct their understanding of the practicum by linking practice with theory through the integration of coursework and clinical work. Richardson (1997) contends that preservice programs informed by constructivist thinking help teacher candidates to be aware of their prior knowledge and deconstruct how their understanding evolved.

Constructivism and its application to learning is significant to my study in multiple ways. It informs my epistemological and methodological stances as I contend
that “individuals create their own new understandings on the basis of an interaction between what they already know and believe and ideas and knowledge with which they come into contact” (Resnick, 1989 as cited in Richardson, 2003, p. 1624). Also, I acknowledge that constructivism is integral to and embedded in preservice education research and preservice programs. Hence, those participating in the practicum are constantly reconstructing their understandings about teaching as contexts change and emerge. These “reconstructions” are useful in helping to understand the practices in preservice education.

Reflective Practice and Preservice Education

The seminal work of Donald Schön (1983; 1987) is highly regarded for its examination of how people engage in professional practice. Aligning himself with Dewey (1933), Schön challenged “technical rationality” as adopted in the early twentieth century by professional schools. He argued that:

[T]he relative status of the various professions is largely correlated with the extent to which they are able to present themselves as rigorous practitioners of a science-based professional knowledge and embody in their schools a version of the normative professional curriculum. (Schön, 1987, p. 9)

According to Schön, technical rationality was responsible for a growing chasm between researchers and practitioners. In the technical rational model, researchers are responsible for reflection and theory construction whereas practitioners are exclusively responsible for theory application. The chasm between theory and practice only widens when practitioners find the work of researchers to be less and less relevant to their practice (Schön, 1987).
Along with Schön’s critique of technical rationality, his extensive work on reflective practice is considered to have made a significant impact on professional practice and educational practice in particular. Schön (1983) argued that practitioners engage in two types of reflection. One type is referred to as *reflection in action*, and can be likened to a process similar to “thinking on one’s feet.” As practitioners *reflect in action* they draw upon prior experiences, making explicit their tacit knowledge in order to frame and reframe their situation.

The practitioner allows himself to experience surprise, puzzlement, or confusion in a situation which he finds uncertain or unique. He reflects on the phenomenon before him, and on prior understandings which have been implicit in his behaviour. He carries out an experiment which serves to generate both a new understanding of the phenomenon and a change in the situation. (Schön, 1983, p. 68)

This constant framing and reframing of situations leads to new and changed understanding of one’s practice. The other type of reflection, *reflection on action*, occurs after the fact and involves exploration through discussions, diaries, journals, and self-study.

Reflective practice (*reflection in action* and *reflection on action*) is clearly supported and evident in much of the preservice research literature (Beck & Kosnik, 2006; Darling-Hammond, 2006b; Hagger & McIntyre, 2006; Kosnik & Beck, 2009; Wilson et al., 2001). Darling-Hammond (2006b) notes that preservice teachers must engage in reflection so that they become “adaptive experts.” Beck and Kosnik (2006) contend that a “key reason for doing self-study research is to model for our student teachers a reflective approach to teaching” (p. 133). Furthermore, Calderhead (1989) contends that Schön’s notion of reflection-in-action is linked to coaching and supports interactions between experts and novices.
Although reference to reflective practice as perceived by Schön (1983) is ubiquitous in the research literature, its interpretation and application is not always consistent. Calderhead (1989) notes that “what reflective teaching amounts to, however, and what it implies for teacher education, is not so widely agreed” (p. 43). The many conceptualizations of reflective practice in the research are evidenced in the literature by the proliferation of terms such as, “inquiry-oriented teacher education; reflection-in-action; teacher as researcher; teacher as decision-maker; teacher as professional; and teacher as problem solver” (Calderhead, 1989, p. 43). Furthermore, Zeichner (1992) asserts that the misunderstood notion of “reflective practice” is troublesome as it reinforces faulty thinking by:

(a) helping student teachers replicate practices suggested by the research of others while neglecting the theories and expertise embedded in their own and other teachers’ practices,

(b) developing means-end thinking that limits the substance of student teachers’ reflections to technical questions of teaching techniques and internal classroom organization while neglecting questions of purpose and curriculum,

(c) encouraging student teachers to reflect on their own teaching while ignoring the social and institutional context in which the teaching takes place, and

(d) encouraging teachers to reflect individually rather than collegially. (p. 297)

Reflective practice is significant to my study for several reasons. First, reflective practice is referred to in much of the preservice literature (Calderhead, 1991; Dewey, 1933; Darling-Hammond, 2006a; Kosnik & Beck, 2009; Zeichner, 1992) making it imperative that I have a solid understanding of its terminology and significance. Second,
reflective practice is congruent with an interpretative tradition and, hence, is in alignment with this study’s choice of methodology, grounded theory. Moreover, reflective practice aligns with my epistemological position and, in turn, the beliefs of the constructivists. As McIntyre (2002) sums up:

Dewey sets up the dichotomy of routine actions and reflective actions. Noting that action is the common denominator, the presence or absence of reflection defines the dichotomy. Without reflection, teacher-learners become a product of past traditions. With reflection, teacher learners can effect change in the context of their classroom, their school, and their community. (p. 53)

Lastly, I hope to learn about what associate teachers, as practitioners reflecting in and on action, actually have to say about their work. I trust that these reflections might not only deal with the “nuts and bolts” of teaching but also with issues of a grander nature.

**Apprenticeship of Observation and Preservice Education**

Their [associate teachers’] strategy reflects Lortie’s (1975) conception of the power of apprenticeship of observation. Cooperating teachers drew upon their past experiences as student teachers to empathize with the student teachers and to plan what to do as cooperating teachers. (Koerner, 1992, p. 51)

In his still influential study, *Schoolteacher*, Lortie (1975) and his research team examined the attitudes and experiences of over 90 practicing high school and elementary teachers. Lortie (1975) observed that:

Although Five Towns teachers were not asked about the influence of former teachers, it is evident that many consider it important (question 29, App. B-1). A large proportion of respondents volunteered information about how their current work is affected by the teaching they received. (p.63)

He illustrated this influence by noting that 42% of teacher candidates attempted to imitate the practices of former teachers, while 16% of teacher candidates shared in detail how a former teacher’s style was very similar to their own style. When Lortie queried teachers
about how their former perceptions of teaching matched with their current reality, he noted that many teachers found their work much more difficult than they expected. Lortie ascertains that, unlike many other occupations, would-be teachers have the uncommon experience of observing practicing teachers over a lengthy stretch of time which he referred to as “apprenticeship of observation.”

Apprenticeship of observation is problematic for preservice education in that it encourages an overly simplistic view of teaching. Often relying on their observations as former students, teacher candidates have an unrealistic take on the work of teachers. A student’s perspective on teaching practice is problematic as it is one-dimensional and does not allow access to the complex thinking and decision making below the surface. As former students observing their teachers, they were not privy to their teacher’s invisible world of reflection, planning, and analysis. Hence, teacher candidates often struggle when coming to grips with the work of teachers. Furthermore, when preservice programs fail to explicitly address teacher candidates’ apprenticeship of observation, teacher candidates’ sense of helplessness is only further compounded. Lortie (1975) speculates:

In summary, the apprenticeship of observation undergone by all who enter teaching begins the process of socialization in a particular way; it acquaints students with the tasks of the teacher and fosters the development of identification with teachers. It does not, however, lay the basis for informed assessment of teaching technique or encourage the development of analytic orientations toward the work. (p. 67)

Lortie’s (1975) study provides a useful lens for my study from which to view the perspectives of associate teachers. Just as Lortie’s concept of “apprenticeship of observation” is helpful in understanding how students’ prior learning experiences inform their practices and thinking as teacher candidates, it is also helpful in understanding how experiences as teacher candidates inform the thinking and practices of associate teachers.
This is relevant to my study as it illustrates the significance of prior learning, an important element in constructivist theory acknowledged in my study. Furthermore, as I seek to understand the perspectives of associate teachers in the practicum, I acknowledge that associate teachers’ past experiences as teacher candidates will inform their perspective on the practicum and the sense they make of that experience.

2. The Complex World of Teachers, Teacher Candidates, and Associate Teachers

The world of schools and teaching is complex. Shifting and unstable economies, globalization, ecological uncertainty, population diversity, and technological innovations are just a few of the factors contributing to the complexity. This complexity is mirrored in education and schools resulting in ever increasing demands and expectations being placed on teachers (Bransford, Darling-Hammond & LePage, 2005; Brophy, 1983; Brophy & Good, 1986; Crocker & Dibbon, 2008; Levine, 2006). Moreover, the pressure is only heightened when one takes into account the substantive body of process-product research directly linking teacher performance to student performance (Cochrane-Smith & Zeichner, 2005; Darling-Hammond, 2006b; Leithwood, 2006; Phillips, 2002).

Although it is impossible to adequately capture the complexity inherent in contemporary teaching, Darling-Hammond (2000) attempts to provide insight into this world through her telling description of just some of the expectations and challenges placed on classroom teachers.

The expectations that schools teach a much more diverse group of students to much higher standards creates much greater demands on teachers. Teaching for problem solving, invention, and application of knowledge requires teachers with deep and flexible knowledge of subject matter who understand how to represent ideas in powerful ways, can organize a productive learning process for students who start with different levels and kinds of prior knowledge, assess how and what
students are learning, and adapt instruction to different learning approaches. (pp. 166-167)

Darling-Hammond’s (2000) description not only addresses the complex world of the teacher, but also the complex world of the associate teacher. However, the associate teacher has an additional layer of responsibility with which to contend that involves working with and supporting teacher candidates in a variety of capacities. Associate teachers must negotiate working with teacher candidates while keeping on top of all their other responsibilities. Despite recent efforts in forward thinking to change the culture of preservice education, with emphasis being placed on aspects of the practicum such as collaboration (Darling-Hammond, 2006a; Kosnik & Beck, 2009), associate teachers for the most part continue to grapple with their impossible job in a culture characterized by working in isolation.

There is considerable debate in the research literature, universities, schools, and the public realm regarding what exactly teachers need to know in order to be successful and effective. Further exacerbating the debate is the lack of agreement amongst researchers regarding exactly how teachers learn (Calderhead & Shorrock, 1997). Specifically, there is little consensus in the literature regarding how teacher candidates actually learn professional knowledge, how the complexity of their work impacts their acquisition of knowledge, and what types of knowledge should and should not be included in teacher candidates’ learning (Calderhead, 1996). In the remainder of this section, I will review various theories on the many dimensions of teaching and of teacher education.

Cochran-Smith and Lytle (1999) contend that there exist three distinct and conceptually different ways in which teachers learn. Teachers engage in knowledge for
practice wherein they access formal knowledge and theory generated by university educators and researchers. Teachers also engage in knowledge in practice, which is characterized by the learning that takes place through practice and the reflection that occurs within practice. This type of knowledge is highlighted in Schön’s (1983) work. He maintains that through reflection, teachers access tacit knowledge, which then becomes explicit. Teachers also engage in a third type of knowledge referred to as knowledge of practice. In this conceptualization, teachers are viewed as generators of knowledge as they see their practice as a place of inquiry and take a critical stance on the theories and research of others. This conceptualization is again congruent with Schön’s (1983) account, which also maintains that teachers access formal knowledge and critically reflect on their work in order to create their own theories.

There is complexity not only in how teachers learn, but also in the content of their learning. In a yearlong study of her own practice, Lampert (2001) recounts these complexities inherent in her teaching practice. Lampert (2001) contends that teaching involves problems framed from social, temporal, or intellectual perspectives. Each perspective requires different and specific actions on the teacher’s part. Teachers have to continuously make adjustments regarding the relationship of students to content and vice versa. In order to make certain that students are learning, teachers must accept the dynamic nature of this relationship and constantly revise their decisions. Additionally, teachers must constantly address other pertinent issues; such as, learning how to attend to their students’ diverse and individual learning requirements, working within tight time restrictions, enduring and balancing pressure from external sources, and coping with a public perception that teaching is undemanding and simple work.
Given the complexities of how teachers learn and the nature of their work, it is not surprising that issues regarding when teacher candidates should learn theory and what kind of theory they should be learning continue to be debated in the research community. Beginning with when teacher candidates should learn theory, the traditional approach is characterized by the teacher candidate learning theory first in the university through coursework and then applying the theory in the practicum (Tom, 1997). This is sometimes referred to as a “front-end loading” model and favours the practicum at the conclusion of the preservice program. With coursework in advance of the practicum, it is thought that teacher candidates will be able to effortlessly integrate theory into their practice. Unfortunately, this is a false assumption in that it does not take into account a number of factors such as the associate teacher’s expertise or possible lack of expertise, the frequent lack of communication between the preservice program and the school, and the varying degrees of teacher candidates’ competence. Even if associate teachers are able to articulate ideas in an easily comprehended manner, teacher candidates often have difficulty negotiating theoretical and practical concepts (Arends & Winitzky, 1996; Grimmett & Erikson, 1988).

In the 1980s, a shift began to take place in some preservice programs, with consideration being given to designing more integrated programs with stronger links between theory and fieldwork (Darling-Hammond et al., 2005). Darling-Hammond (2006b), in a study examining selected outstanding preservice education programs, describes how these programs are very different from those in the traditional model. They are different in that considerations were made; such as, selecting practicum sites that provided a good place to learn, establishing and developing relationships amongst all
participants, and integrating theoretical coursework with practical work. Darling-Hammond (2006b) uses the findings from this study to argue against the traditional model, which clearly separates theory from practice. Moreover it is noted that,

Since then, a number of studies have offered empirical evidence that teacher education programs that have coherent visions of teaching and learning, and that integrate related strategies across courses and field placements, have a greater impact on the initial conceptions and practices of prospective teachers than those that remain a collection of relatively disconnected courses. (Darling-Hammond et al., 2006b, p. 392)

In addition to the theory-practice debate, there is also considerable disagreement in the research literature over what kind theory or knowledge is most appropriate for teacher candidates. A key issue here is the degree of emphasis to be placed on subject matter knowledge as distinct from general pedagogical knowledge. Subject-matter knowledge or content knowledge as referred to by Shulman (1986) is concerned with the knowledge of academic content. Research conducted in the past few decades does suggest that a better understanding of subject matter can make a difference in teacher effectiveness (Kosnik & Beck, 2009; Hagger & McIntyre, 2006). A more complete and deeper understanding of subject matter allows teachers, and, specifically teacher candidates to differentiate instruction according to the needs of their students (Ball, 2000; Hagger & McIntyre, 2006; Kosnik & Beck, 2009). In a review of empirical research, Wilson et al. (2001) argue that some studies demonstrate a connection between teachers’ subject-matter knowledge and students’ achievement. They also, however, emphasize that more research is needed in this area.

While a deep understanding of subject matter knowledge is certainly worth pursuing in terms of increasing teacher candidates’ effectiveness, it is only part of the equation. It is also argued that student teachers should know and understand how to plan,
organize, and manage the methods used to teach subject matter. This is referred to as pedagogical knowledge (Jaipal, 2009; Shulman, 1986). Furthermore, it is reiterated that pedagogical knowledge should not be taught in isolation. Both pedagogical and subject knowledge should be an integral part of the preservice program (Kosnik & Beck, 2009; Grossman, Schoenfeld & Lee, 2005).

Shulman (1986) refers to the integration of subject matter and pedagogical knowledge as “pedagogical content knowledge” and defines it as:

The most regularly taught topics in one’s subject area, the most useful forms of representations of those ideas, the most powerful analogies, illustrations, examples, explanations, and demonstrations—in a word, ways of representing and formulating the subject that make it comprehensible to others. Pedagogical content knowledge also includes an understanding of what makes the learning of specific topics easy or difficult. (pp. 9-10)

Shulman’s definition underscores the need for preservice programs to move away from simply offering “general” pedagogy and towards offering rich subject specific content integrated with subject appropriate pedagogy. As reinforced by Kosnik and Beck (2009), “Student teachers will not understand the general pedagogy we advocate in the preservice programs unless we illustrate it in the context of particular subjects” (p.113).

Although the preservice research community has not reached agreement on how teachers learn, the complexity of their work, or the type of knowledge required of teachers, the foregoing discussions are relevant to my study. Understanding these issues provides context and perspective to the work of associate teachers. Associate teachers grapple with myriad factors. Lack of clarity in the research regarding such important matters as when and how to integrate practice with theory, and what teacher candidates actually need to know, is not helpful. If I intend to understand the experiences of associate teachers, it is imperative that I am familiar with ongoing issues embedded in
3. The Problematic Practicum

The field experience, though commonly touted as the most meaningful part of preservice teacher preparation, is not without flaws and does not escape criticism. (Knowles & Cole, 1996, p. 648)

Virtually all preservice programs include a practicum component as it is considered to be pivotal to teacher candidates’ success both developmentally and socially (Guyton & McIntyre, 1990; Metzler & Tjeerdsma, 2000; Power & Perry, 2002). Furthermore, the research literature clearly acknowledges the significance of the practicum with regard to teacher candidates’ learning (Guyton, 1989; Haigh, 2001; McGee, Ferrier-Kerr, & Miller, 2001). Despite its positive characteristics, many unfavourable views of the practicum persist in the eyes of the general public, teacher candidates, and associate teachers themselves (Darling-Hammond, 2006b).

This section begins with Zeichner’s (1996) and Schulz’s (2005) theoretical perspectives on the practicum. Next, a synopsis of the practicum’s multiple and complex issues as discussed in the research is presented. Then a specific examination of the issue regarding university supervisors’ involvement and collaboration in the practicum will be considered. Last, I will share a discussion of two innovative practicum structures that attempt to address some of the criticisms, namely, the professional development school model and the cohort model.
Theoretical Perspectives on the Problematic Practicum

It is important to note that practicum experiences are as varied and distinct as the teacher preparation programs themselves. As observed by Levine (2006) in his large-scale report, *Educating School Teachers*, “It is clear there is no such thing as a typical education school. Their diversity is extraordinary” (p. 7). Yet despite this diversity, the conceptual model of the practicum has remained relatively static over the years (Tom, 1997). The prevailing conceptual model referred to as the “apprenticeship model” relies on the transmission of technical skills (Schulz, 2005). This traditional approach is characterized by the following aspects: courses are taught in a lecture style with subject and method courses separate from each other; courses are completed before the practicum and are rarely connected to the practicum; and there is a distinct divide between practice and theory. (It is important to note that alternative preservice programs exist and will be discussed later in this section.)

The criticisms of the traditional apprenticeship model are extensive and raise numerous dilemmas for teacher educators who are attempting to better understand and improve the practicum. Zeichner (1996), in his analysis of the practicum, contends that the apprenticeship model as the predominant model cannot be trusted to produce better teachers. Stones (1984, as cited in Zeichner, 1996) notes that in the apprenticeship model there is an assumption that “good teaching is caught and not taught, that good things happen more by accidental fortune than by deliberate design” (p. 218). Furthermore, “the hallmark of success is the assumption of independent teaching performance” (Zeichner 1996, p. 218).
Zeichner (1996) asserts that the apprenticeship model is a deficit model. First, he contends that many teacher candidates are placed in classrooms according to convenience, often on the whim of the administrator with little consideration of associate teachers’ expertise. These associate teacher placements might be confusing for teacher candidates who then fail to connect what is learned in coursework and learned in the practicum. Second, Zeichner contends that even if the teacher candidate is lucky enough to get an excellent associate teacher, this, too, is problematic. Associate teachers are often restricted in terms of time and are offered little in terms of compensation. Neither of these circumstances is conducive to building incentive. Zeichner suggests that the quality of the associate teacher is really the luck of the draw for teacher candidates. Last, he laments the fact that teacher candidates are often placed with individual teachers rather than schools, which limits access to a full practicum experience such as the school community.

The problem is that apprenticeship as it now exists does not encourage collaborating teachers to share any of their knowledge about teaching or teacher education. The simple apprenticeship model encourages collaborating teachers to act as teachers and not teacher educators. (Zeichner, 1996, p.220)

Zeichner (1996) also describes two other conceptual models, namely, the applied science practicum and the inquiry-oriented practicum. In the applied science practicum, teacher candidates apply the knowledge and theories they have learned in their academic course work to their work in the classroom. Zeichner (1996) points out that the applied science practicum, “in contrast to the apprenticeship approach, [assumes] the source of teaching expertise is thought to lie outside of the practices of teachers” (p. 221). This view values formal theory over practical theory. In his discussion, Zeichner draws upon studies demonstrating that a better knowledge base does not necessarily translate into better teaching. He cautions that while it is important for teacher candidates to have some
grounding in formal theory, it is also important to acknowledge theory created in practice and the expertise of associate teachers.

The third model, the *inquiry-oriented practicum*, according to Zeichner (1996), places the practicum within a research context. In this model, teacher educators (university supervisors and associate teachers) “emphasize helping student teachers develop a greater understanding of their own practical theories and tacit knowledge of teaching, and on learning to develop new knowledge about teaching through their reflection in and on their teaching practice” (p. 222). This approach will help teacher candidates to be more in charge of their own professional development over the span of their entire career. Zeichner maintains this would be an “educative” practicum.

Using Zeichner’s model of the inquiry-oriented practicum, Schulz (2005) carried out a qualitative study that explored the experiences of teacher candidates in this type of practicum over a more traditional approach. Over a three-year period, the research team closely examined the transcriptions of taped focus-group discussions. Schulz’s research supports Zeichner’s (1996) concern for an “educative practicum” (a practicum that encourages reflection and learning as opposed to merely demonstrating what is learned in coursework).

In Schulz’s (2005) study, the teacher candidates had to expand their experience outside of the classroom and consider their “learning” experiences over their level of “performance”. In this study, Schulz (2005) found that teacher candidates did acknowledge the rewarding aspects of engaging in inquiry, although it was also noted that many of the inquiries tended to focus on issues of a practical nature. Schulz speculated that teacher candidates’ tendencies toward practical issues were a result of
being new teachers rather than experienced teachers. Schulz (2005) confirms, “[W]e believe that beginning teachers first need to achieve a critical threshold of comfort in technical skills proficiency” (p. 161). Speaking from the perspective of a teacher educator, Schulz challenges others to examine their practices and programs. Schulz draws on Cochran-Smith’s (1991) notion of “collaborative resonance” to encourage teacher educators to “work jointly with teacher candidates in ways that move them beyond a focus on gaining immediate proficiency in skills, toward assuming the larger role of teachers as knowers, thinkers, and researchers” (p. 162).

Both Zeichner’s conceptual analysis of the practicum and Schulz’s (2005) study of the inquiry-oriented program are relevant to my study. Their in-depth investigations of the practicum and its complexities enrich my understanding and provide another angle from which to view the experiences of associate teachers in my study. Their consideration of an “educative practicum” influences my study in that they not only offer a detailed description of existing practicum models, but also offer a hopeful direction for future practice.

**General Issues with the Practicum**

In a broad sense, the research literature does suggest the practicum is the most “hands-on” way for preservice teachers to gain *real* experience and to learn intently about the role of the teacher (Caires & Almeida, 2005). Teacher candidates themselves refer to the practicum as the most informative element of preservice education (Crocker & Dibbon, 2008; Graham, 1999; Guyton & McIntyre, 1990). It is argued that a quality practicum helps preservice teachers transition into the profession (Ralph, 1994). Hagger and
McIntyre (2006) refer to learning in the practicum as *work based learning* and note that the benefits include: learning in a real context, learning both theory and practice in an integrated manner, and learning rules, customs, and cultures of the workplace. Hagger and McIntyre (2006) provide a compelling description of the practicum and its significance:

> Classroom teaching is so complex that one cannot afford to use very much of the limited available time for learning about anything other than classroom teaching; that the best place to do most of one’s learning about the complexities of classroom teaching is where that teaching is happening; and that the best people from whom to learn most about these complexities are those who are engaged with them on a daily basis. (p. 41)

Further, Darling-Hammond (2006a) underscores the importance of the practicum by referring to it as the metaphorical “glue” for powerful teacher preparation. The practicum is often the first time preservice teachers get an insider’s perspective of what really goes on in schools as they get a chance to “try on” the role of teacher (Cole & Knowles, 1993, p. 464).

From a wide perspective, the research on the practicum suggests that it serves a very real and necessary purpose. Yet, from a closer range, the problematic nature of the practicum becomes more apparent. The preservice literature details many ways in which the practicum is indeed problematic; such as, the lack of connection between the university and the school placement (Darling-Hammond, 2006b; Guyton & McIntyre, 1990; Kosnik & Beck, 2009; Wilson et al., 2001), the lack of planning regarding the placement of student teachers and the choice of associate teachers (Darling-Hammond, 2006b), the lack of common understanding amongst researchers regarding the purpose and goals of the practicum (McIntyre, Byrd & Foxx, 1996), the absence of reflective dialogue amongst participants (Beck & Kosnik, 2006; Hagger & McIntyre, 2006), and
The lack of connection between theory and practice (Darling-Hammond, 2006b; Putnam & Borko, 2000).

The traditional view of the practicum was based on a view of teaching as an applied science. The teacher candidate’s job was to apply what had been learned in campus courses during the practicum (Stones, 1984 as cited in Zeichner, 1992, p. 297). Kosnik and Beck (2009) refer to this as the “we cover, they select and apply” (p. 4) model of preservice education and propose a “together we figure out” (p. 4) model. To further understand the concerns raised in the literature, it is helpful to look more closely and shine a light on other criticisms of the practicum. In particular, the role of the university supervisors and issues related to that role will be examined.

**The University Supervisor and the Practicum**

Darling-Hammond and Bransford (2005), in their work with exemplary preservice programs, note that university supervisors who are very present and collaborative are integral to the success of practicum experiences. Moreover, Koerner and Rust (2000) note that university supervisors can play a significant role in teacher candidates’ experiences. Guyton and McIntyre (1990) also maintain that communication is lacking amongst teacher candidates, associate teachers, and university supervisors. Unfortunately, in the current day the absence of university supervisors is still quite pronounced.

Another unhelpful factor affecting the work of the university supervisor is the selection process. In Beck and Kosnik’s (2002a) study examining the participation of university faculty in practicum supervision, they contend “the practicum was enhanced, the campus program was improved, and the faculty grew in knowledge” (p. 16).
Regrettably, some preservice programs continue to base their selection of university supervisors on availability rather than qualifications and background experience (Snyder & D’Emidio-Gaston, 2001). Koerner, Rust, and Baumgartner (2002) contend that many university supervisors are often retired principals or teachers who depend on their experience as teachers and their impressions of student teaching.

Although the participation of faculty in practicum supervision might be preferred (Bullough & Gitlin, 1995), this is not always easily attained. In addition to practicum supervision, faculty advisors are also often responsible for setting goals, orienting preservice teachers to field placements, acting as liaisons, reducing conflict, observing and providing feedback, and supporting preservice teachers (Knowles, Cole, & Presswood, 1994). Moreover outside the parameters of the practicum, faculty advisors are strongly encouraged to follow other academic pursuits, grapple with a general lack of regard for preservice work in the academic milieu, and cope with the perception of some professors who feel they can contribute more fully through research and theorizing (Beck & Kosnik, 2002a).

Fortunately, attempts have been made to engage more fully university faculty in the practicum (Beck & Kosnik, 2002a; Kosnik & Beck, 2009). The participation of faculty has produced many positive benefits for both preservice teachers and faculty; such as, increased participation of associate teachers in workshops and their commitments to practicum involvement, increased satisfaction of teacher candidates regarding the outcome of the practicum and their relationship with faculty, and a more connected and caring relationship between faculty and teacher candidates. However, faculty must also be prepared to deal with an increased time commitment and difficulty in
having their work recognized by the university (Beck & Kosnik, 2002a). In spite of all these challenges, Beck and Kosnik (2002a) still contend that overall they have “strengthened the case for faculty involvement in the preservice practicum” (p. 17).

**Innovative Practicum Structures**

Perhaps the most pervasive pedagogy in teacher education is the student teaching experience or internship. (Dibbon & Crocker, 2008, p. 48) Preservice teacher education programs reveal widely differing ideas on what factors should or should not be considered regarding practicum experiences. Differences in practicum structures are manifest in the following areas: the ultimate goal of the practicum experience, the frequency and duration of the practicum experience, the relationship of practicum to coursework, and the variety and length of experiences (Darling-Hammond et al., 2005). As suggested by Goodman (1986) “just placing students in practicum sites will [not] automatically provide valuable experiences” (p. 351). This subsection describes in more detail two innovative programs that endeavor to do more than “just place” students. These are, namely, the professional development school model (PDS) and the cohort model.

**a. Professional development school model (PDS)**

In *A Report of the Holmes Group: Tomorrow’s Teachers* (1986), a group of deans of education attempted to examine and address the perceived poor quality of teacher preparation in the United States. The report addressed a number of issues including the failed efforts of educational reform and insufficient opportunities for teacher professional learning. The Homes Group (1986) argued that demonstration sites were lacking and
The associate teacher in the preservice practicum

proposed an alternative model, the professional development school model (PDS). It was argued these collaborative schools would address both the academic and clinical preparation of teacher candidates and the professional development of the school system and the preservice program. The premise that practising teachers contribute to creation of practical theory in their profession was acknowledged. In these sites, teacher candidates, associate teachers, administration, and university faculty were encouraged to collaborate. In the PDS model, not only are the instructional practices of teacher candidates enhanced, but also the professional practices of associate teachers and their colleagues as well as university faculty.

Although the research is somewhat limited regarding how professional development schools affect teaching practice, there are some studies suggesting that graduates from PDS sites appeared more prepared than others (Darling-Hammond et al., 2005). Certainly, many positive outcomes of professional development schools are noted in the literature (Adbal-Haqq, 1998; Darling-Hammond, 1994); namely, more frequent and longer practica with coursework being meaningfully integrated, opportunities for teacher candidates to work with specifically chosen expert teachers rather than the current more haphazard means, motivated associate teachers wishing to increase their professional learning through action research, and more connected university educators to the practicum experience.

The overriding banner of the professional development school is programmatic coherence. Programmatic coherence is attained by the integration of coursework and practical work and the engagement of associate teachers and teacher candidates in action research related to their practice. As reiterated by (Darling-Hammond, et al., 2005), “One
strategy that purposefully seeks to construct communities of practice and a greater degree of coherence between university coursework and student teaching experiences is the professional development school” (p. 414).

**b. Cohort model**

In the cohort model teacher candidates are grouped together and remain in the groupings throughout their participation in coursework and the practicum. Beck and Kosnik (2006) emphasize how in their campus cohort program they attempt to bridge the sometimes very distinct and very separate worlds of university and school. For example, they note, “integration of the campus program and the practicum is enhanced by building close relationships with partner schools and, as far as possible, clustering many student teachers in each school” (p.41). To further build on relationships, Beck and Kosnik (2006) attempt to ensure that supervisory staff is also provided with an opportunity to teach in the campus program. “In this way, ideas and community experience are brought from the campus into the practicum, and the practicum in turn impacts on the campus program” (p. 41).

Tom (1997) argues that many preservice programs claim to offer a cohort model; however, few of these programs have seriously made significant structural changes. Tom maintains that the following structural principles need to be considered when organizing teacher candidates into cohorts.

1. Making programs short and intense.

2. Focusing the novice teacher on pedagogical thinking, integrating theory and practice.
3. Staffing programs vertically rather than horizontally.

4. Forming prospective teachers into cohorts.

5. Shifting education resources toward the years of teaching.

While currently the cohort model operates mostly as a means to organize teacher candidates, it has the capacity to go well beyond that mandate. “Rather than being treated as individuals to be managed bureaucratically, prospective teachers should be grouped into a cohort that moves through a professional program as a unit” (Tom, 1997, p. 149). The cohort model has many advantages (Tom, 1997). Koeppen, Huey, and Connor (2000) in their review of cohort groups contend that the following are some of its positive outcomes:

1. Increased social interaction which supports adult learning.

2. Interdependence which helps to alleviate feelings of isolation.

3. Group and individual learning through collaboration.

4. Cohesiveness and a sense of belonging.

5. Interaction with faculty.

6. Common purpose helping to create shared purposes and goals.

Both the professional development school model and the cohort model attempt to address the shortcomings of the “problematic practicum.” Understanding theoretical models of the practicum is helpful; however, in light of recent criticisms (Darling-Hammond, 2006b; Guyton & McIntyre, 1990; Kosnik & Beck, 2009; Wilson et al., 2001), it is apparent the jury is still out regarding what, exactly, is the best way to proceed. Understanding the problematic nature of the practicum is relevant to my study in multiple ways. Having had limited experience as an associate teacher, I need to
familiarize myself with some of the prevalent issues in the research to provide a different lens from which to view the practicum and provide some fresh insight into unfamiliar territory.

4. The Associate Teacher and the Practicum

Dedicated classroom teachers contribute to their profession in many ways, but perhaps none is more significant than serving as [associate] teachers or mentors. (Ganser, 2002, p. 380)

As part of the practicum experience, teacher candidates work intimately with associate teachers. Teacher candidates usually see their experiences in the practicum as being very beneficial (Guyton & McIntyre, 1990) and associate teachers are crucial in assisting them as they make the shift from being students themselves to being teachers of students (Ganser 1996; 2002). Associate teachers also report that working with preservice teachers is fulfilling from a personal and professional perspective (Ganser & Wham, 1988). Despite these positive outcomes, it is remarkable that clear expectations regarding the role of associate teachers and training for associate teachers are absent in many preservice programs (Ganser, 2002). This may contribute to many associate teachers feeling dissatisfied as participants in the practicum (Cole & Sorrill, 1992).

This section investigates how associate teachers make sense of their role and their experiences as participants in the practicum. It begins with Sanders, Dowson, and Sinclair’s (2005) consideration of the role of associate teachers based on the theoretical framework of Balch and Balch (1987). Next, what associate teachers actually gain or learn from their participation in the practicum is explored. Furthermore, some of the emotions experienced by associate teachers in working with teacher candidates are
considered. Finally, some negative aspects of the relationship between the associate teacher and teacher candidates are discussed.

The Role of the Associate Teacher

The role of the associate teacher in relation to teacher candidates is often problematic in its interpretation. It is questioned whether the associate teacher’s role fits better with the “expert” tradition (Drever & Cope, 1999) or the “mentor” tradition (Hawkey, 1997, 1998). In an attempt to better understand and conceptualize the relationship between associate teachers and teacher candidates, researchers have constructed various frameworks (Balch & Balch, 1987; Roth & Tobin, 2001). These frameworks include both notions of “expert” and “mentor” and stress that the difference between the two notions is more a question of emphasis (Jaipal, 2009).

These frameworks are pertinent to my study as, first, they establish a baseline from which to begin understanding and, second, they provide a comparative perspective, as what is theorized about the role of associate teachers may not always match what is practiced in the classroom. There is general agreement, both in the literature and in the field, that the role of the associate teacher is poorly defined and that expectations related to the role are ambiguous, diverse, and often overlapping or at odds with each other (Cole & Sorrill, 1992; Grimmett & Ratzlaff, 1986).

In their investigation of associate teacher roles, Sanders, Dowson, and Sinclair (2005) carried out a case study with four associate teachers and four teacher candidates. They observed the associate teachers and teacher candidates for 87 hours and conducted semi-structured interviews. They were interested in exploring the practices of associate
teachers and how theoretical models were congruent or incongruent with associate teachers’ own perceptions of their role.

Sanders et al., (2005) used the framework of Balch and Balch (1987) as a baseline to examine the roles of associate teachers:

1. model teacher,
2. observer and evaluator of preservice teacher,
3. planner of teaching experiences,
4. demonstrator of planning processes related to teaching,
5. conferencer,
6. professional peer,
7. counselor, and
8. friend.

Sanders et al.’s (2005) research revealed that in most instances associate teachers did take on roles as identified by Balch and Balch (1987); however, it was evident that they related more strongly to some roles than others. For example, 40 percent of associate teachers’ interactions with preservice teachers pertained to the planner role. Planning in this study was understood to be decisions related to content and to practical decisions around how and what to teach. Below, the summary table describes how Sanders, et al. (2005) interpreted the roles for their study and the frequency of observed interactions:
Table 1

*Summary of Associate Teachers’ Role Conceptualization*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Role Interpretation</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Planner</td>
<td>Mostly around decisions regarding content to teach and to a lesser degree, how and when to teach.</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Modeler</td>
<td>Effective teaching techniques, evaluation procedures, management strategies, and modeling the attitudes and beliefs that underpin these techniques, procedures, and strategies.</td>
<td>26%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evaluator</td>
<td>Refers directly to the evaluation role of the associate teacher and occurs most often at the end of day in more formal discussions regarding the strengths and weaknesses of lessons.</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friend</td>
<td>Inferred from associate teacher statements when a concern was shared regarding preservice teacher.</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional Peer</td>
<td>Interactions including comments about child and learning needs and to lesser degree school policies and procedures</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Counselor</td>
<td>Interactions regarding emotional well-being of preservice teacher and psychological support</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conferencer</td>
<td>Interactions concerning the rationale and philosophies underlying teaching decisions and practices</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In addition to reporting on the roles of associate teachers, these researchers also noted that there is scant literature dealing with how associate teachers actually manage all these roles, especially when roles conflict with each other as is the case with evaluator and counselor. Recognizing the need for more research on the management of all these
roles and in keeping with their study’s findings, Sanders et al., (2005) offer some recommendations for those interested in working with associate teachers.

1. Introduce associate teachers to the possible roles of an associate teacher;
2. Explore before, during, and after the practicum the breadth and depth of those roles;
3. Raise awareness of the need to represent each role in a balanced manner;
4. Build confidence in associate teachers to articulate their own pedagogical beliefs;
5. Provide strategies for extending dyad discussions into genuine pedagogical dialogue;
6. Develop observation guidelines to assist associate teachers with focused observation;
7. Develop suggestions for maintaining a balance between challenge and support. (p. 732)

While Sanders et al.’s (2005) study differs from my study in that its primary purpose was to observe associate teachers “in action” with a secondary purpose to compare these observations with theoretical conceptions of the associate teacher’s role, it does intersect with and influence my study in a couple of ways. Their study seeks to understand what associate teachers have to say about their work through the interviews as do I in this study. Furthermore, the findings are pertinent to my study in that the roles conceptualized by Sanders et al. (2005) provide a useful framework for me in making sense of my data.
**Associate Teachers Learning From Teacher Candidates**

Research literature focusing on associate teachers (Beck & Kosnik, 2000; Clarke, 2001; Graham, 2006; Kahn, 2001; Sanders et al., 2006) is growing in recent years and suggests amongst other findings that learning from the practicum is reciprocal for both teacher candidates and associate teachers. Ferrier-Kerr (2009) maintains that the practicum “contributes substantially to helping both parties develop new insights into their pedagogy and practice” (p. 796).

It is well documented that associate teachers have a significant influence on teacher candidates’ professional development (Feiman-Nemser, 1990; Stanulis & Jeffers, 1995); however, little is known about the converse, the influence of teacher candidates on associate teachers’ professional development. Kiraz (2004) carried out a study of the relationship between teacher candidates and associate teachers and how the associate teacher gained from this interaction.

In Kiraz’s (2004) study, the researcher made use of interviews, observations, and document analysis to inductively seek out categories and subsequent themes. Kiraz’s (2004) research into the literature revealed that classroom teachers who take on the role of associate teachers are often “considered to be silent participants in teacher education” (p. 71). The researcher speculated that this silence may be the result of numerous factors; namely, unfamiliarity with talking about their work or collaborating with colleagues (Reecer, 1995), a very demanding workload (Lucas, 1996), a tendency to exclusively hold onto their own notion of teaching and professionalism rather than discussing it with others (Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 1995), and the inability to perceive the
importance of their role in the professional development of teacher candidates (Kiraz, 2004).

First, Kiraz (2004) found that associate teachers benefitted from interaction with the teacher candidate mainly in four areas, namely, the development of teaching skills, classroom management, instructional planning, and observation of children. Second, Kiraz (2004) examined the ways teacher candidates contribute to the professional development of associate teachers and concluded that teacher candidates contribute through being collegial and reflective.

Kiraz (2004) challenges the traditionally perceived transfer of knowledge from expert to novice. This researcher suggests that if student teachers and associate teachers knowingly engage in collaboration and associate teachers “discharge their duty as traditional supervisors” (p. 86), there is a strong likelihood of reciprocal learning taking place, expert to novice and novice to expert. Kiraz suggests that if teacher education programs explicitly train student teachers with strong leadership, collaboration, and interpersonal skills there is greater chance of reciprocal learning taking place.

Kiraz’s (2004) study influences my study as it demonstrates that learning during the practicum can be reciprocal for both the student teacher and associate teacher. Also, my study is comparable to Kiraz’s study in that it, too, allows associate teachers an opportunity to share and discuss their understanding of the practicum.

**Emotional Work of the Associate Teacher**

Inevitably, as associate teachers learn from and engage with teacher candidates, they experience a whole host of human emotions. “Emotions are dynamic parts of ourselves,
and whether they are positive or negative, all organizations, including schools, are full of them” (Hargreaves, 1998, p. 835). While acknowledging the existence of extensive literature on human emotion, particularly in the fields of philosophy and psychology, Hargreaves (1998) asserts that four points must be considered in any study on the emotional practice of teaching. These points are:

1. Teaching is an emotional practice.
2. Teaching and learning involve emotional understanding.
3. Teaching is a form of emotional labor.
4. Teachers’ emotions are inseparable from their moral purposes and their ability to achieve those purposes. (p. 837)

Hastings (2004), through an analysis of narratives in a qualitative case study, investigated the emotional component of associate teachers’ work. The researcher made use of previously analyzed transcripts from the participants’ three semi-structured interviews (before, during, and after the practicum) and re-examined them from a symbolic interactionist perspective. This perspective acknowledges the work of Denizen (1984) who maintains that “experiencing emotion is a social, interactional, linguistic, and physiological process” (p. 31, as cited in Hastings, 2004).

In the re-examination of data, Hastings (2004) confirms that emotions are a recurring theme and that associate teachers experience a wide assortment of emotions associated with their role. The researcher notes that while there were variances regarding the intensity and scope of feelings, there were some common themes including guilt, anxiety, sense of responsibility, disappointment, stress/relief, frustration, sympathy, anxiety, and satisfaction. Hastings states that the practicum is an experience rife with
emotion and speculates this emotionality needs to be acknowledged by all stakeholders as having a considerable impact on associate teachers’ work.

Hastings’s (2004) study confirms that lack of time is a major factor increasing the negative emotions felt by associate teachers. He speculates that the issue of time impedes associate teachers from deepening their understanding of the practicum, which ultimately increases frustration. The researcher draws a parallel between the work of teachers with students and the work of associate teachers with student teachers. Associate teachers in their relationship with preservice teachers, university personnel, and students are often faced with managing their emotions. Hastings refers to the managing of emotions as “emotional work.”

Hastings offers some solutions to ease the emotional frustrations of associate teachers. She suggests that associate teachers must be afforded consideration and acknowledgement in light of ever-increasing demands being foisted upon them. She argues that, in order to do so, it needs to be recognized that the practicum is emotionally demanding and structures must be put in place to support associate teachers. Furthermore, she contends the gendered nature of teaching is partially responsible for the silence in the literature. Finally, she supports more research being conducted in the area of associate teachers’ emotions, which will ultimately help their work to be better recognized.

Hastings’s (2004) study intersects with my study because I, too, acknowledge the inclusion of associate teachers’ voices—including their emotions—as centrally important. While I don’t solely seek to explore associate teachers’ emotional response to the practicum experience, I must be open to its significance. Additionally, we both acknowledge the value of associate teachers and the complex nature of their work.
**Problematic Aspects of the Associate Teacher Role**

In keeping with the theme of emotional work, there are problematic aspects to the associate teacher’s participation in the practicum. While the research literature indicates that associate teachers provide important professional experiences for student teachers (Beck & Kosnik, 2000a; Knowles & Cole, 1996; Murray-Harvey, 2001), it also indicates that some aspects of the relationship between associate teacher and teacher candidate are not always so positive. For instance, the relationship between preservice teachers and associate teachers is often lacking in clarity (Beck & Kosnik, 2000; Zeichner, 1980).

Additionally, concerns persist as to whether the associate teacher is modeling appropriate skills and reflective practice in the clinical setting (Ferrier-Kerr, 2009; Sands & Goodwin, 2005). These concerns certainly support conclusions by Cole and Knowles (1993) who describe the practicum as often being “mis-educative”. Moreover, Coles and Knowles note that often little thought is given to school placements and the choice of associate teachers. As pointed out by Darling-Hammond (2006b): “Often, the clinical side of teacher education has been fairly haphazard, depending on the idiosyncrasies of loosely selected placements with little guidance about what happens in them and little connection to university work” (p. 9). Finally, as noted by Gerges (2001), there is an inherent power imbalance in the relationship that may impede preservice teachers in learning from this relationship, especially when the associate teacher plays an evaluative role.
5. Concluding Thoughts

It is clear that teachers and schooling are important in a changing world. It is also clear that preservice education has an important role to play in the formation of teachers who will be ready to meet the needs of this changing world. There are many considerations to be weighed regarding educational theory, the complexity of teachers’ work, and the problematic nature of the practicum; however, the picture is incomplete without a consideration of the associate teacher within the practicum. My study is based on the assumption that the role of associate teachers and ways of supporting them must be more carefully researched, and that their experiences and ways of understanding must be factored into the research.
The previous chapter provided an overview of theory, research, and issues pertaining to the practicum and, in particular, the associate teacher’s role. Motivated by my initial experiences in the practicum and my work with new teachers, the purpose of this study is to delve more deeply into the role of associate teachers and their ways of understanding their experiences in the preservice practicum. What are the often-silent voices of associate teachers telling us? The purpose of this chapter is two-fold. First, it will contextually situate the study through a description of my background, the participants’ backgrounds, and the study’s setting. Second, it will present the research approach and methodology used describing the underlying rationale, study structure, data collection, and methods of analysis.

Prior to commencing my study I conducted a literature review of my topic, associate teachers in the preservice practicum. This foray into the research literature clearly revealed that while there were a significant number of studies dealing with the perspectives of teacher candidates in the practicum, there were far fewer studies dealing specifically with the perspectives of associate teachers. The associate teachers’ absent voices further motivated me to pursue this topic as a possible area of study.

In light of that consideration, I sought out a methodology that would permit associate teachers to share their perspectives and tell their stories. Knowing from my own experience that teachers, and especially associate teachers, have busy schedules, I considered methodologies that would not be too taxing on the participants with regard to time. Qualitative approaches are suitable for research in education as they allow the
researcher to delve into the “shared beliefs, practices, and behaviours of some groups of
people” (Goetz & Le Compte, 1984, p. 2). Furthermore, within qualitative methodology I
considered constructivist grounded theory a sound choice as it typically uses interviews
as its primary source of data (Creswell, 2007). Interviews, although certainly requiring
some time commitment by the participants, seemed to be the least intrusive choice and
yet the most likely to yield sufficient rich data for the study at hand. The details of
grounded theory and its applicability to the study will be discussed later in the chapter.

1. Context of the Study

As an elementary teacher with just over twenty years of experience in schools, my
understanding and beliefs as a teacher undoubtedly shape my role as a researcher. Eisner
& Peshkin (1990) point out that as researchers we need to be cognizant of such influences
and acknowledge them explicitly. In particular, it is my contention that associate teachers
seldom get the opportunity to provide their perspective on the practicum to educational
researchers or to their own colleagues for that matter. It is my hope that this study will
help to open doors for others wishing to gain access to associate teachers’ valuable
insights.

My Context

My first three years teaching are contextually significant to this study in that they were
spent in an isolated community in northern Quebec where, in many ways, I lived the
“sink or swim” reality that many teacher candidates and new teachers endure. Given the
remoteness of the community and the lack of input from colleagues, I was forced to
confront and fine-tune my own philosophy about teaching and learning. I have been confronting and reconstructing my philosophy ever since those early years. In some ways Darling-Hammond and Sykes (1999) aptly captured the essence of teaching in the title of their book, *Teaching as the Learning Profession: Handbook of Policy and Practice*.

For the past three years, I have worked in many schools in southern Ontario. With experience spanning just over twenty years, I have had the chance to work in multiple roles as a teacher. I have taught in all elementary divisions (primary, junior, and intermediate) and had opportunities as a core French teacher and teacher-librarian. For the past three years, my work has taken me in the direction of leading and coaching teachers in terms of literacy objectives as articulated by the Ontario Literacy and Numeracy Secretariat (LNS). In my role as “curriculum leader,” I have also acted as a liaison between the school board and the Ontario Ministry of Education, handling multiple portfolios including: English as a Second Language, French as a Second Language, Physical Education, and the Arts. This role permitted me to remain current around literacy initiatives, allowing for a “big picture” or a system perspective. Also, given the rather high profile nature of curriculum leader work, I was able to gain access to multiple schools throughout the district.

Over and above my work as a curriculum leader I also worked as a mentor with new teachers in the provincially mandated New Teacher Induction Program (NTIP). This was not only an extremely rewarding experience on a personal level, but also a highly motivating experience given my interest in associate teachers. While I was not an “associate teacher” per se at this point, I did get a chance to experience the expert/novice
The associate teacher in the preservice practicum

relationship, which provided me with valuable insights that helped me to “build a complex, holistic picture” (Cresswell, 1998, p. 15).

My interest, therefore, in associate teachers’ perspectives grows from the accumulation of all my experiences, past and the present. All of my experiences in some way or another provide a landscape or backdrop for my interpretations. This is in accordance with qualitative research, as “[t]he qualitative researcher values his unique perspective as a source of understanding rather than something to be cleansed from the study” (Rossman & Rollis, 1998, p. 9).

Participants

Ten participants were involved in this study. All participants were teachers with the same school district, the one in which I work. I had established a working relationship to some extent with all the participants prior to the study. A number of years ago I worked with Natasha and Charlene at the same school where I was the teacher-librarian, and the other participants were familiar with me through my work as curriculum leader in the school board.

The participants’ years of classroom experience range from four to twenty-eight. All participants had at least one year’s experience as an associate teacher with the range of associate teacher experience from one to ten years. A few of them had significant experience as an associate teacher; namely, Paula, Jennifer, and Brenda while three of the participants, Grace, Kate, and Allison, had only one year experience in this role.
Table 2 below presents an overview of the participants’ experiences as both classroom teachers and associate teachers. Pseudonyms have been used for the participants’ names.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Associate teacher</th>
<th>Classroom teacher experience (years)</th>
<th>Associate teacher experience (years)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Natasha</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paula</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jennifer</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brenda</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jane</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Charlene</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sandra</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grace</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kate</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Allison</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The participants in this study represent teachers with a broad range of experience with teaching assignments (primary grades up to and including intermediate grades). All of them were working as classroom teachers at the time of the interviews in the spring of 2009. Three of the participants (Allison, Charlene, and Jennifer) had had experiences working outside of the classroom setting as support teachers in various capacities.
In terms of location, Brenda and Jennifer worked in the largest urban centre in the
district school board (with a population of approximately 250,000.) This urban centre is
the most ethnically and culturally diverse location in the board. Jane, Grace, Charlene,
Sandra, and Kate all worked in the second largest urban centre (with a population of
approximately 120,000), which is gradually becoming more diverse but still has a
relatively homogenous population with a strong farming history. Natasha, Allison, and
Paula worked in small towns with populations below 10,000 located just outside of the
largest urban centre. Two of the associate teachers, Allison and Paula, worked in French
Immersion programs.

I was also a participant. As a secondary data source, I kept a journal to record my
reflections after each interview and throughout the research process. In the journal, I
noted participant responses that were intriguing, questions that needed rewording or
reordering, hunches or insights that I didn’t want to forget, and possible avenues of
interest to explore in the literature. Reflection allows researchers to see more clearly
assumptions they have about the study, and also allows them to clarify what helps and
what hinders them from “seeing” (Russell & Kelly, 2002).

Setting and Technical Terms

The school district where the study took place encompasses a large geographic area and,
as indicated, includes both urban and rural populations. There are over 50 elementary
schools in the board and it is considered to be a board of medium size within the province
of Ontario. The board is partnered with eight or more teacher education institutions that
are located mostly in Ontario but some are in New York State. These teacher education
Institutions offer concurrent and consecutive programs, with one institution operating within a professional development school (PDS) model. The length and structure of practica vary greatly amongst the institutions.

The interviews took place in a variety of settings away from the practicum sites and outside school hours. As the school district is geographically large and can be divided into three distinct regions, the interviews took place in three different regions for the convenience of the participants.

Listed below are definitions of terms repeatedly used in this study along with supplementary terms commonly found in the research literature. For the purposes of consistency I attempted to use the same terms throughout this study, although this was not always possible when referencing others’ work.

1. **Associate teacher**: a classroom teacher who supervises, instructs, and evaluates teacher candidates during the practicum; may also be referred to as cooperating teacher, host teacher, or mentor teacher.

2. **Teacher candidate**: a university student in an education program who is assigned to practicum placement; may also be referred to as student teacher or preservice teacher.

3. **Practicum**: a period of time (of which there may be several) which a teacher candidate spends in a classroom with an associate teacher to learn about teaching and to gradually participate more fully as a classroom teacher; may also be referred to as clinical experience, fieldwork, field experience, practice teaching, or student teaching.
4. *University supervisor*: a person connected with the preservice program, (sometimes from the university faculty, depending on the structure of the program) who is the liaison between the preservice program and the associate teacher and teacher candidate; may sometimes also be referred to as the field supervisor or faculty advisor.

2. Research Approach

Generally speaking this is a qualitative study employing an interpretative, constructivist lens (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). This is appropriate given that I am “interested in understanding the meaning people have constructed, that is, how they make sense of their world and the experiences they have in the world” (Merriam, 1997, p. 6).

Specifically, this study employs the strategies of data collection and analysis developed by Charmaz (2006) in her constructivist interpretation of grounded theory, *Constructing Grounded Theory: A Practical Guide Through Qualitative Analysis*. Charmaz (2006), relying heavily on Glaser and Strauss’s (1967) seminal work, *The Discovery of Grounded Theory: Strategies for Qualitative Research*, notes she is particularly drawn to the work of Strauss. Strauss is strongly associated with the Chicago sociology tradition and the pragmatism of Dewey (Wildy, 2003). Given Charmaz’s constructivist stance, it is not surprising that she is drawn to his work.

Constructivist grounded theory is suited to my study for many reasons. The open-ended nature of my main research question — *What do associate teachers make of the preservice practicum experience*— fits with Strauss and Corbin’s (1998) idea that “it is necessary to frame a research question in a manner that will provide the flexibility and
freedom to explore a phenomenon in depth” (p. 40). Furthermore, constructivist grounded theory permits the researcher flexibility so that data collection and analysis occur simultaneously throughout the research project (Charmaz, 2006; Punch, 2005) with interviews as the typical form of data collected (Creswell, 2007). Moreover, constructivist grounded theory permits the researcher to gather data without setting out to confirm a priori assumptions or already known concepts and frameworks (Wildy, 2005). As well, it permits the researcher to move between the data and literature as the research unfolds (Charmaz, 2006; Wildy, 2005). Last and in summary, constructivist grounded theory as a qualitative methodology allows for data collection in words rather than numbers, research in a natural setting, a desire to learn from and interact with participants, and a concern to really understand the thinking of participants (Frankel & Wallen, 1996; Kahn, 2001).

In choosing a methodology for this study, I encountered some common obstacles typical of novice researchers. Watt (2007) asserts that,

> [G]iven the complex nature of qualitative inquiry, it is reasonable to expect new researchers to feel some trepidation at the onset of a first study. Although there are guidelines in the literature, the paradigm’s emphasis on interpretation and emergent design provides no precise formula on how to proceed. Each project is unique and ultimately it is up to the individual to determine what works best. (p. 82)

While I initially considered a more traditional approach to grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) as it is congruent with the interpretive tradition of qualitative research (Creswell, 2007), I narrowed my choice of methodology to constructivist grounded theory as it had a better fit with my research approach.
3. Study Structure

The school district in which the study took place has a well established relationship with numerous teacher education institutions that represent a cross-section of Canadian, American, and off-campus Australian programs. In recent years the school board has worked diligently with a local university to set up professional development schools at various sites. The board’s spirit of commitment to preservice education and openness to learning has supported the pursuit of my study.

The following sections will specifically outline how the proposed research proceeded in terms of participant selection, ethical considerations, interview questions, data collection, and data analysis.

Participant Selection

Participants for this study were selected using criterion-based sampling. As specified in criterion-based sampling, one must determine the criteria or specifications to be considered for the investigation and then obtain a sample that meets these criteria (Goetz & LeCompte, 1984). Two criteria were established for this study. First, the participants had to be actively involved in a practicum as an associate teacher in the 2008-2009 school year. Second, they had to be elementary school teachers with the previously described school district, so that I would have access to them.

The process of participant selection began by contacting the Superintendent of Education in the school board responsible for “teacher education” in order to ascertain elementary schools hosting teacher candidates. The names of 15 schools in total were provided. School principals of these schools were then contacted via electronic mail and
provided with a brief outline of the study and a request for a list of participating associate teachers at their respective schools. This yielded a list of 25 associate teachers.

Subsequently, 25 associate teachers were sent an electronic correspondence outlining details about the study and inquiring about their interest to participate. The participants were informed that the researcher is also a teacher with the school board and this study will be the basis for the doctoral dissertation requirements of the researcher. Of the 25 possible participants, 14 teachers responded positively to the initial request.

These 14 teachers were sent a subsequent email with a formal invitation requesting participation (see Appendix A). Allowing a couple of weeks for reflection, participants were then contacted by phone and a brief interview took place to ensure they were willing participants and as representative as possible (see Appendix B for phone script). I attempted to include participants who represented urban and rural settings, all three elementary divisions (primary, junior, and intermediate), English and French Immersion streams, and male and female genders. Despite the fact that I intended to select a number of males for the study, there was only one male who met the criteria and responded to the original email. Unfortunately, due to unforeseen circumstances, he was not able to attend the interview and rescheduling attempts were unsuccessful. This resulted in the selection of another participant.

The participant selection took place over the fall of 2008. The primary data collection, consisting of semi-structured interviews of approximately one hour in length, was completed over a two month period in the spring of 2009. All participants signed a consent form (see Appendix C) prior to the interviews.
Limitations

I acknowledge there are limitations to my research. As Schram (2003) suggests, all qualitative researchers must make weaknesses apparent to readers. Since the focus of this study is to delve into the broad experience of associate teachers within the practicum and not their experiences with specific Faculties of Education, careful consideration was given to a fair representation of these Faculties. Furthermore, given that classroom teachers are very busy people, I needed to be cognizant of the responsibilities and time restrictions placed upon classroom teachers. Also, while my previous work in the district school board as a curriculum leader afforded me access to a large selection of teachers and is in accordance with qualitative research wherein the researcher is acknowledged as a participant observer (Punch, 1998), there was a possibility for a perceived imbalance of power. Last, it is understood in qualitative research that the researcher is the primary collector of data and its analysis (Merriam, 1988). “The human element, complete with assumptions, biases, and blinders, can cause researchers to fail to observe data even though they are present” (McCaslin & Wilson, 2003, p.453). It is not unusual for the researcher to worry about being too connected to the research (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992). Fortunately, qualitative research conflicts with the positivist approach to research and accepts the view that meaning is “co-created by researchers and those who experience the events or lived phenomena being investigate” (Becker, 1992, in Morrissey & Higgs, 2006, p. 163).
Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations are always relevant in qualitative research. According to Deyhle, Hess, & LeCompte (1992) there is an inherent risk in qualitative research because it involves researcher and participant in a shared relationship. Before any contact was attempted with participants, permission was sought from the university’s ethics review board; and once permission was granted, the protocol was followed carefully.

Every attempt was made to ensure that participants were not made vulnerable. There was some concern that associate teachers might feel reticent about sharing as it could potentially jeopardize their relationship with the preservice teacher, the preservice teacher program, or the school board. I assured the participants that all identifying information would be removed from the transcripts. Hence, all digital interview files were safely stored in a secure location and all names of participants and institutions were replaced with pseudonyms in the transcripts. As a final precaution, all interviews took place away from the practicum site. At the completion of the study, all digital files from the project were destroyed.

Interview Questions

Interviews with participants were the primary data source for this study; hence, it is appropriate that I provide a description of their development and purpose. For a comprehensive list of research questions, topics, and probes please refer to Appendices D, E, and F respectively.

Semi-structured interview questions were prepared ahead of time based on reflections recorded in my research journal, advice from my supervisor who is an expert
in preservice education, and consultation of the research literature. Interview questions were constructed with consideration of the phenomena being studied while keeping in mind my research objectives (Higgs, 2001). In addition to the semi-structured interview questions, interview topics and probes were prepared to serve as an aide-memoire (Morrisey & Higgs, 2006) to permit a more natural flow of questioning.

Given this study seeks to understand the perspectives of associate teachers in the practicum experience, the interview questions were semi-structured. The questions progressed from broad based questions that explored the background and general teaching philosophies of participants, to more specific questions relating to their experiences as associate teachers within the preservice practicum and their opinions about the role of associate teachers.

4. Data Analysis

With constructivist grounded theory the researcher is the key agent not only of data collection, but also of analysis (Watt, 2007). Researchers should be able to clearly articulate their methods of analysis and acknowledge the source of categories (Constas, 1992). I acknowledge that I did not use data analysis in the classical sense of grounded theory. Instead, I employed the methods of constructivist grounded theory, which permitted more flexibility. Hence, analysis began with the reading and rereading of the interview transcripts in order to familiarize myself with the words of the participants. Next, notes were made in the transcript margins and significant passages were highlighted making note of what was essential and what was accidental (Giorgi, 1985).
After this initial open coding, I used the cut and paste feature of word-processing software to select passages from the interview I thought were important and relevant to the study. At this point I had identified approximately 275 passages. I then printed these passages, cut them into strips, and began to group and regroup them according to commonalities and themes. After a great deal of arranging and rearranging of passages, noting frequencies and making reflexive notes, I was able to consolidate the passages into initial conceptual categories at an abstract level. For example, some categories at this juncture included: associate teachers’ feelings about student teachers, associate teachers’ perception of their role in the practicum, and associate teachers’ emotions regarding the practicum experience.

Subsequently, I continued with a second level of data analysis in which I elaborated on categories, collapsed some categories, and deleted some categories. In order to achieve this, I reexamined the data and my original conceptual categories. Along with constant reviewing of the data, I also consulted the research literature throughout the process. I made note of observations and insights referred to as “memos” in grounded study. Charmaz (2006) maintains that “by writing memos on your focused codes, you build and clarify your category by examining all the data it covers and by identifying variations within it and with other categories” (p. 93). I also constantly searched for alternative understandings so that I could verify that my interpretations were grounded in the data.

With the assistance of computer software, I placed the “codes” in a column and noted the number of times participants made reference to these codes. Noting the frequency of comments was useful in determining which codes really captured what was
foremost in the participants’ thinking. The frequency of comments does not appear in the
report as such, but was used to shape my thinking. As noted by Hammersley (1992),
Merriam, (1998), and Punch (1998), quantifying the responses to various themes or codes
is not necessarily incongruent with qualitative studies.

At the third level of analysis, I reread the transcripts again to ensure that there was
a contextual connection to the categories and began to group significant quotes under the
appropriate categories. I continued to write memos, check the transcripts, and consult the
research literature. This iterative process was on-going throughout the analysis and was
informative right up to the writing of the final report.

The following is a list of categories with a brief definition followed by the
corresponding sub-themes. These categories and sub-themes are a result of the final level
of analysis:

1. Helpful: this category describes experiences and ideas shared by associate
teachers that were interpreted to be positive in nature.
   a. Heightened Awareness of Practice
   b. Reciprocal Learning
   c. New Set of Eyes Brings a New Perspective
   d. Lessening the Workload

2. Not Helpful: this category describes experiences and ideas shared by associate
teachers that were interpreted to be less than positive in nature.
   a. Issues of Time
   b. Other Concerns
3. More Role Clarification: this category describes aspects of the associate teachers’ role that were expressed in the interviews and interpreted as demonstrating a lack of clarity.
   a. Mentor
   b. Discloser of Secrets
   c. Guardian of the Profession
   d. Evaluator

4. Wishful Thinking: this category describes questions and hopes expressed by associate teachers in the interviews.
   a. More Awareness
   b. More Presence
   c. More Responsiveness

5. Emotional Practice of Associate Teachers: this category describes the wide range of emotions expressed by the associate teachers during the interviews.
   a. Sympathy
   b. Responsibility
   c. Disappointment
   d. Anxiety
   e. Guilt
   f. Attachment

6. Connections: this category describes how the associate teachers in the study often referred to their previous experience as a teacher candidate and their desire to bond with their current teacher candidates.
   a. Connections to the Past
b. Lack of Connection

Consultation of the research literature was ongoing throughout the research process. Hence, even in the final phase in the data analysis, interpretations continued to be affected by my reading of the research literature. In the interests of providing a “decision trail,” a few examples have been provided to show how my thinking and subsequent conclusions were shaped by the research literature. For example, Lampert’s (2001) yearlong study aided my understanding and appreciation of the demanding work of teachers. This study also helped me to build my own ideas about associate teachers’ references to “unhelpful” circumstances and their many unfulfilled wishes. As another example, Sanders, Dowson, and Sinclair’s (2005) examination of roles undertaken by associate teachers was influential to my study in that it exposed how associate teachers’ perceptions of their role do not always match theoretical conceptions of their role. Moreover, the work of Darling-Hammond (2006) and her argument for more coherence in preservice programs was instrumental as I began to interpret the data. The associate teachers in this study seemed to echo some of the same arguments.

Embracing the assumption that the ultimate goal of all educational research is to improve teacher practice and student learning, I learned there are many positive aspects of the preservice practicum; but I also learned there were some aspects in need of improvement, such as:

a. Understanding Schools and Structure.

b. Communication and Connection.

c. Pedagogical and Practical Considerations.

d. Teacher Program Philosophy.
The associate teacher in the preservice practicum  61

e. Time.
f. Teacher Candidate Preparation.
g. University Supervisor Role.
h. Associate Teacher Role.
i. Evaluation.
j. Meaningful Practica

k. Status of the Associate Teacher and the Practicum

A strategy employed in grounded study is “constant comparison,” which ensures integrity of the data analysis by researchers repeatedly going back to the data to confirm their thinking (Tuettemann, 2003). I employed constant comparison throughout the data analysis until I found myself unable to see any new significant elements in the material.

Stake (2000) likens research to a long and sometimes “hazardous passage” in which the researcher must search for “ways of safeguarding the trip” (p. 442). Hence, I chose to draw upon Wolcott’s (1990) notion of “correctness or credibility” (p. 126). He contends that, “readers will not be offended if you do not claim to know everything” (p. 46). Therefore, I make my tentative claim.

Throughout the study as I learned about the perspectives of associate teachers, I also learned in tandem about the research process and my role in the process. It was not a straightforward path. Sometimes I came to a dead-end and sometimes I lost sight of the path. My hopes as a researcher are that this study will offer insights to those who share an interest in knowing more about preservice education, and that it will make a difference to them no matter how small.
Chapter Three:

Findings and Discussion: The Associate Teacher in the Preservice Practicum

I really believe strongly in providing a place for you to practice being a teacher. I believe we need to open our classrooms to give it a try. (Interview with Jennifer)

Having provided an overview of the complexities inherent in preservice education and, in particular, the intricate and sometimes misunderstood work of associate teachers, this chapter will now report my findings regarding the associate teacher in the preservice practicum.

On the whole the associate teachers were enthusiastic participants in the interview process and were open to sharing their experiences. At the beginning of their interview, a few wondered if they had enough interesting information to share for the purposes of the study; however, by the end, they all seemed very pleased with how much they actually did have to share. The associate teachers appeared to appreciate that their expertise might be helpful in possibly shaping new practices for future practica. I attempted to reassure them that they were, indeed, the experts and I had much to learn from their experiences. At the completion of each interview, I appreciated having experienced a glimpse into the anecdotes, thinking, and suggestions that were previously unknown to me. Most significantly, I really valued the sense of connection I made with each associate teacher through the interview process.

The findings for this study are based primarily on the interviews with the 10 associate teachers, as previously described in the context and methodology chapter. This chapter utilizes the perceptions and views of the following associate teachers: Jane, Grace, Charlene, Natasha, Allison, Sandra, Jennifer, Paula, Kate, and Brenda. However,
the findings also draw on insights from the research literature, which will be cited extensively throughout the chapter.

Overall, the associate teachers felt that the practicum was a meaningful experience and had a significant influence on many aspects of their work. They identified helpful and not so helpful aspects of being an associate teacher; considered their role in helping teacher candidates learn to teach; shared their wishes for more awareness from the preservice administrators of the program, more presence from university supervisors, and more responsiveness from teacher candidates; and revealed a wide array of emotions experienced in their work in the practicum. Last they talked about their connections to their past experiences as teacher candidates and reflected on the need for the preservice program to be more connected to the work of teachers and schools. As the focus of this study was to seek understanding, extensive responses of associate teachers have been cited in order to provide a rich and detailed picture. It should be noted that although the associate teachers usually referred to their most recent experiences, they sometimes referred to previous practicum experiences as well.

1. Helpful

All of the associate teachers spoke positively of participating in the practicum and working with teacher candidates. Helpful aspects shared by associate teachers included, a renewed awareness of their teaching practice, two-way learning from associate teacher to teacher candidate and teacher candidate to associate teacher (reciprocal learning), a “new set of eyes” providing a fresh perspective on students in the classroom, and a lightened workload.
**Heightened Awareness of Practice**

I found that it was almost like being outside yourself, watching yourself teach and thinking, “Okay, I wonder what this looks like when—?” I could hear my teacher voice come out a lot more just because she was there, and I knew I was modeling that for her. (Interview with Jane)

All the associate teachers found that having a teacher candidate in the classroom allowed them to reflect on their practice and become more acutely aware of themselves as teachers. Many studies refer to teachers’ ongoing learning as being tacit (e.g., Goodnough, Osmond, Dibbon, Glassman, & Stevens, 2009; Meijer, Zanting, & Verloop, 2002). Tacit knowledge as described by Schön (1987) refers to “knowing-in-action” and is characterized by the inability to “make it verbally explicit” (p. 25).

Most of the associate teachers noted the difficulty in explaining their practice to teacher candidates. As described, this difficulty may be in part because their accumulated knowledge is often tacit in nature. Natasha, an associate teacher with twenty-eight years experience as a classroom teacher commented:

You become aware of what to you seems very simple and when you see a student teacher attempting to do the same thing you realize that it’s all the things that you’ve learned over the years. You actually have to articulate to someone and sometimes it’s really hard to explain what you do. It makes you really reflect on things.

When Natasha mentioned, “it’s really hard to explain what you do,” she was referring to that practical knowledge often not articulated by teachers. Additionally, Charlene, a teacher with over ten years experience, described the elusive nature of tacit knowledge and the need to reflect on one’s practice. She noted how reflection encouraged her to critically examine her practice:

That’s the other thing about being an associate teacher—you have to be able to think critically about your practice. So, if you’re going to be an associate teacher,
The associate teacher in the preservice practicum 65

you have to be willing to look at yourself as well as your student teacher. Because, if you don’t know, how can you explain it to others.

While Grace’s initial comments were more focused on a very tangible and technical aspect of teaching, the use of her voice, she does suggest that what she “really” reflected on was much deeper than that. In reflecting on how she used her voice as a tool, Grace noted, “There are little things I picked up on like the voice—bringing down the voice—being aware of speaking a little slower. What she [the teacher candidate] really helped me to do is reflect more on what I am like as a teacher.”

Additionally, both Allison and Kate noted how working with a teacher candidate encouraged an awareness of reflection itself. Allison remarked that, “Well, I think the biggest part was you end up reflecting on your own teaching for sure.” In accordance with Allison’s comments, Kate pointed out, “It was a very positive experience. It made me reflect on my practice a lot.”

Whether the associate teachers were noting the tacit nature of their work, remarking on a technical aspect of their practice, or commenting on their increased self-reflection, they all experienced a heightened awareness of their practice. Clearly participating in a practicum affords associate teachers the opportunity to reflect in ways not conventionally available to them. Although Zeichner (1996) cautions against viewing reflection as a panacea, there is a growing body of evidence suggesting that reflective practice is an important characteristic of effective teachers (Borko, Michalec, Timmons, & Siddle, 1997; Mills & Satterhwait, 2000; Valli, 1997).

Increased awareness of one’s teaching practice is of benefit not only to associate teachers, but also to teacher candidates. When associate teachers model reflection with teacher candidates, they make it easier for teacher candidates to analyze their own work
(Feiman-Nemser & Buchmann, 1987). A heightened awareness of practice is promising for both associate teachers and teacher candidates, and, in the words of Charlene, “I think what I have learned anyway, and what I’m going to pass along, is that it’s all about reflection.”

**Reciprocal Learning**

That associate teachers learn from the practicum experience is confirmed in the research (Beck & Kosnik, 2000; Goodnough et al., 2009; Kahn, 2001). As associate teachers attempt to help teacher candidates in learning to teach, they must be able to articulate what they understand about teaching. Clarke’s (2006) study of associate teachers also supports the notion of the practicum providing a rich opportunity for reciprocal learning.

Not surprisingly, all the participants in this study felt they had learned from participating in the practicum and, in particular, from the teacher candidates. Sandra spoke positively of the reciprocal relationship between associate teacher and teacher candidate. Her frank and enthusiastic comments illustrate not only her willingness to help the teacher candidate, but also her receptiveness to learning from the teacher candidate.

The one student teacher was able to help me greatly in that I used a lot of her ideas today. So it was sort of a give and take situation. I helped her out with certain things and she was able to help me out with certain things. So yeah, the benefits were win-win on both sides. She was able to learn from me, as I was able to learn from her.

Kate also mentioned how working with a teacher candidate kept her current regarding new techniques and strategies and allowed her to approach her practice from a renewed perspective.

I think just by watching somebody else teach maybe a lesson that you wouldn’t have taught, makes you look at how they set it up and say to yourself, “Okay, I
wouldn’t have done that” or “Oh, you know what? That’s a really good idea!” I feel like I get to be more up to date on what’s coming out of teachers’ college.

Paula, an experienced teacher, enthusiastically shared how working with a teacher candidate helped her to learn “tons” about technology. She specifically described a math lesson in which she not only learned a new technique, but also appreciated the role reversal.

I learned so much in technology because they know about tons of stuff that I don’t. I remember [teacher candidate’s name] did this technique with…something with math and he used a clothesline. He brought in one of those clotheslines you buy at the dollar store with pegs and he got kids to peg stuff up. It’s amazing and I kind of liked being the learner too.

Brenda spoke of how having a teacher candidate in the classroom kept her “fresh”. She clearly articulated how learning was very much reciprocal between associate teacher and teacher candidate. Moreover, she was open to sharing this with the teacher candidate.

I would continue to take student teachers because for me they bring so much freshness and new things to the classroom and I feel like I’m continuing to stay fresh. I learn from them as much they learn from me. And, I tell them on the first day that this is a win-win situation. You’re learning things from me but I’m also learning things from you.

The responses from the associate teachers in this study challenge the traditional apprenticeship notion of learning in the practicum as flowing from expert to novice (Guyton & McIntyre, 1990). As with Kiraz’s (2004) study, most of the participants acknowledged that working with teacher candidates helped them learn new strategies and kept them “fresh”. The associate teachers appreciated being in the role of “learner” and articulated this to the teacher candidates.

Given the reciprocal nature of learning in the practicum for both the associate teacher and the teacher candidate, I contend there are some important considerations that must be made. First, I argue that it is important to reconsider how associate teachers are
selected for practicum experiences (Kiraz, 2004; Koerner, 1992). Sadly, the selection of associate teachers is still left to the whims of school administrators (Cole & Sorrill, 1992) as was the case with most of the associate teachers in this study. Through a more careful and thoughtful selection process, sound decisions might be made regarding which teachers would best fit and benefit from this reciprocal learning relationship.

Second, I also argue that, given the reciprocal nature of learning in the practicum, it is imperative that the role of the associate teacher be explicitly revised to articulate this notion. Ganser (1996, 1997) surmises that being an associate teacher can have a very positive and significant effect on one’s work and career. He maintains there is much to be gained from agreeing to be an associate teacher and proposes that the critical thinking involved in preparation for the duties and sharing with the teacher candidate can only lead to the betterment of the associate teacher’s own teaching.

_A New Set of Eyes Brings a New Perspective_  
In accordance with Kiraz’s (2004) study, nearly all of the associate teachers commented that participating in the practicum allowed them to see their students with a new “set of eyes.” They found this fresh perspective to be very useful, particularly given the hectic and frenetic pace of most classrooms these days. In the busy world of schools, it is rare indeed that teachers are afforded the opportunity to really observe their students. Over half of the associate teachers in this study noted that being “allowed” to observe their students was an extremely valuable experience from a practical and pedagogical stance. Having a teacher candidate in the classroom provided a rare chance for associate teachers to see what is _really_ happening in their classrooms.
Jennifer clearly appreciated the chance to see students from a different perspective. She articulated how observing her students provided her with a new awareness and was beneficial to the relational aspect of her work with students.

So you get a chance to pause and see your kids in action which you never get when you’re teaching them or when you’re in a guided reading group. So it gives you insight into your students that you’re working with. If that doesn’t help you build a relationship with your kids, I don’t know what does, because you see them while they’re being taught.

Kate agreed that observing her students while they were being taught was very useful. From the vantage point of an associate teacher, she was able to become aware of student behaviour that might otherwise go unnoticed.

I think it made me more aware of what I need to be looking for in terms of my kids while I’m teaching. You start your lesson, right, and then sometimes there are things that are going on that just fly under the radar that you don’t always see. I think that it made me more aware of what’s really going on.

Similarly, Paula noted how being allowed to observe her students was a very useful experience that allowed her to be privy to hidden behaviour:

By being an observer you think, “Oh, I never noticed them doing that before and he’s not even looking while somebody’s talking.” It was good because I could see them being taught.

The very practical benefit of allowing associate teachers to observe their students from a different perspective should not be downplayed or overlooked in the literature. While it may seem to be a rather minor benefit to those not in the teaching profession, the chance, or one might even say, the luxury to observe one’s students from the sidelines should not be underestimated. Not only is this perspective helpful to associate teachers in a very practical sense, but it is also helpful in a motivational sense. From my personal experience and observations as a teacher, being allowed to observe students without disruption is invaluable and might serve to spark conversations between associate
teachers and teacher candidates regarding students’ learning. Furthermore, I argue that these “sparked” conversations encourage associate teachers and teacher candidates to see their work less from an isolationist perspective and more from a collaborative perspective.

**Lessening the Workload**

Only a few associate teachers spoke of how having a teacher candidate helped to lessen their workload in some very concrete ways. This was not a strong theme in the interviews, but its inclusion is nonetheless useful. Sadly, there exists amongst some classroom teachers a perception that associate teachers take on teacher candidates solely to offload their work (Cole & Sorrill, 1992). In fact, when Jane described the important role of the associate teacher, she lamented:

I get frustrated with some colleagues who would see it like a slave, having a student teacher, and their sole purpose is to do all your photocopying. She [the teacher candidate] appreciated knowing that because she’d been in other classrooms and that was the practice.

Paula recalled a conversation with her teacher candidate in which he shared some of the challenges faced by fellow teacher candidates:

I heard stories from [name of teacher candidate]. He was telling me how some of his fellow [colleagues] had to correct stuff and they had to do stuff for report cards *unofficially*. They weren’t allowed to leave until they did these things for their teacher.

While none of the associate teachers in this study treated the teacher candidates in the manner referred to by Jane or as described by Paula’s teacher candidate, a few of the associate teachers did make direct references to the concrete benefits they received. Paula in describing the practicum schedule mentioned how she appreciated that her teacher
The associate teacher in the preservice practicum

candidate started in September rather than later in the school year. Paula appreciated the timing and thought this was practical for both the teacher candidate and herself:

She came right at the beginning of September and that was actually great because it was like having another set of hands in the classroom. I just wanted somebody in there helping me. We just started off doing stuff. I just said, “Do you want to do pizza or attendance today?” You know, all of these little things to gradually get them into it.

Without providing much in the way of details, Kate also alluded to the tangible benefits of having a teacher candidate in the classroom, “I mean there really are some benefits. I mean marking and all that stuff.”

Clearly, while a few associate teachers referenced a couple of practical ways they benefitted from having teacher candidates, this was not a strong theme in the data. In contrast to Cole and Sorrill (1992) and popularized myths (although admittedly some of these myths are based on reality) none of these associate teachers viewed their participation in the practicum as a way to renge on their professional duties.

2. Not Helpful

As noted, for the most part, the associate teachers in this study found their experience in the practicum to be very positive. There were, however, a few specific references to experiences that were not so helpful. These comments mostly focused on issues related to time; namely, the lack of time or the lack of alone time. The other concerns mentioned by associate teachers included: the encroachment of the practicum on their sense of autonomy, the selection process for associate teachers, and issues regarding classroom management. It should be noted that there were other areas of concern for associate
teachers more consequential in nature. These will be discussed more thoroughly in the remaining sections of this chapter.

**Issues of Time**

As anyone familiar with working in schools is aware, time is a scarce and precious resource. Sandra and Paula, for example, noted how, as associate teachers, the availability of time was affected in a direct and tangible manner. Specifically, Sandra explained how she anticipated many benefits from her participation in the practicum, yet she protested that this participation came at the cost of adding time to an already very full day:

> It seemed like it would be a lot easier than I thought it would be. I thought I was going to get all these great ideas. I’m going to share. I’m going to collaborate. But, then I realized I just added an extra hour to my day.

Paula shared Sandra’s sentiments as she described the pressure of trying to find time to juggle the roles of both classroom teacher and associate teacher. Paula described the pressure of time as “unreal” and her comments capture an almost visceral sense of being *squeezed* for time.

> I felt like I was always rushed, rushed and I think he [the teacher candidate] felt that way too. He [the teacher candidate] came the second week of November and I was still working on report cards and he was there until Christmas. It was so busy. It was unreal.

Not only is the *lack* of time an issue for associate teachers, but also the *quality* of that time as well. Three of the associate teachers commented on the difficulty of finding time to mentally unwind and “recharge one’s batteries.” Jennifer described how at the end of the practicum she was relieved to have some time to herself:
I was glad when she [teacher candidate] left because I was like, “Ah…I’m back to myself.” So it’s a lot of extra work in terms of you’re always thinking. Not that you’re never always thinking but you’re thinking in different ways. You’ve always got to be there for them.

Jane, also, shared how she missed her “alone time” and found it challenging to be constantly “on” for the teacher candidate:

You know what I found to be the hardest part is that there’s not a lot of ‘by yourself’ time. So every recess, every lunch, and every planning time and then every day until 4:30, she’s [teacher candidate] there. You can never just be like on your planning time—turn on your radio and sort of zone out because they’re always there.

It is somewhat predictable that the least helpful aspect of being an associate teacher is connected to time. One only need spend a few days in a school setting to discover how issues connected to time are very real and omnipresent. Given the complexity and isolated nature of teachers’ work, it is not surprising that adding another layer of responsibility, that of associate teacher, further compounds the already pressing issue of time and its availability (Koerner, 1992).

Other Concerns

Lack of time was the most significant concern for the associate teachers; however, a few of them also shared other concerns; notably, a loss of autonomy in the classroom, a flawed associate teacher selection, and issues around classroom management.

Traditionally classroom teachers still maintain a certain amount of autonomy in their classroom. Although curriculum content for various grade levels is decided upon by external governmental agencies such as the Ministry of Education in the case of Ontario, the means of delivering the curriculum is decided upon by teachers. A few of the associate teachers in this study struggled with relinquishing this autonomy. As Kate
pondered over the positive and negative aspects of being an associate teacher, she commented:

I mean there are positives and negatives. As I said, it’s hard for someone to give up the…like I had my program; especially my language arts program. It was very difficult to hand over. I had worked hard on that program with [name of teaching partner]. We found it really difficult for us being totally aligned. We were handing off pieces of it to the student teacher and felt a little out in left field.

As Sandra described her work as an associate teacher, she described how “letting go” was extremely challenging:

Yeah, it seemed like it would be a lot easier than I thought it would be. I thought it was just going to be, “Oh, I’m going to get all these great ideas. I’m going to share. I’m going to collaborate.” Then you realize, wow, I have to let go of my control. And I like to have control. I’m that type of person, as many teachers are, I think. So, that was something I wasn’t really prepared for.

In addition to a loss of autonomy, a few of the associate teachers spoke directly of how they were chosen to be associate teachers. This is an interesting line of inquiry, as this question was not asked directly of the participants [see Appendices D, E, and F]. As noted earlier, the literature suggests that associate teachers are often chosen by school administration and sometimes for the wrong reasons. For example, weak teachers are sometimes asked to be associate teachers with the hope that it will inspire them and that they might learn from the teacher candidate. Overall, what was most disconcerting about the associate teachers’ comments is the apparent lack of consideration in choosing associate teachers and their sense of resignation about the whole process.

Sandra noted with amusement how she was haphazardly chosen to be an associate teacher at the beginning of the year:

My principal came to me and asked if I would do it [be an associate teacher]. He said, “I think you would do well with this person.” Yeah, well, I didn’t even apply to do it [laughter]. Actually, he came the day before school started and asked, “Ah, I kind of need somebody.” So, yeah, I volunteered.
Natasha, also, with a certain amount of amusement and resignation spoke of how she was “voluntold” for the role of associate teacher.

Well, a few years ago our principal was somehow associated with a teachers’ college. It was a new model of having student teachers in one school the whole year rather than traveling amongst other schools. So, in the spring he *voluntold* us to do that. And then he moved on to become a superintendent and the new principal came in at our first staff meeting and said, “Could I meet with X, Y, and Z to talk about the student teachers that are going to be in your classrooms.” And we were kind of like “What?” [Laughter] We didn’t actually sign up in particular.”

Charlene commented on how she was chosen as an associate teacher, “I’m not sure why he [the principal] approached me, but [laughing] he might have approached everyone. I don’t know.”

In addition to a loss of autonomy and a questionable selection process, a few of the associate teachers also noted their worries about the ability of teacher candidates to handle classroom management. It is well established that classroom management is critical to the running of an efficient classroom to ensure that quality student learning takes place. It is interesting to note that stances on classroom management have changed dramatically over the years moving from a focus on intervention to a focus on prevention (Brophy, 1988; Weinstein, 1999). Additionally, often motivated by a sense of moral purpose, teachers are hesitant to allow teacher candidates to *undo* the sense of order they have established or are trying to establish in the classroom.

As Jennifer shared her concerns about having a teacher candidate in the classroom, she mentioned how she had changed her practice as an associate teacher over the years. Originally, she gave full rein to the teachers candidates; however, she soon learned that this was folly.
I learned very quickly that it was horrendous. I had to establish routines after they left. Now I have a disclaimer that I want you to learn as much as you can here, but you have to do it with my routines because I can’t re-teach these routines after. So, I tell them to please watch as I deal with this behaviour and manage or guide this behaviour. I’m going to have to ask you to treat them [the students] the way that I’m finding it successful this year because it’s too long of a year for me to re-do it when you leave.

Kate explained how she found it challenging at times to watch her teacher candidate teach. She was not sure about when to allow the teacher candidate the opportunity to learn from his mistakes and when to step in and take over the class.

I think as a teacher sometimes it is hard to watch the class get out of control and become chaotic. For me that was really difficult to bite my tongue and not say anything just because he [teacher candidate] needed to find his own style to deal with them behaviourally as well. So, absolutely that was uncomfortable.

3. More Role Clarification

The job of the cooperating teacher is to help the student teacher develop a deep and meaningful concept of teaching, to help the student teacher analyze the many facets of teaching, to provide the student teacher with sources and resources, and to encourage the student teacher’s unique teaching behaviour. (Copas, 1984, p.50)

This section explores how the ten associate teachers involved in this study perceived their role in the practicum. It is a common assumption among researchers that the role of the associate teacher is poorly understood and inadequately defined (Ganser, 1996; Knowles & Cole, 1996). Furthermore, the role is scarcely even acknowledged in the research (Bullough & Draper, 2004).

Despite what is said in the literature, all 10 associate teachers had a general sense of their role in the practicum. Most associate teachers were comfortable referring to their role using terms such as, mentor, role model, or coach. This inconsistency with the
literature is not at all surprising given the inconsistency of terminology not only in the research literature, but also in the Ontario Numeracy and Literacy Secretariat.

Many associate teachers, however, were less comfortable providing a detailed description of that role. Despite being provided with a binder that included a description of their role, only one associate teacher actually referred specifically to its contents. Paula referenced the information directly when she noted, “It’s pretty spelled out in the binder what you do, but at the same time you have to say, ‘How much am I going to let them do? That was something I had to figure out.’”

Despite the role ambiguity, or possibly because of the ambiguity, it is important to explore and make sense of what exactly the associate teachers did say about their role in the practicum. The analysis of the data revealed four relatively strong themes namely, mentor, un-masker, keeper of the profession, and evaluator. In the following sections these themes will be described in more depth. A few associate teachers did allude to other roles such as protector and motivator. These roles were not strongly represented in the data; however, their inclusion in the discussion helps to provide a rich and textured picture of associate teachers in the preservice practicum.

It should be noted for clarity that while the associate teachers in this study confirmed they received, prior to the practicum, literature from the respective programs outlining and describing their role and responsibilities, they did not participate in any courses or workshops to prepare them for their role as associate teacher.
Mentor

Mentoring is traditionally defined as “a personal or professional relationship between two people—a knowing experienced professional and a protégé or mentee” (Mullen, 2005, p. 2). Indeed, there is a perception in some of the research that mentoring is a simple and predictable activity between two people focused on skill acquisition (Kram, 1985; Rix & Gold, 2000).

For the purposes of this study, I argue for a more complex definition of mentor. In addition to the traditional definition, I contend that a mentor is also someone who is interested in guiding the learning of the mentee and concerned with the mentee’s overall growth (Stanulis & Russell, 2000). Implicit in the notions of “guiding the learning and overall growth” are other notions that should be considered such as, “coaching, assisting, guiding, advising, leading, teaching, learning, readiness, compensation, support, and socialization” (Rix & Gold, 2000, p. 2). Last and clearly supported in the literature, when associate teachers mentor teacher candidates, they also take on the role of being a friend, an encourager, a counselor, a nurturer, and an evaluator (Anderson & Shannon, 1988; Franke & Dahlgren, 1996; Hawkey, 1997, 1998; Hudson, Skamp, & Brooks, 2005; Fieman-Nemser, 2001, as cited in Jaipal, 2009).

In light of a comprehensive definition of mentoring, most of the associate teachers in this study perceived themselves as mentors, at least to some extent. Jennifer, who had the most years of experience as an associate teacher, described in detail how she perceived her role. She spoke of how she felt it was her job to show the teacher candidate the “whole ball of wax.” Her description of her role included the many attributes associated with mentoring:
My job is to model philosophy and you can’t just model teaching strategies. You have to show the whole ball of wax—what teaching really is. So you show your relationship with your students, your relationship with other staff—your relationship and your responsibilities as a teacher, and as a staff member because they are different. You show your relationship with your parallel staff, your peers within the division, your responsibilities, and relationships with your administrators. You need to show what it means to build a relationship and your responsibilities to everyone and yourself. I really believe strongly in providing a place for you to practice being a teacher.

Charlene clearly indicated that her role was not to direct teacher candidates but rather to facilitate their learning. “My role is a facilitator and to stand back and watch what they [teacher candidates] do. What is their style? I can suggest, guide, and advise but not tell.” From her comments, Charlene indicated that she is interested in not only ensuring that teacher candidates have the basic skills necessary for teaching, but also the more advanced skills required for teaching over the long-term. Charlene recognized that learning to teach is not acquired through transmission but rather through situated learning that is constructed and socially mediated.

Paula preferred to use the more antiquated analogy of “master craftsman” and “apprentice” in her description of the associate teacher role. While Paula acknowledged that she saw herself and the teacher candidate as being equals, she also recognized that she is at an advantage because of her experience in the classroom.

So, it’s like two metal workers right? And you’re the like the master craftsman and they’re the apprentice. They’ve done enough school to know how you make this. They can make it, but you know how to make it quicker and you can make it look better. You’re the fine tuner. We’re on equal footing for sure, you’re like a friend but at the same time there’s a bit of weight to what you say because they know you have the experience.

Although the associate teachers in this study used different labels such as, mentor, facilitator, or even “master craftsman” to describe their role in the practicum, they all shared a similar purpose. They were clearly engaged in guiding the learning of the
teacher candidate and recognized that learning to teach is complex. Natasha succinctly described the perplexity of the associate teacher’s role when she commented, “It’s strange but I think you can’t *teach* what it means to be a teacher.”

Given the lack of agreement and “ambiguous guidelines” concerning the role of the associate teacher (Koerner, 1992), it was not surprising to find a lack in consistency in how the associate teachers referred to their role. Individually, associate teachers are left to construct their own role description, which is indelibly shaped by the idiosyncratic nature of their work and personal experiences. Regardless of the label used and regardless of their personal experiences, all of the associate teachers were sincerely concerned with mentoring teacher candidates so that these teacher candidates would experience professional growth not only for their immediate needs, but also for their future needs.

*Discloser of Secrets*

Another indication of how associate teachers perceived their role was the extent to which they mentioned the importance of allowing teacher candidates to experience the “real” world of teaching. Many of the associate teachers spoke directly in terms of initiating teacher candidates into the practical world of teaching and shared how they attempted to *disclose* the little known aspects of classroom life. When associate teachers alluded to “hidden secrets,” they were usually referring to aspects of teaching such as locating resources, classroom management, and all the “little tricks”. This part of the associate teachers’ role was in direct contrast to what they perceived to be the university’s role, which was to provide the theoretical base for teacher candidates.
Jane expressed her surprise at how little her teacher candidate knew about the real world of the classroom. With reading strategies as a board-wide, and even province wide initiative, Jane felt they had “barely” been touched upon in the preservice program. She also spoke of how the preservice program focused on other initiatives which were of little practical use:

Some stuff she had a lot of information about and other stuff she never heard about. She came out with little information on classroom management, which we spent a lot of time talking about. Reading strategies were barely touched upon [in the preservice program] which surprised me because it’s such a buzzword right now for all of us. And yet they only had one class on it or something. And then some of the things that they did spend time on, which I remember from teachers’ college, are so insignificant in reality. You know, you don’t even use it.

Natasha was worried about creating an authentic experience for her teacher candidate. She wanted to make sure the teacher candidate understood that while the practicum was a useful experience, it didn’t fully prepare one for the realities of teaching. Natasha pointed out that the preservice program was useful but it was not equipped to provide a true picture:

I wanted to show her [the teacher candidate] that, “Okay, this is how you are being told to do it and that’s good, but when you have your own class and you’re in the midst of teaching, you’re not going to be able to do that. So, here’s some ideas on how to survive teaching 8 different subjects to 25 grade two’s.”

Allison, in describing her role, talked about some of the realities of the classroom teacher that are unknown to the world of the university. It is a well-known fact in schools that resources are scarce and that teachers sometimes become protective over these resources. Allison referred to this reality when she described the “little secrets” that are in some ways foreign to preservice programs. In her comments she flippantly talked about “stealing” resources:
I think being an associate teacher is about sharing those secret little tricks that we learn so we’re not all reinventing the wheel. These are the experiences that maybe they can’t train you for in teachers’ college. I think at the base of that you need to give them insight into what resources do we have in this board. How do you start to design or program a lesson, a unit or an entire school year? What are the bare bones of your program and how do you build it up? So sharing that…sharing how you steal resources [laughter]. Um, and I think those are experiences that they maybe can’t train you for in teachers’ college.

Even though on the surface the associate teachers spoke often of un-masking the secret world of the classroom teacher, below the surface they were most concerned with ensuring that the practicum was an authentic experience and felt it was incumbent upon them to initiate teacher candidates into the “real” world of teaching. Beck and Kosnik (2000) contend associate teachers who view their role in this manner are taking on an apprenticeship approach. Moreover, it is noted in the research that the apprenticeship model is built on the notion that real learning takes place when students “work on the authentic tasks in real settings of application or practice…where both teacher and learning are rooted in the doing of work, not just in talking about it” (Pratt, Arseneau, & Collins, 2001, p. 6 as cited in Clark & Jarvis-Selinger, 2005, p. 66).

The apprenticeship model is sometimes approached from a sympathetic stance with the associate teacher seeking to help the teacher candidate, or from a “sink or swim” stance with the associate teacher initiating teacher candidates into the tough reality of teaching (Beck & Kosnik, 2000). The associate teachers in this study, for the most part, were partial to the sympathetic approach, although Charlene spoke of how she ignored the advice of the preservice program and “threw her [the teacher candidate] right in since this is what really happens in schools.”

It is interesting to note that the apprenticeship approach has been criticized for not allowing intellectual growth since the learner is copying rather than constructing.
knowledge (Zeichner & Liston, 1990). In rejecting that argument, Clarke and Jarvis-Selinger (2005) point out that according to “Schön (1987) imitation is a creative act, where ‘master’ models both the practice and the intellectual processes that underlie the practice, and that the reconstruction of that practice ‘apprentice’ requires sophisticated intellectual work on the part of the learner” (p. 67). Unfortunately, the extent to which the associate teachers in this study actually modeled the “intellectual processes” of teaching was not entirely clear in the data.

Guardian of the Profession

In addition to the associate teachers’ desires to mentor teacher candidates and unmask the ‘real’ world of teaching, over half of them also perceived of their role as “guardians of the profession.” From the interviews, it was evident that many of the associate teachers thought it was necessary for teacher candidates to develop a critical stance regarding their future profession as teachers. This stance contradicts some of the research, which suggests that associate teachers tend to focus on the immediate needs of teacher candidates and the teaching moment, rather than issues more analytical or critical in nature (Guyton & McIntyre, 1990).

Jennifer expressed concern that teacher candidates needed to keep student learning at the forefront of their practice. She was cognizant that teacher candidates soon become colleagues and in recent times “student achievement” has become somewhat of the collective mantra for all schools:

So, if I want to work with people who have a focus on student achievement I better put my neck out there and say, “Come on in and let’s work together and make you a really strong candidate. You need to really think about this and make it part of everything you do.”
Sandra acknowledged the importance of “reflective practice in teaching” which has also been popularized by the work of the Ontario Literacy and Numeracy Secretariat in schools and school boards through their work with critical learning pathways (CLIP) or teaching learning cycles (TLC). She explained that in her role she tries to help teacher candidates understand the importance of being receptive to new ideas.

So, I think I need to help them see the process of being reflective and guide them through that. They [teacher candidates] need to be able to communicate well and come to teaching with an open mind. Just be willing to accept new ideas and be open to suggestions.

Brenda’s suggestions echo Sandra’s regarding the importance of reflection and the need to be aware of teaching from a “bigger” perspective. She explained, “[A]nd I actually think student teachers need to be receptive to that [being reflective] because we all know in a school it isn’t just being in the classroom. It’s not the only thing you do. It’s not unto itself.”

Associate teachers in this study were not solely committed to sharing the basics about teaching. They were also concerned about allowing teacher candidates to explore a more critical stance about their own practice so that they, too, might become “guardians of the profession.”

Indeed, some of the associate teachers’ comments suggest they function within a critical interventionist model. In this model, associate teachers encourage teacher candidates to question the complexity of teaching by engaging in critical dialogue with the ultimate goal of transforming teaching and learning (Beck & Kosnik, 2000; Goodlad, 1990). It is indeed hopeful that the associate teachers in this study seem to contradict the work of Guyton and McIntyre (1990) who suggest that “analysis and reflection on
teaching” (p. 525) are rare in interactions between associate teachers and teacher candidates.

**Evaluator**

As evidenced in the research (Clarke, 2006; Ralph, 2003), many of the associate teachers in this study struggled with the assessment and evaluation of teacher candidates. As confirmed in the research, associate teachers find this aspect of their role uncomfortable and challenging. While associate teachers are proficient with providing feedback in the classroom to students, they tend to feel less proficient with teacher candidates and feel they need some professional development in this regard (Clarke, 2006). To further compound their sentiments, associate teachers are in a challenging position of “having to establish a special relationship that allows them to be peers while at the same time supervising, instructing, and critiquing their student teachers” (Koerner, 1992, p. 52).

Allison described the uneasiness she felt in the evaluation process. She contended the evaluation process was too broad and overwhelming for the teacher candidate. “That [evaluation] was kind of uncomfortable because just having to think about so many things. I was just thinking let’s just focus on one thing—you don’t want—you don’t want it to be overwhelming.”

Natasha explained that she worked diligently at trying to put a positive slant on her feedback even if she felt improvement was warranted:

I found that difficult to tell something [to the teacher candidate] that wasn’t really great. So I would spend a lot of time trying to phrase it so that it would sound positive. It was like writing report cards, you always have to start off with something positive and then you might say, “...but when you did such and such, you need to change that.”
Allison felt conflicted about the evaluation process as she worked in French immersion and, with the scarcity of French immersion teachers at the time, her teacher candidate would very likely be a colleague of hers in the near future: “It was hard to do, too, because the board was ‘pool hiring’ at that time; so now this person [teacher candidate] is almost a colleague that I’m evaluating and will have to work with her down the road.”

Most of the associate teachers in this study expressed concern regarding their role in the assessment and evaluation of teacher candidates. As evidenced in the research of Sanders et al. (2005), the associate teachers in this study felt conflicted within the relationship, especially if the feedback was negative. Throughout the practicum the associate teachers had carefully built a solid relationship with the teacher candidate and did not want this relationship jeopardized.

This sense of discomfort with feedback and evaluation speaks to a need for associate teachers to participate in some kind of preparation program where they can effectively learn the skills involved in offering both positive and negative feedback (Cole & Sorrill, 1992). Sanders et al. (2005) note that associate teachers’ hesitancy towards evaluation and assessment may be based on “insecurity” with their role and that,

[T]he present research extends this observation by making it clear that uncertainty among associate teachers, as opposed to a lack of evaluative ability per se, may be at the heart of associate teachers’ apparent reluctance to provide extensive and intensive evaluations to preservice teachers. (p. 727)

The findings from the associate teachers in this study and from the research literature indicate that associate teachers want to be more meaningfully involved in teacher education (Koerner, 1992; Mitchell, Clarke, & Nuttall, 2007). More meaningful involvement for associate teachers includes a stronger sense of leadership in mentoring
The associate teacher in the preservice practicum

(Stanulis, 1995; Zeichner, 1992) and more preparation for the role (Koerner, 1992; Korinek, 1989).

4. Wishful Thinking

In addition to a more defined role, the associate teachers in this study wished for considerably more. These deeper concerns were expressed as wishing for the preservice program to be more aware of the associate teacher’s world and its challenges; wishing for the university supervisor to be more present (in a supportive as well as physical sense); and wishing for teacher candidates to be more responsive. The following sections will explore these three themes as expressed by the associate teachers.

More Awareness

Over half of the associate teachers spoke of how the preservice program was not aware of the complex and hectic lives of associate teachers in schools. This lack of awareness was manifest in the preservice programs’ unrealistic expectations regarding the workload of both associate teachers and teacher candidates. Moreover, there was a perceived disregard of the hectic school schedules and a failure to fully communicate the components of the preservice program.

Natasha discussed the need for preservice programs to be aware of teacher candidates’ workloads. She explained that often teacher candidates are given numerous writing assignments when they are in the midst of participating in the practicum. She contended that preservice programs need to be more aware of this dilemma and strive for a better balance:
I think [preservice programs] have to recognize that this is a person that is in the beginning stages of being a teacher. They need to recognize that they are just learning and be sensitive to that fact. They [teacher candidates] have a huge workload as far as academic workloads go that are not necessarily thought through as to the—what’s the word I’m looking for—as to the balance. All of a sudden they might be doing 3 weeks of 50 percent teaching in your classroom; but meanwhile back at the university [preservice program], they’ve gone and given them 5 papers to be due.

Jane described how the preservice program had unrealistic expectations regarding the participation of associate teachers in activities outside the realm of the classroom. She discussed how the expectation of participating in an on-line discussion was not practical:

I know when they first started they really wanted us [associate teachers] to be part of that email group that they set up and participating in the chat groups with students and like that was well above and beyond what I could keep up with.

Brenda and Paula both observed that the preservice program was somewhat out of touch and unaware of what was happening in the practicum. Brenda was concerned about how the preservice program did not elicit much feedback from the associate teachers during the final practicum “I can’t understand why you would spend six weeks, for example, in the last practicum with a student and then not get the associate teacher’s feedback.” Paula, moreover, spoke of how the preservice program needed to be more in tune with the school calendar, “One thing to think about for sure is timing. Don’t throw them [teacher candidates] in when the school year is really busy. The worst time would be in those November/December and May/June periods. Those would be bad times.”

More Presence

Eight out of ten associate teachers felt the university supervisors should have had a more sustained presence during the practicum. Associate teachers agreed that university supervisors performed their duties well but they also expressed a wish for more
consistent presence. Many expressed concerns about not only the amount of time
university supervisors actually spend at the school site, but also the *quality* of that time.

In describing the university supervisor’s visits, Allison indicated a concern with
the cursory and perfunctory nature of the visits:

He had come in to watch her teach that first week that she was at the other school.
So that [supervision] had happened in that setting and he didn’t need to supervise
her again. That was checked off the list. That was the last placement so that
[supervision] wasn’t a priority.

Grace discussed the visits by the university supervisor in the same light. She described
how he made superficial contact and seemed to be more concerned that procedures were
being followed accurately rather than being concerned with the teacher candidate’s
teaching:

No, he [university supervisor] wasn’t there a lot. He came out once kind of
midway through and he watched her [teacher candidate] teach and then gave her
oral feedback. Then at the end he came out again to observe her one more time
and he gave me a letter at that point, you know, just reminding me with what I
needed to fill out for her in the end for evaluation purposes and that was it really.

Sandra spoke of how she felt a lack of personal connection with the university
supervisor. She also expressed concern about how the visits from the university
supervisor were causing undue stress for the teacher candidate and how, as the associate
teacher, she felt somewhat in the middle:

We didn’t have a lot of communication. It was set up more for appointments and
convenience. It’s a little awkward, especially not knowing this person coming in
and your student teacher is really nervous. Besides it’s a little awkward also when
they [faculty advisors] want to talk with you afterwards and, to be honest, I didn’t
feel like what I was saying to him was all that important to him anyway.

Natasha spoke of how the university supervisor was inconsistent and
uncommunicative during her visits to observe the teacher candidates. Natasha recounted
how she would sometimes arrive late, which made Natasha feel protective of the teacher candidates:

We had no idea how often she was supposed to see the students. Was she going to meet with us? We were not impressed with her professionalism at all and that’s an issue we dealt with quietly with the student teachers. She would show up for five minutes then leave. She didn’t seem to have any guidelines as to what she was doing and it was very disappointing for us to see that happening to these students. We became very protective of them.

More Responsiveness

Although the associate teachers’ comments regarding the teacher candidates were nearly all positive, more than half of them remarked on feeling disappointment regarding the teacher candidates’ lack of responsiveness and enthusiasm to feedback. While studies indicate that the development of a strong bond between associate teacher and teacher candidate is essential to the development of a beneficial relationship (Clarke, 2006; Graham, 2006; Jaipal, 2009), there were clearly occasions when associate teachers struggled with this relationship, especially in terms of the teacher candidates’ ability to respond to the realities of the classroom and to respond to associate teachers’ feedback.

Brenda spoke of how teacher candidates have difficulty taking what they learn in the preservice program and applying it in the classroom. Brenda discussed how sometimes teacher candidates are unwilling to respond to needed accommodations and also have unrealistic expectations. Brenda pointed out:

I think of the misnomers of student teachers right now is that they are coming into the classroom and think that the practicum is going to fit nicely with the theory and it doesn’t. I find [teacher candidates] these days come into the classroom and they’re like “But I didn’t learn this and I didn’t learn that. And I don’t know how to do this and this.”
A couple of the associate teachers remarked on how the teacher candidates were not always receptive to feedback. The associate teachers found the teacher candidates’ lack of receptivity to advice to be rather disturbing, as it seemed to violate the associate teachers’ “internalized sense of the requirements of the profession” (Sanders et al., p. 728).

Jennifer described how she found it frustrating that her teacher candidate didn’t want to listen to advice: “He just didn’t take feedback very well. He didn’t want to listen to the how. He just taught and that is against my philosophy.” Charlene explained how she tried to connect with her teacher candidate; however, her suggestions were not well received:

She just didn’t listen to a single thing and yet, she was talking about her previous placements and she said, ‘Oh, the teachers there didn’t give me any feedback.’ So, I was giving her lots of feedback and she didn’t follow any of it.

Natasha voiced her disappointment over her teacher candidate’s lack of enthusiasm. Natasha described how she struggled with “telling people what they’re doing wrong;” yet when she did provide feedback to her teacher candidate, Natasha noted little or no response:

I had someone scheduled to come in and she was very shy. She was very timid with not a lot of classroom management skills. Her enthusiasm wasn’t there as much as you had hoped for, you know. You have to have enough confidence to be standing up in front of the class and be able to project your voice and all those kinds of things. You have to have that enthusiasm if you really, really want to be a teacher and I didn’t see that in her.

All the associate teachers, in different ways, wished for improvements to the practicum. Some wished for more awareness of the work of associate teachers and school life. Zeichner (1990) asserts that this is not unexpected given that associate teachers see their world as being very distinct from the world of the preservice program. The school
and the preservice program are two very different places culturally. The boundaries between the two are complex and, sometimes, counterproductive (Clandinin, 1993). Indeed, there still exists a belief that preservice programs are only interested in “knowledge and theory, whereas schools only value the application of knowledge and theory” (Zeichner, 1992 in Ganser 1996, p. 216).

Some wished for more of a presence from the university supervisors in terms of time spent at school sites and the quality of that participation. It is well documented in the research that the practicum experience is strengthened when instructional staff [faculty advisors] make successive visits to the practicum site (Beck & Kosnik, 2006; Bullough & Gitlin, 1995; Ducharme & Ducharme, 1999; Tom, 1997).

Some wished for more responsiveness from teacher candidates in terms of their commitment to applying what they learned in the preservice program to the classroom, their level of enthusiasm, or their ability to accept feedback. Even though associate teachers made efforts to connect with their teacher candidates, they must additionally contend with their busy schedules as classroom teachers. This will continue to be a problem for associate teachers until more time is allowed for associate teachers to get to know and connect with their teacher candidate. “Few [preservice programs], if any, actually validate [the social dimension] by allocating time for the practicum partners to get to know one another” (Clarke, 2006, p. 919).

The comments expressed by the associate teachers may seem a bit harsh at times but they are in many ways congruent with Beck and Kosnik’s (2000) finding that,

Despite our associate teachers’ intention, just noted, to be supportive, positive, and helpful—which they undoubtedly were, to a degree—our formal and informal data revealed the reality to be somewhat different. Their supervision at times was rather ‘tough’ in certain respects. (p. 217)
This “toughness” of associate teachers might well be as a result of associate teachers taking their role very seriously. Furthermore, as suggested by Sanders et al. (2005), it might also be as a result of “uncertainty” regarding their role.

5. Emotional Practice of Associate Teachers

Undoubtedly, the practicum is not an emotion-free zone and it was never imagined that it could be. (Hastings, 2004, p. 144)

Traditionally, studies examining the relationship between associate teachers and teacher candidates have focused on teacher candidates’ perspectives (Koerner, Rust, & Baumgartner, 2002; Veal & Rikard, 1998). Recently, studies have begun to include associate teachers’ perspectives and indicate that a well-established relationship between associate teachers and teacher candidates contributes to an advantageous practicum for all involved (Clarke, 2006; Graham, 2006; Jaipal, 2009). Associate teachers frequently identify their role as “supporting and nurturing student teachers” (Borko & Mayfield, 1995 as cited in Beck & Kosnik, 2000, p. 217).

As expected, the development of a sympathetic relationship between associate teachers and teacher candidates necessitates much effort on behalf of both parties. Indeed, with regard to associate teachers, it is noted in the research literature that the relationship associate teachers build with teacher candidates is taxing and could be perceived as “emotional work” (Bullough & Draper, 2004; Hastings, 2004; Mitchell, Clarke, & Nuttall, 2007).

In my research, I found that all the associate teachers in this study were engaged to some extent in emotional work vis-à-vis the teacher candidates. As indicated earlier (in
Chapter 2), Hastings (2004) suggests that associate teachers make emotional connections with teacher candidates. She employs the sociological term “emotional labour” to describe how associate teachers must manage their feelings. Just as “[good teachers] are emotional, passionate beings who connect with their students and fill their work and their classes with pleasure, creativity, challenge, and joy” (Hargreaves, 1998, p. 835), so too are “good” associate teachers. They are also emotional and passionate beings who connect with teacher candidates. This section explores the emotions of the associate teachers as evidenced in the data. Their emotional work is evidenced in the themes of sympathy, responsibility, disappointment, anxiety, guilt, and attachment.

**Sympathy**

A few of the associate teachers spoke of how they felt sympathy for the teacher candidates during the practicum experience. Clearly, the associate teachers had created close bonds with the teacher candidates and to some degree felt protective over them. Additionally, it was obvious the associate teachers were very cognizant of the complexity of learning to teach and wanted to alleviate some of the stress for the teacher candidates.

Natasha in her interview remarked how the practicum can be very stressful for teacher candidates. In particular, she noted how the preservice program associated with her school was not aware of the stresses placed upon teacher candidates. She shared how she found the preservice program to be too demanding and unfair by insisting that teacher candidates attend school even if weather conditions are dangerous.

They [teacher candidates] were really tired and so I think as an associate teacher, you have to kind of recognize that what they’re doing in your classroom is big and they’ve got a lot of stress. Like if it’s a snowy day and they can’t make it, they have to supposedly make it up. One woman who lived up north…she had a farm way up
north and it was a snow day and her kid’s busses were cancelled and schools were closed. She was still expected to make it down to us. So those are just little things, but you should be sensitive to the fact that these are people too.

When describing her role as an associate teacher, Brenda shared how she is sympathetic to teacher candidates and tries to break down the learning into “manageable” chunks:

I can’t expect them to be where I’m at. So, I have to keep thinking what are the things they need to learn. How can I break things down into smaller chunks—little mini units, mini lessons? Try this—try that, and if this doesn’t work always have something up your sleeve.

Grace, in recounting her teacher candidate’s experience with a full day of teaching, was clearly conscious of how the practicum can be an overwhelming and stressful experience when she stated, “When she fully started teaching there was a lot of ‘deer in the headlights’ kind of thing at the end of the day.”

**Responsibility**

In addition to feeling sympathy for the teacher candidates, a number of the associate teachers talked about feeling responsible for teacher candidates. This strong sense of responsibility was particularly evident in how they felt towards preparing teacher candidates for future employment.

Charlene, when talking about her role as an associate teacher, saw herself as being very responsible for the teacher candidate’s success in the practicum placement. She remarked, “Like I look at it like a personal failure that they don’t learn.” Sandra shared that the teacher candidate was like one of her students and wanted to make sure he was successful in his quest for a teaching placement:

My student teacher, he’s always coming in saying, “I have an interview. What do I
need to do?” So it’s constant…constant feedback and I don’t think it…well I hope it won’t end until he is on his feet. It’s like he was one of my students. I didn’t want to let him go until I knew he was going to be successful.

Natasha spoke tenderly about a very touching story regarding a teacher candidate whose father passed away during the practicum placement. In Natasha’s telling of the story it was clear that she was attached to this teacher candidate and was rooting for her success in securing a job.

She did miss a week and a half when he passed away, but she came back and that was amazing and inspiring to see a young person so dedicated. She really wanted to get her teaching degree and so that’s what she did, even though everyone else had finished. She came back and put in that extra week at the end of her schooling. Now she’s back doing volunteer work and she’s actually on the supply list and got called back to our school a few times. So, your hope is that they’re going to be successful in the real world you know.

**Disappointment**

In addition to feelings of sympathy and responsibility, almost half of the associate teachers expressed feelings of disappointment in their teacher candidates. Most of the disappointment expressed by associate teachers centered on the teacher candidate’s lack of preparation or lack of commitment to the profession.

Allison, a French immersion teacher, discussed the feeling of disappointment she had when the teacher candidate did not fully prepare the lesson. In particular, Allison noted that the teacher candidate had failed to read a chosen text before giving it to students. This practice is discouraged at all times in teaching, and is particularly discouraged in French immersion as students are very likely to encounter unknown words:

I feel like I gave a lot and then you always hope that she gained a lot. Sometimes, she would give the kids something to read and it did surprise me that she had not
read it or there’s always terminology that you might not use in your everyday speech in French and she didn’t know some of those.

Jane indicated that working with a teacher candidate who doesn’t have a strong commitment to the profession is disappointing. Jane’s remarks underline the emotionally challenging position associate teachers find themselves in when dealing with teacher candidates who are “difficult”:

If you don’t get a positive one [teacher candidate], though, it can be difficult. I had a gentleman and he didn’t want to take any of my feedback and he wouldn’t change what he was doing. He’d never been in a classroom…I was shocked. He just didn’t get it. It’s a lot of work. It’s not just, “I’ll take this blackline master and photocopy it.

Brenda raised the very important issue of a teacher candidate who disappointed her by not “pulling his weight.” She confided that this is indicative of some teacher candidates who come to teaching for the wrong reasons:

I’ve had a [teacher candidate] in the past who just wasn’t pulling his weight you know. I would have soccer practice at 8 o’clock in the morning and it was like, “Hey, you need to be here on Monday morning,” but then he just wouldn’t show. And some people come in with that attitude of, you know, “I’ve got 2 months off in the summer!”

Charlene’s comments regarding her disappointment with a past practicum experience provide a powerful summary, “I also took a teacher from [name of preservice program] and that was not a good experience. And if that had been my first experience as an associate teacher, I probably wouldn’t do it again.”

Anxiety

That associate teachers carry a strong sense of responsibility towards teacher candidates and often work extensively, almost exhaustively, at ensuring the practicum experience is rewarding for teacher candidates is borne out in the research literature (Beck & Kosnik,
2000; Borko & Mayfield, 1995). It comes as no surprise that:

In an attempt to ensure a successful experience especially for a struggling student, [associate teachers] go to extraordinary lengths in an attempt to ensure that they themselves are not seen as a failing in their role and that the student achieves the best possible result. (Hastings, 2004, p. 139)

However, sometimes the cost of ensuring a successful practicum experience for the teacher candidate is increased anxiety for the associate teacher. Although overall the practicum was a positive experience for all 10 associate teachers, six out of the ten associate teachers pointed out during the interview they experienced anxiety regarding their preparedness for the role.

Grace was particularly concerned with making sure she was prepared for the teacher candidate by coming in over the holiday to not only make sure the physical classroom was ready, but also to make sure she was “set” in her head:

I spent a good week of my Christmas holidays just tidying my room and really getting set in my head how I wanted things to go so that I would be able to give her [teacher candidate] my focus and not have to worry about it you know...so I guess I was a bit anxious that was a big part of it. And I did wonder, you know, “Am I ready for this?”

Jennifer spoke of her experience in the first week of the practicum, which incidentally coincided with the first week of school. In general, the first week in a classroom is a stressful time for teachers as they are engrossed in very immediate and practical preparations:

It was a bit disconcerting from an associate’s point of view when I first thought about it. I thought, “Oh, I don’t want someone there the first week. I’m pretty busy. I don’t have time to explain what I’m doing.” I thought, “I’ll try but I’m not going to have time to explain. It’s more learning from what I do this week because I have so much to set up.” So you’re always worried about, “Did I give you enough information, have I answered all your questions, are you good for tomorrow?”

Jane reflected on her first experience as an associate teacher in which she woefully
admits, “I think I was in my sixth year of teaching when I had my first one [teacher candidate]. I remember saying, ‘Oh my gosh, she’s going to think this is how you teach!’”

Feeling anxiety suggests that one is feeling unsure about the outcome of an event or an experience. More than half of the associate teachers in this study experienced feelings of anxiety about the practicum. Teaching is an emotional practice to be sure. Associate teachers, along with all teachers, will always experience emotions, even intense emotions; however, I argue that a more defined role for associate teachers that is clearly communicated will help to alleviate some of this anxiety.

**Guilt**

Additionally, virtually all of the associate teachers alluded to feeling guilty about various aspects of the practicum experience. Did they provide enough support? Were they fair to the teacher candidate? Did they provide a well-rounded experience? Furthermore, a few of the associate teachers were conscious of the perception of their colleagues, who might be feeling envious, and expressed guilt about this. Hargreaves (1998) talks about the emotional work of teachers and notes that many teachers experience “intolerable guilt and burn-out” (p. 836).

Despite circumstances being beyond her control, Paula explained how she felt guilty about not providing the richest experience for the teacher candidate as he started his practicum at the most challenging time in the school year. “He [teacher candidate] came in and it was an issue because I found it bad timing. I should have been doing so many more things but I was kind of finishing off units instead of beginning them.”
Charlene conveyed how she felt poorly about a less than stellar evaluation she prepared for a teacher candidate. Charlene struggled with how to phrase her wording on the evaluation form and was not yet comfortable with this experience:

I wanted to give her credit. I would have liked to give her credit that potentially she could be an amazing teacher and it’s just the situation that caused [the problems] but I can’t. When you’re dealing with children you can always place a positive spin on it like the ‘yet factor’. I haven’t mastered the language for adults because the ‘yet factor’ doesn’t exist for them. Like I look at it like a personal failure if they don’t’ learn.

For Natasha, she commented on how she frequently felt that she could be doing more in her work with the teacher candidate, “Sometimes we…I mean, I, think, ‘Well, I can do this better. I could do that better.’ But then I realize that it’s actually tricky to keep all those 25 kids learning all day long.”

Paula also indicated that she felt guilty about not planning enough for her teacher candidate. She echoed the enduring sentiment of many teachers who lament the time required to do the job properly, “If I had had more time I definitely would have planned more but then you could work 24 hours a day for finding things or doing more.” Allison mentioned specifically that she felt guilty about having a teacher candidate help her out in the classroom and was conscious of her colleagues’ less than favourable perception. “They [colleagues] think it’s [classroom work] is going to be a lot easier for you. People were coming into my room saying, ‘When do I get her?’ That made me like the student teacher is hired help.”

The associate teachers had varied reasons for feeling guilty about their work in the practicum. They felt guilty about the lack of time, their lack of expertise, or the perceptions of other colleagues. It should be noted that the guilt experienced by associate teachers was idiosyncratic and varied in degree of severity amongst the teachers. I also
surmise that another factor added to the anxiety of associate teachers. Zeichner (2000) points out that associate teachers’ work is not often held in high regard by their colleagues, or society for that matter.

**Attachment**

A few of the associate teachers spoke about the friendship they developed with teacher candidates over the course of the practicum. The development of a friendship suggests that there is a certain amount of “approachability, encouragement, and honesty” implicit in the relationship (Sanders, Dowson, & Sinclair, 2005, p. 727). Certainly, a friendly relationship between the associate teacher and teacher candidate is a vital element of this type of mentoring relationship (Bradbury & Koballa, 2008).

While Grace’s teacher candidate had a different way of responding to students, Grace appreciated the effort put forth. Grace spoke of how they both got along very well and that she missed the teacher candidate when the practicum was over:

Yeah, we got along very well, very well. You know, she’s similar to me. Her demeanour was different with the kids but her wanting to give 100 percent very much jived with me. You know we did get along very well and she gave me a hug on the last day. Then, I was lonely for a week!

Jennifer also spoke of the positive emotional support she received when working with teacher candidates and her attachment to them, “But I’m almost always sorry they’re leaving and I’m happy they’ve spent time with me because I’ve always learned something from them.” It is clear from Natasha’s comments that she enjoyed the friendship that developed over the course of the practicum, “I got to know her really quite well and she is very outgoing and actually, quite funny. So we developed, I think, a very open relationship and became close.”
In contrast with some of the associate teachers in this study, Dewey cautioned that a close relationship between teacher candidates and associate teachers might serve to inhibit teacher candidates from developing a critical and reflective stance (1904 as cited in Zahorik, 1988). It could also be argued that since “teaching is a moral act” the personal relationship between an associate teacher and teacher candidate makes it challenging for associate teachers to consider those professional duties and procedures that are central to the development of a good teacher.

I contend that sustaining a distant relationship between teacher candidates and associate teachers is unrealistic and far too taxing. It requires a great deal of emotional labour defined as “the hard work involved in masking emotions to conform with institutional work demands” (Hochschild, 1983 as cited in Bullough & Draper, 2004, p. 285). Furthermore, teachers are often expected to maintain professional distance on one hand, while demonstrating emotional caring on the other hand.

I maintain that associate teachers can and should develop a friendly and professional relationship with teacher candidates. I argue this is not a zero-sum relationship. While it may at times present a delicate balancing act, it is important for associate teachers to embrace both aspects. Knowles and Cole (as cited in Murray, 1996) argue that,

Numerous reports of field experience studies (for example, Beynon, 1991; Campbell & Williamson, 1983; MacKinnon, 1989) indicate that the development of a positive and productive working relationship between cooperating and preservice teachers is the most significant factor in determining successful field experiences. (p. 659)
6. Connections

Because of ambiguous guidelines, an [associate teacher] typically constructs a definition of roles and responsibilities often based on his or her own experiences as a student teacher. (Koerner, 1992, as cited in Ganser, 1996, p. 284)

Interestingly, a powerful theme of “connections” was evident in most of the associate teachers’ responses. It was apparent that many of the associate teachers in the study connected to their own past experiences as former teacher candidates to guide them in the current practicum. The associate teachers referred to their past experiences in order to gauge their responses and actions to the teacher candidates. Those associate teachers who had positive practicum experiences in the past looked to replicating them. Those with negative practicum experiences in the past looked to preventing them.

Another perspective on “connections” was the associate teachers’ perception of the lack of connection between the preservice program and practicum. The associate teachers often felt the preservice program was not connected to the practicum experience pedagogically and in its overall expectations.

Connections to the Past

Lortie (1975) identified that teacher candidates engage in an “apprenticeship of observation” through observing teachers over the span of their childhood. While often not acknowledged in the preservice program, these observations have a significant impact on teacher candidates’ perceptions about teaching. Lortie (1975) concluded that teacher candidates are very likely to teach in the manner they themselves were taught. Just as teacher candidates draw upon their past experiences in the classroom as students, associate teachers draw upon their past experiences as student teachers in the practicum. Cole and Sorrill (1992) noted that associate teachers often, due to lack of preparation,
depend on their own prior experiences as teacher candidates in the practicum to inform their current practice as “good” associate teachers. Furthermore they contend,

How associate teachers view and carry out their roles as performer, models, critics, co-learners, and coaches derives mainly from what they are able to piece together from their own experiences as student teachers and from what they are able to ‘learn by doing’ and struggling on their own. (Cole & Sorrill, 1992, p. 42)

With respect to past practicum experiences, almost all of the associate teachers, to some extent, commented directly on how they were influenced by their experience as a former teacher candidate. Some associate teachers when reflecting back to their practicum were adamant not to repeat their negative experience for their teacher candidate. Others were very positive about their student teaching experience and wished to emulate it for their teacher candidate. A few associate teachers had both negative and positive practicum experiences.

As Charlene described how she tried to encourage her teacher candidate to visit other teachers and classrooms, she reminisced about her past associate teacher and mentors. Charlene explained:

I think what I would do next year is try to expose whoever I have to a few other teachers and just say, “Why don’t you go and observe that class for a day or a period just to see how they do things?” Because you need to see as many teachers as you can to learn how to be a teacher. Like I’ve had some amazing mentors in my teaching career. All these amazing teachers that can pull the best out of their kids and I had to learn what kind of teacher I am and where I fit in things.

Jennifer, as well, was most grateful for her past experience. At the end of the interview, she took the opportunity to further comment on how her experiences as a teacher candidate were indeed inspirational.

Well, you know I think it’s important for us to take them. I really do. I think I wouldn’t be teaching if someone hadn’t let me in their room. Or I would have been a horrible teacher my first year. It’s one of the most rewarding things I’ve done. So you have to be able to let other people have that reward too. Because they
could be my child’s teacher and I don’t want somebody who is not passionate
teaching my child.

In discussing her work with the teacher candidate, Allison replied that she found it useful
to reflect back on her own experience as a teacher candidate and put herself “in the
shoes” of the teacher candidate:

I think I try and reflect back on my experiences as a student teacher and my first
year teaching. What did I wish people had shared with me? What did I want to
leave with? What do I want to share now? What do I really want them to pull
away from the experience?

Not all the associate teachers had positive experiences as teacher candidates in the
practicum. In fact, it was clear that some of the past experiences were decidedly negative
and provided the associate teachers with a clear idea as to what not to do. Kate spoke of
how she wanted to create a classroom experience for her teacher candidate that was
“safe” compared to the practicum she managed to get through:

Ah, well, I went off of my own personal experience when I was a student teacher
so my expectations were that…well, trying to provide sort of a safe place where,
you know you can fumble through. You know, I wasn’t there to judge him in
terms of his actual mistakes he made because, honestly, your real learning goes on
in that classroom when you’re totally alone. Like, I remember what was important
and focused on what it was like for my student teaching. I had an associate
teacher when I was in teachers’ college who was not really there and I didn’t like
that.

Paula provided a specific example of a memory from her practicum experience many
years ago:

One of my big concerns was, I think, what kind of responsibility and what kind of
work to give them. I didn’t want to give too much. I remember being a practice
teacher and the teacher always sat in the back of the room and watched me teach.
She didn’t say much. She was always accessible to the kids and it was really
distracting.

Two of the associate teachers shared how they had both a positive and a negative
practicum experience. Brenda explained that while one of her practicum experiences
The associate teacher in the preservice practicum seemed positive on the exterior with little criticism from the associate teacher, she did not find it very useful to her on a professional level. Even though Brenda’s experience with the other associate teacher could be perceived as “negative,” she felt it helped her to discern what teaching is really about:

I had two very different practicums. The first one, the teacher was extremely laid back and everything I did was beautiful. And the second practicum was exactly the opposite. So having had the two experiences I really like the fact of the second where I figured out for myself, “Hey is this the job for me?” Because when you’re given everything, you know, on a silver platter and you’re told “That’s beautiful. That’s great.” I don’t think you get a chance to really understand what the teaching profession is about.

Jane, as well, had two very different practicum experiences. In her description, she shared how they helped her to realize what she “wouldn’t want to do to a student teacher”:

I was in two different schools for student teaching. I had one really positive experience and one not so positive. Yeah, so I guess I knew what I wouldn’t want to do to a student teacher. I had one that was exceptionally good. She did a lot of feedback whereas at the other school they just sort of dumped me in there. The teacher never gave feedback. She never did anything. I did a lot of menial tasks. She would say, “You can take over the phys ed. program.” And this is early in the year and you don’t really know what you’re doing. And there was not feedback at all and I didn’t find that very helpful.

Only two of the associate teachers did not explicitly make a connection with their past experiences as teacher candidates, namely, Natasha and Grace. Natasha was the associate teacher with the most experience and Grace was one of the associate teachers with the least experience.

**Lack of Connection**

The lack of connection was also a theme regarding how the associate teachers perceived the role of the university in the preservice program. All the participants in the study remarked on the inability of the preservice program to prepare teacher candidates for the
reality of the classroom. Their comments focused on gaps in the teacher candidates’
learning with regard to issues of a pedagogical nature and the preservice program’s
unrealistic expectations.

Disagreement exists in the literature about the value of the university
“component” of the preservice program (Beck & Kosnik, 2002b). Essentially there
appear to be two perspectives. It is advocated that preservice teachers learn by actually
teaching in the classroom and contended that they need more time in the classroom and
less time as students. Others contend that although there are areas that could use some
improvement, the evidence shows that the university component should play an even
bigger role (Darling-Hammond, 1999; Goodlad, 1999; Wideen & Lemma, 1999).

Both Brenda and Sandra felt the preservice program was misguided in terms of its
focus. Brenda said that when the teacher candidates came prior to the first day of school
they were surprised to be performing mundane tasks. Brenda, in response to some of their
questions, responded, “You know what, this is part of our job. This is part of the whole
setting up of our classroom and our school, and yes, we do sharpen pencils for the first
day.” Remarking on how time was misspent on preparing detailed lesson plans which
would be more beneficially spent on looking at the bigger ideas, Sandra said:

Instead of sending them [teacher candidates] off to work at lesson plans and
lesson designing for science and social studies (not that they’re not important),
they should be looking at the bigger ideas and how do incorporate those into the
core subject areas. Sometimes it was hard for them [teacher candidates] to let go
of part of a lesson…because they’re forced to write out these crazy lesson plans
that are so intense and they’re so excited about them. They [teacher candidates]
need to learn to let things go and be able to change on the fly.

Natasha and Kate commented on the preservice program’s unrealistic connection
to the life in schools. She commented on how the preservice program was so out of touch
with the reality in school that functions arranged as “thank-you’s” for associate teachers were impossible to attend because of poor scheduling:

They would have the “thank-you suppers” or celebrations throughout the year but it would be from 4 o’clock to 6 o’clock. When you’re teaching at a school it’s impossible to get to the university by 4 o’clock. It’s just totally impossible to make it. So to set those times seemed a little bit naïve or was it a disconnect between their placement [the school] and the academic stuff.

A few of the associate teachers felt the preservice program did not prepare teacher candidates adequately in terms of the practical “hands on” aspect of teaching; such as dealing with parents and accessing documentation. Jane commented:

She came out with little information about classroom management so we spent a lot of time talking about it. She didn’t have a lot of information about that…She had no idea about how much documentation and copious notes are required so that was something I spent some time talking to her about. And she stayed with me to meet with a couple of parents just to see how it helps to have all your notes and your back-up stuff. I’m surprised they don’t spend any time on that stuff.

Susan expressed some disappointment regarding the content of some of the courses in the preservice program. She felt the necessity to bring the teacher candidate up to speed on areas such as the curriculum. She noted,

I would have liked to have seen what courses she had taken or what her program looked like because I was surprised that there seemed to be these gaps, you know. I spent a lot of time teaching her. Like I would sit down and teach her the curriculum much more than I thought I would have needed to and sort of felt that should have been done elsewhere in the program.

With a poorly communicated and unclear role description, it is inevitable that associate teachers resort to their prior experiences as teacher candidates. This isn’t a necessarily negative consequence. Clearly, from the comments of a few associate teachers, some past experiences helped shape their understanding of their role in a positive sense. Moreover, if associate teachers had more of a connection to the university and the preservice program, they might be more sympathetic. Feiman-Nemser and
Buchman (1989), in their discussion of associate teacher beliefs, point out, “While these beliefs are often considered by teacher educators to be problematic misconceptions, an alternative perspective is to treat them as prior knowledge that must be built on, challenged, or deepened” (p. 377).

7. Conclusion

In summary the associate teachers found the practicum to be a positive experience as they became more aware of their own practice, learned from the teacher candidates, gained new insights into their relationships with students, and appreciated some practical benefits. However, there were some aspects of the practicum that they thought were problematic. For instance, they sometimes felt pressured for time and regretted their loss of autonomy over how that time was spent. They also noted the selection process for associate teachers needed refinement and raised some concerns around classroom management issues.

From a broader and deeper perspective, the responses of the associate teachers raise issues about their role in the practicum. Most of them saw themselves as “mentors,” but it became clear that they needed to “get beneath the happy ‘appearance’ of mentoring to reveal its essence” (Bullough & Draper, 2004, p. 272). How the associate teachers saw their role in the practicum was idiosyncratic in many ways. In addition to seeing themselves as mentors, the associate teachers saw themselves as “disclosers of secrets,” “guardians of the profession,” and “reluctant evaluators.”

Many of the associate teachers to some extent wished for a better relationship with the preservice program. They felt the preservice program was not in tune with the
daily, often hectic, life in schools. Moreover, they talked about the need for the preservice program to take a more active role in the practicum. The associate teachers wanted to know more about the structure of the preservice program and to be able to provide more input.

The need to connect more frequently and meaningfully with university supervisors was another area of concern for the associate teachers. They found the university supervisors’ visits to be infrequent and somewhat shallow. Bearing in mind the close relationship formed between associate teachers and teacher candidates, they often based the need for additional visits from the faculty advisor on their desire to make the practicum a useful learning experience for teacher candidates.

In spite of the close bond between the associate teachers and teacher candidates, there were instances when the associate teachers felt the teacher candidates were not living up to expectations or responding appropriately to feedback. This is congruent with research illustrating difficulties experienced by associate teachers (Applegate & Lasley, 1982; Koerner, 1992; Sandholtz & Wasserman, 2001).

To a large degree, all the associate teachers experienced a range of emotions (sympathy, responsibility, disappointment, anxiety, guilt, and attachment) during the practicum. Sustaining a professional and friendly relationship with teacher candidates was hard emotional work. While the associate teachers seemed to accept this emotional work as part of the territory, some sort of preparation and role description provided by the preservice program would be beneficial.

Connection was also a prevalent theme in the data for two different reasons. First, associate teachers often relied on their prior experiences as teacher candidates to guide
their work in the practicum. They talked about prior practicum experiences that were negative; hence, they attempted not to repeat these experiences with the teacher candidate. They also talked about prior practicum experiences that were positive and tried to replicate those experiences with their teacher candidate. Second, the associate teachers spoke of the lack of connection between what is learned in the preservice program and what is practiced in schools. Associate teachers sometimes contended that the content of the preservice program was misguided and out of touch.
This study suggests that associate teachers, for the most part, find the practicum to be a meaningful experience and are genuinely interested in a successful practicum experience for all. They see both benefits and drawbacks in being an associate teacher. Their suggestions for improvement include: greater role definition, more support from the preservice program, more presence of faculty supervisors, and more responsiveness by teacher candidates. Last, associate teachers reflected and acted on their past experiences as teacher candidates themselves and lamented the university’s lack of connection to the preservice program.

1. Time to Take a New Tack

The overarching intent of this study is to help improve practice for the benefit of associate teachers, teacher candidates, and university supervisors. Moreover, it is hoped this study will also benefit those not directly implicated in the practicum experience (pupils, classroom teachers, school administrators, and other university faculty). Based on the findings and discussion in the previous chapter, the following areas will be addressed in detail with regard to implications and recommendations:

a. Understanding Schools and School Culture
b. Communication and Connection
c. Practical and Theoretical Considerations
d. Program Structure
e. Time
Some implications from this study are readily identified and recommendations for improvement easily and realistically offered, while other implications are not so easily discerned and attendant recommendations not quite so straightforward. As much as possible, I have attempted to provide recommendations that are attainable and practical but do appreciate there are many contextual and structural constraints that may very well pose restrictions. At the close of this chapter, I will highlight some areas for future research that became apparent as a result of this study and provide some closing remarks.

a. Understanding Schools and School Structure

The findings of this study support the notion that university preservice programs should be more in tune with the structures and culture of everyday school life. It was evident in this study that the associate teachers felt the preservice program was not cognizant of associate teachers’ hectic schedules, the complexity of their work, or the immense pressures they face. Consequently, the coordinating of practicum schedules was sometimes out of sync with school schedules as evidenced by teacher candidates beginning their practicum experience at report card time. Additionally, associate teachers were frequently informed of (and sometimes coerced) into their role and were often
provided with very little prior notice. Furthermore, celebrations of appreciation for associate teachers were scheduled either too early or too late in the school day making it impossible for those working in schools (associate teachers, administrators) to attend. Fortunately, there are ways to address many of these concerns. Some solutions are simple while others are broader in scope and require considerably more effort and coordination.

Starting from a broad perspective, university preservice programs need to ensure that university faculty and supervisors are familiar with educational initiatives mandated by governmental institutions, in this case the Ontario Ministry of Education and its branch, the Literacy and Numeracy Secretariat. Awareness of these mandated initiatives is an important step in understanding the considerable amount of pressure currently placed on schools and school boards. Preservice programs should not assume that university supervisors are au courant with provincial initiatives. Until preservice programs attempt to ensure they are also paying attention to and incorporating, to some extent, initiatives from the Ministry of Education, there will continue to be a sense that universities and schools are worlds apart.

As a concrete example, all elementary teachers are required to some extent to participate in professional learning cycles, sometimes referred to as “critical learning pathways” (CLIP). These sessions provide a perfect opportunity to engage teacher candidates and associate teachers in meaningful and practical discussions that are directed at increasing student achievement. University supervisors could ensure that teacher candidates are involved in these professional dialogues as they allow teacher candidates to observe collaboration in the workplace and to work cooperatively with others. I am not suggesting that universities give up in any way their autonomy; however,
until preservice programs acknowledge and take the initiative to work with school boards on at least some of the very same issues, I am afraid that their impact in the educational system, a system that is currently struggling, will be minimal at best.

While understanding the broad perspective and working towards common goals with governmental agencies and school boards might seem unattainable, understanding what happens at the classroom level is not. Simply put, preservice programs need to pay attention to realities such as the yearly school calendar when scheduling practicum sessions, associate teachers’ individual timetables when planning meetings or events, and, in general, be mindful of the time restrictions placed upon associate teachers. Allowing for flexibility concerning timetabling and providing ample lead-time regarding upcoming meetings and assignments are two very practical solutions that would be greatly appreciated by associate teachers and teacher candidates. Indeed, these rather simple solutions would go a long way in bridging the gap between preservice programs and schools in helping to build a stronger relationship based on mutual respect.

b. Communication and Connection

That associate teachers repeatedly expressed concerns about not entirely understanding the workings of the preservice program is troubling. The findings of this study indicate that good communication and a strong connection between the preservice program and associate teachers is crucial to the running of an enlightened practicum (one which has high learning expectations for all as its mandate).

One recommendation is to rethink the print support (sometimes referred to as handbooks or manuals) for associate teachers and to rethink this support from a fresh
perspective. Preservice programs cannot continue to rely on their current means, usually in the form of a rather lengthy manual, as their chief communication with associate teachers. If, (and again this ties into the importance of understanding what actually goes on in schools) preservice programs were to elicit feedback from associate teachers they would soon learn that in recent years classroom teachers have been inundated with support documents, curricula documents, and policy documents. Associate teachers simply do not have the time or the inclination to read painstakingly and digest the contents of more print.

At the very minimum, associate teachers should receive any documentation support well in advance of the teacher candidate’s first visit, and, if possible, the university supervisor should conduct a face-to-face meeting to discuss any questions. However, I strongly suggest that preservice programs explore other possibilities to increase communication and connection by exploring more constructive and innovative means such as weblogs or social networking sites. Associate teachers may feel more comfortable with these modes of communication as they allow opportunities to clarify understanding on a per need basis, provide venues to discuss issues with a certain amount of anonymity, are easily accessed in most communities, and, in some cases, are an already familiar technological tool.

Contained within the weblogs or social networking sites should be links for associate teachers to seek out more information about the structure, the philosophy, and the workings of the preservice program. From the study, it is obvious that associate teachers wish to understand the objectives of the preservice program and how they fit with their own objectives and those of their school. This sharing of information could
also help bridge the perceived theoretical and practical divide between universities and schools. Associate teachers in this study often identified the university with as being the cusp of educational innovation and they were keen to learn about innovative techniques. These technological tools would be an opportunity for preservice programs to demonstrate and embrace innovation.

A further recommendation to promote better communication and connection between preservice programs and associate teachers is to reconsider the criteria for and selection process of associate teachers. As indicated in the findings, associate teachers were mostly unaware of the requirements for their role or the selection protocol. Preservice programs cannot rely on school administrators as the main communicators and gatekeepers. While most school administrators have good intentions, if given a choice, they will most likely choose the school’s needs over the preservice program’s needs. Hence, their choice of an associate teacher might not necessarily be the best fit with the philosophy of the preservice program.

Cole and Sorrill (1992) offer four recommendations to help promote communication and connection. They are as follows:

1. Associate teachers should have choice regarding their participation in the practicum.

2. The selection process for associate teachers should be standardized and transparent.

3. Communication should be a focus amongst university supervisors, associate teachers, school administrators, and school board officials.

4. Selection criteria for associate teachers should be developed. (p. 48)
These recommendations would go a long way in opening up lines of communication and feelings of connection not only for associate teachers, but also for all involved in the practicum.

c. Pedagogical and Practical Considerations

One of the preservice program’s objectives and responsibilities is to provide teacher candidates with a successful integration of pedagogy and practice. The findings from this study indicate that there is room for improvement in this regard. The associate teachers in this study expressed surprise when teacher candidates seemed to be lacking in common pedagogical concepts or general knowledge. Additionally, while it is customarily accepted that the practicum provides a very real and practical link for teacher candidates, associate teachers sometimes find this responsibility to be daunting. As the sole connection to the “real world” of teaching, they were overwhelmed with covering all the practical aspects of being a classroom teacher (consulting student records, maintaining parental contact, managing classroom behaviour, organizing extra curricular events, etc.).

Preservice programs must seriously consider reexamining all aspects of their program structure. Specifically, they need to build strong and robust programs that clearly link pedagogy with practice and reflect a comprehensive understanding of current school and provincial initiatives. This is very much in congruence with Darling-Hammond’s (2000; 2006a; 2006b) notion of “programmatic coherence.” For example, some specific recommendations promoting programmatic coherence would include insuring alignment between coursework and practicum work, allowing for more frequent
and structured practicum experiences, and providing on-going support to teacher candidates and associate teachers. These recommendations would go a long way in linking the work of preservice programs (pedagogy) and the work of associate teachers (practicum) in a meaningful and respectful manner.

**d. Program Philosophy**

Based on the findings of this study, I have already suggested that preservice programs reconsider their method of communication, but I also suggest they reconsider the content of their communication. While this study was not focused on examining specific practicum structures per se, it was clear from the associate teachers that they had very little understanding, or sometimes even misunderstanding, regarding the philosophical and theoretical underpinnings of the preservice program with which they worked.

Additionally, the sense from this study is that associate teachers are indeed interested in the theory behind the practice.

It is important that practicum experiences articulate their underlying structure and why these structures are in place. This was particularly evident when three of the associate teachers in this study, who worked with a preservice program based on a professional development school model, failed to make mention of any action research whatsoever. This is somewhat troublesome given that action research is a main objective of professional development schools.

Preservice programs need to ensure that they clearly communicate to associate teachers and teacher candidates how theory undergirds and supports their particular practicum structure. This will help associate teachers make sound decisions for teacher
candidates and potentially lessen the burden they feel they carry with regard to “covering” it all. As an example, if teacher candidates are required to keep reflective journals, then associate teachers need to understand why reflective practice is so fundamental to good teaching. Associate teachers need to encourage and model these reflective skills; and they need to be able to articulate to the teacher candidate why these skills are important. This will not happen unless the preservice programs are prepared to make explicit the thinking beneath the practice.

Finally, I strongly urge preservice programs to provide opportunities for associate teachers to understand how their prior experiences as teacher candidates inform their current practices as associate teachers. Unless these constructs are examined they are “likely to remain unchallenged, therefore static and potentially unreflected-upon elements of practice” (Knowles & Cole, 1996, p. 654). This could be achieved through encouraging associate teachers to collaborate with other associate teachers and engage in discussions that explore these past experiences. Rather than university supervisors facilitating these meetings, experienced associate teachers should be encouraged to facilitate the discussions thereby building upon practitioners’ knowledge.

e. Time

The findings in this study point to the importance of allowing more release time from classroom responsibilities for associate teachers so they can deal efficiently with the many facets of their role. The additional release time would undoubtedly reduce associate teachers’ sense of feeling overwhelmed and permit them to readily discuss aspects of their work with teacher candidates in a meaningful manner rather than the haphazard
approach that is occasionally the practice. Anyone who has had the opportunity to work in schools realizes that “release time” from classroom responsibilities is problematic given the lack of funding that results in school boards being stretched financially. Despite these financial challenges, however, this should not become an excuse for ignoring the issue at hand.

One practical solution would be for universities and governmental education agencies to look at more creative methods of pooling money through partnerships. As an example, the New Teacher Induction Program (NTIP) would be an excellent consideration. Given that the number of new teachers has dwindled in recent years, this might be an opportune time to investigate sharing financial responsibility between preservice programs and NTIP. A close partnership amongst universities, school boards, and governmental agencies would provide an excellent opportunity to build a continuum of support for teacher candidates as they finish up their practicum experience and embark on their teaching career. This partnership could also allow associate teachers to consider not only working with teacher candidates, but also with new teachers as well.

\textit{f. Teacher Candidate Preparation}

It is apparent from this study that teacher candidate preparation would benefit from a more holistic approach that takes into account relational and emotional aspects of the practicum. When a teacher candidate enters into the associate teacher’s classroom, they should do so with respect, curiosity, and commitment. While the relationship is certainly co-beneficial in many ways, teacher candidates also need to acknowledge and understand that it can be a stressful experience for associate teachers as well. During the practicum,
associate teachers must contend with an increased workload and time pressures as well as dealing with the emotional aspects of this work.

I recommend that, to ease the integration of teacher candidates into the classroom and lessen the intensity of emotional work for associate teachers, associate teachers be allowed to interview teacher candidates prior to the practicum placement. These interviews would ideally include the university supervisor as well. The benefits would permit associate teachers to be more actively involved in the decision process, reduce dramatically the potential for personality conflicts, and allow the potential for not just mediocre practicum experiences, but really exceptional practicum experiences.

Achieving this recommendation might pose numerous challenges for preservice programs in terms of scheduling, but I argue in the long term it would be beneficial to all. It would help to eliminate some of the unnecessary conflicts that arise from simple misunderstandings prior to the practicum experience, add to the purpose and structure of the associate teacher’s role, and set the stage for future opportunities both professionally and personally.

g. University Supervisor Role

Based upon the findings of this study, it is clear that role of university supervisors requires some careful rethinking. Given that university supervisors are often the associate teacher’s only tangible contact with the university, it is imperative that all avenues of communication are clearly articulated and that the relationship is carefully structured. Also, given that university supervisors are critical to how teacher candidates see their role as future educators, it is vitally important that preservice programs get it right.
Furthermore, the sometimes conflict ridden nature of triadic relationships (university supervisors, associate teachers, and teacher candidates) serves to underscore the necessity of thoughtful deliberation with regard to the university supervisor’s role.

Beginning with the question of who should be in the role of university supervisor, I strongly agree with Beck and Kosnik (2002) who contend that preservice faculty are perhaps best suited to be involved in practicum supervision. While preservice faculty’s participation in the practicum may sometimes be challenging due to the lack of recognition for this type of work, other university commitments, and time pressures, it is still a path well worth exploring. Surely, those with the expertise, the knowledge of course content and an already formed relationship with teacher candidates would be best suited to oversee the practicum. This would be a very positive step in the direction of more coherence for the preservice program and would also assist preservice faculty in keeping themselves grounded in the world of schools.

If having university faculty serve as supervisors in the practicum is not practical due to restrictions financially or structurally, then preservice programs should seriously consider former (perhaps recently retired) classroom teachers, especially classroom teachers whose teaching practices reflect to some extent the objectives of the preservice program. Many of the supervisors assigned to monitor the practicum experiences in this study were former principals, which can be somewhat problematic. Just as principals’ duties have expanded over the years to include more of an emphasis on administrative duties, their connection to classrooms has diminished. Hence, these retired principals through no fault of their own, have lost a sense of connection to the work of teachers and life in the classroom. The associate teachers in this study alluded to this sense of
disconnect with university supervisors (former elementary principals) when they mentioned that they were “not impressed at all” by or “have very little to do with them.” While there are certainly some administrators who choose to be connected to classrooms, there is a call for university supervisors who are grounded in the life of schools and have demonstrated sound teaching practices. Retired classroom teachers are a very reasonable choice.

Continuing with the question of what should be required of university supervisors, this study lends credence to the notion that university supervisors need to be more present in the practicum. More present implies showing up more frequently and consistently in schools, collaborating with associate teachers and teacher candidates, participating in inquiry teams, clarifying misunderstandings from the onset, and generally engaging in a shared and helpful approach. Furthermore, some attention needs to be directed to emotional suitability of university supervisors to the role.

A more present university supervisor who is really connected to the preservice program requires significant restructuring (systemically and financially) on the part of the university and the preservice program; however, it is certainly a direction worth considering. Preservice programs, the Ministry of Education, and school boards need to creatively explore ways to share costs to hire more university supervisors so that these supervisors can focus their work on a smaller group of teacher candidates and associate teachers rather than being spread so thin as to be quite ineffective. As is currently the situation, many university supervisors simply do not have the time to spend with teacher candidates and associate teachers.
h. Role of Associate Teacher

Of all the implications and recommendations arising from this study, perhaps the most pressing is associate teachers’ need for a more clearly defined role. What was unexpected in this study is the extent to which associate teachers were permitted to construe their own role and their lack of any general theoretical perspective connected to that role. The associate teachers, although well intentioned, would have benefitted from the preservice program providing explicit guidelines regarding their role and its theoretical underpinnings.

To begin with, I recommend that the university preservice program seek out and listen to feedback from associate teachers. Eliciting comments from associate teachers is an excellent starting point and could be achieved through inviting associate teachers to participate in feedback sessions. While this may be the current practice with some more “progressive” preservice programs, it did not seem to be the practice of preservice programs associated with this study. Again, if distance and time restrictions pose difficulties, technological tools such as social networking or even web conferences might be worth consideration. These tools, which are quite affordable and participatory in design, would be an excellent first step towards communicating and clarifying the role of associate teachers.

Once feedback is obtained from associate teachers, the next step is to clearly outline and communicate their role. Again, relying on a brief description in a manual is clearly not enough. A face-to-face visit from the university supervisor prior to the practicum would go a long way in clearing up misunderstandings and provide opportunities for clarification. It was apparent from this study that associate teachers, for
the most part, take their role seriously but are not always able to articulate just what the role requires of them.

Another recommendation for preservice programs is to provide more formal introductory sessions for associate teachers that provide basic skills in negotiating relationships and facilitating learning with adults. The default assumption that associate teachers who are adept at teaching children will be adept at teaching adults is misguided. Speaking from experience as a curriculum leader and working with teachers, the needs and learning styles of adults are very different from those of younger students.

It is my view that eliciting feedback from associate teachers, providing face-to-face communication, and offering preparatory courses are all recommendations worth pursuing; however, these steps only scratch the surface. What are also needed are more progressive approaches that seek to reconceptualize the role of the associate teacher. Moving in a more radical direction, I strongly urge that preservice programs shift the role of associate teachers to embrace the notion of associate teachers as “teacher educators” (Borko & Mayfield, 1995, p. 517). The role of “teacher educator” would formally recognize associate teachers’ knowledge and expertise. This shift in perspective would give a definitive direction and recognition to associate teachers’ roles by acknowledging their professional expertise; hence, I contend, they would take their role even more seriously than is currently the practice.

Last, I contend that having a sound understanding of purpose would be a strong motivational factor for associate teachers. It is clear from the findings that associate teachers want to be of assistance to teacher candidates and, furthermore, want to be helpful to their profession, but they are unclear how to go about this. Providing an
explicit role to associate teacher that builds on their expertise is a step in the right direction.

\textit{i. Evaluation}

Associate teachers in this study were at best ambivalent about the evaluation of teacher candidates and at worst anxious about it. This study demonstrates that improvement is warranted in associate teachers’ understanding of how teacher candidates should be evaluated during the practicum. A number of the associate teachers in this study were uncomfortable with the evaluation of teacher candidates and expressed a lack of understanding regarding their role in the process. Associate teachers felt they could provide feedback to teacher candidates and university supervisors, but they did not feel like their comments made any real impact with regards to the final evaluation. In many respects, they felt like the evaluation process was out of their hands and indicated there was some underlying tension vis-à-vis the university supervisor. Further, they questioned the accuracy and intentions of the university supervisors’ comments.

To address these issues, an initial step for all preservice programs is to develop more specific guidelines pertaining to the evaluation of teacher candidates. These guidelines must clearly outline and delineate the evaluative roles of both university supervisors and associate teachers. Building on the theme of increased communication evidenced in previous recommendations, evaluation guidelines are far too crucial to be simply placed in the associate teacher manual with the expectation that they will be read and understood. I suggest that an early face-to-face meeting with the university supervisor and teacher candidate take place in order to elucidate the evaluation process.
Along with face-to-face communication, I also suggest that preservice programs consider restructuring the evaluative role of associate teachers to include more real input in this regard. Given their link to the preservice program, university supervisors should continue to play an important role in the evaluation of teacher candidates; however, I advocate for a more balanced and measured approach to evaluation that includes the associate teacher as a partner with real purpose.

**j. Meaningful Practica**

Associate teachers found the practicum experience to be beneficial to their practice, yet they implied in their responses that they wished for a more meaningful experience. Many of the recommendations already mentioned such as better understanding, more frequent collaboration, more practical focus, and more role clarification would be advantageous and go a long way in improving the practicum. There was, however, from the associate teachers an almost wistful sense of wanting even more from the practicum; they wanted the practicum to be significant to their practice as well as the teacher candidates’ practice. The obvious question is how to achieve this without impacting on the workload and time restrictions of associate teachers.

One recommendation is to transform the mentoring relationship of associate teachers and teacher candidates to one that is more aligned with a co-teaching model (Jaipal, 2009; Roth & Tobin, 2001; 2004), a model that recognizes and supports the reciprocal learning that takes place between associate teachers and teacher candidates. I advocate for a co-teaching model that allows associate teachers and teacher candidates to share their knowledge and expertise by strengthening the connection between the two. An
excellent place to start is to recognize the reciprocal learning that takes place during the practicum. This attainable and worthwhile approach would require serious efforts on the part of all concerned. Certainly, co-teaching would oblige a reexamination of the hierarchical structure inherent in many practicum relationships and a realignment of power.

Other recommendations that are very much in keeping with co-teaching, in that they require action, reflection, and engagement, are inquiry approaches such as action research or self-study. Both of these approaches require critical reflection, collaboration, and result in the creation of knowledge by the practitioners rather than experts who are removed from the context of schools (Beck & Kosnik, 2000; Beck, Freese, & Kosnik, 2004). These approaches shift the learning for both associate teachers and teacher candidates from a transmission model to one that is more constructive in its orientation. Having participated in the role of providing professional development for classroom teachers over the past three years, I can attest that the “having it done to you” model does not work. Teachers are not inspired to make changes to their practice and have little, if any, personal investment in the process. In fact, I contend that action research and self-study make imminent sense as they are situated in teachers’ practice and school sites and are best suited to adult professional development.

**k. Status of the Associate Teacher and the Practicum**

The findings from this study suggest that the status of associate teachers and the practicum need to be raised. Associate teachers in this study perceived that their role is
The associate teacher in the preservice practicum

often not highly regarded by teacher candidates, university supervisors, or even their own colleagues. Furthermore, associate teachers perceived from their colleagues that the practicum is sometimes merely regarded as a chance to offload duties onto teacher candidates. These perceptions are not warranted and are clearly not in line with the reality of associate teachers’ work; however, if they are indeed present in the minds of other classroom teachers, then they certainly need to be addressed.

That teachers are constantly seeking for ways to upgrade their qualifications is a given. That teachers learn from the practicum is also a given. Hence, it makes sense for preservice programs along with the Ontario College of Teachers (the regulating body for teachers) to build upon the skills and knowledge of associate teachers through an accredited course that further builds on their skills and qualifications. The course content could deal with such issues as building a relationship with teacher candidates, handling unfavourable situations, assisting a struggling teacher candidate, or helping associate teachers to make the most of the practicum experience. Granted this would involve much communication and deliberation amongst all interested parties, namely, the Ontario College of Teachers, school boards, teacher unions, and universities, but it would well be worth the effort.

I also argue that in addition to an accredited course, preservice programs must also consider different types of compensation offered to associate teachers. Many teachers are appreciative of the letter of thanks and the nominal pay for their work (often in the form of advancements towards university courses); however, I argue that rather than monetary compensation preservice programs offer teachers access to more time during the school day. From this study, it was clear that associate teachers felt they needed more release
time from the classroom in order to address the complexity of their work with teacher candidates. With at least some time allotted during the school day, associate teachers would be able to address issues and concerns they have with teacher candidates in a meaningful way rather than “on the fly” as was described by one of the associate teachers in this study. This would provide them with a sense that what they are doing is important and is indeed recognized.

2. Areas for Future Research

Although research on preservice education is expanding to include the role of associate teachers in the practicum, there is a need to go further in this direction. Hopefully this small-scale qualitative study has provided rich details and insights into what associate teachers make of the practicum experience and has assisted in identifying those aspects of the practicum that are helpful and not so helpful. In the following several paragraphs, I will describe possible areas for future research that are worth pursuing.

One interesting line of inquiry with regard to the practicum might be to conduct a longitudinal case study of experienced associate teachers to understand how they perceive their role over time. What aspects of the role become more comfortable as associate teachers gain experience? How does their perception of their role change over time? This might be of particular interest and relevance to preservice programs working towards a more defined role for associate teachers that acknowledges the role’s dynamic nature. How should preservice programs acknowledge the evolution of the associate teacher’s role over time and how can the nature and structure of the practicum reflect and embrace the evolving role?
Another area of further interest and possible research would be to examine in more depth the relational aspects of associate teachers’ work. Of particular interest would be to explore in more depth how associate teachers negotiate their relationship with university supervisors and teacher candidates. What are the features of these relationships? This type of research would be useful as a means to improving the interaction amongst all three (associate teachers, university supervisors, and teacher candidates) and help to develop understanding.

This study reveals that an area in need of further research is the partnership between universities and schools. How do the current structures affect collaboration? How might government agencies play a role in a more collaborative relationship? A study of this nature would be of interest to those committed to improving the current structures in place. Some consideration to longitudinal studies would also be effective in tracking how a more collaborative approach affects the perceptions of associate teachers, university supervisors, and teacher candidates.

From a Canadian perspective, there is also a need to look more closely at the wide variety of preservice programs and practicum structures available and how associate teachers perceive these structures. Since associate teachers are an elemental part of preservice programs, it would be helpful to know, for example, how associate teachers perceive the impact of practicum lengths or the frequency of practicum sessions. More specifically, this type of fine-grained research is needed to deepen understanding of how different models, such as the professional development model, affect the perceptions of associate teachers and teacher candidates.
Since more communication is key to advancing better practicum experiences, further research that investigates different modes of communication would be beneficial as well. How does the use of social networking sites or weblogs affect, both positively and negatively, the work of associate teachers? How are these tools used effectively in the practice of associate teachers and teacher candidates? As access to and use of these technological tools continues to increase in all facets of society including education, these questions are particularly timely.

It is generally understood that the ultimate goal of all educational research is to positively and ultimately affect student learning. The suggestions for future research offered in this section have the potential to advance improvement in preservice education, and to all those involved with preservice education including classroom students. These suggestions are not finite in nature but are merely a sampling of some possible considerations that are well worth examining.

3. Conclusion

This study offers insight into the preservice practicum, especially as seen through the eyes of associate teachers. How associate teachers see the preservice practicum is important as their perspectives help signal new directions worthy of consideration. The findings illustrate the striking need for preservice programs to better communicate with associate teachers regarding their role in the practicum and to make them real partners in preservice education.

The study suggests that preservice programs must seek programmatic cohesion to ensure that the preservice practicum provides meaningful and authentic experiences for
not only teacher candidates, but also associate teachers. Working on action research projects that examine real problems that test advanced teaching strategies is just one place to start. With associate teachers and teacher candidates working together on authentic and practical tasks directed at increasing student learning, school boards will be compelled to participate.

This study also points to the importance of rethinking institutional patterns entrenched in a culture of status quo. Universities, school boards, governmental agencies, and teacher licensing bodies need to practice greater collaboration. This is a call for a partnered approach to preservice education. A more collaborative approach to preservice education will enhance the strength of preservice programs as well as increase the capacity of school boards.

Last, the findings of the study point to the need to dramatically re-envision the role of the associate teacher in the practicum. To accomplish this, associate teachers must be viewed as true partners in preservice education and true partners with teacher candidates. The reciprocal nature of their relationship lends itself to a co-teaching model wherein both are considered novices and experts. Developing a co-teaching model will require a significant shift in thinking but will also revitalize the preservice practicum.

I argue for an alignment of preservice programs, participant schools, school boards, and government agencies that takes into account the complexity of teachers’ work and seeks to make the practicum an educative experience for all. The findings of this study suggest that a different tack is needed to steer preservice education in a new direction. This new direction requires innovative thinking, joint ownership, and collaboration among all partners in preservice education. I hope that inviting a group of 10 associate teachers,
teachers to sit down and share their perspectives on the preservice practicum has illuminated some of the challenges yet to be resolved. On a more hopeful note, I also hope their voices have helped to illuminate the unmistakable importance of the preservice practicum and why “getting it right” is so worthwhile.
References


Appendix A

Letter of Invitation

Month, XXX

Dear [Associate Teacher],

You are invited to participate in a research project: *The practicum and working with preservice teachers: What is in it for associate teachers?* As a Doctoral student in the department of Curriculum, Teaching and Learning at the Institute for Studies in Education of the University of Toronto and working under the supervision of Dr. Clive Beck, I am investigating the experiences of the associate teacher as a participant in the practicum experience. The objective of this proposed research is to examine and understand how elementary associate teachers make sense of the practicum experience and in particular, how do associate teachers make sense of the experience specifically in relation to the interactions with the preservice teacher. I am requesting your cooperation as a voluntary participant in this study, which I hope will contribute to the current literature and increase our understanding of this relationship.

Literature abounds with respect to the structure of the teacher education programs; and the amount and structure of field placement. However, there is very little dealing specifically with associate teachers. It is hoped that looking at the experiences of associate teachers will provide an additional lens through which to improve future practicum experiences.

Data analysis will be conducted based on one **one-hour semi-structured interviews off site** with 10 associate teachers like yourself. The interviews will be audio-taped and information from the interview will be transcribed; all identifying information will be removed. If you agree to be interviewed but do not feel comfortable being audio-taped let me know and I will be pleased to take field notes instead. Analysis of this information will be done through both an automatic and manual process with a person reading through all the content to make sure no identifying information has been missed. Only the researcher and supervisor will have access to the original information. You have the right to decline to answer any question(s) in the interview and you also have the right to withdraw from the study at any point without any negative consequences.

There are no risks to participating in this study and it is my intention that this information will be solely used to provide a better understanding of the associate teacher in the practicum. Only you, the researcher, and the faculty supervisor will be privy to the data that is collected. All raw data will be kept in confidence and will not be identified by name in the study. The tapes will be destroyed as soon as they have been transcribed. When the study is over I would be pleased to send you a summary of the paper. Please indicate if you would like me to send it to you and which address you would like me to use.
Thanks for your consideration. Please contact me at (519)846-8387 with any concerns you may have.

Sincerely,

Katherine Wainman
Phone: (519) 846-8387
Email: kwainman@oise.utoronto.ca

Dr. Clive Beck
Phone: (416)978-0196
Email: cbeck@oise.utoronto.ca
Appendix B

Phone Script

After soliciting names and school locations of preservice teachers, this phone script will be used to ascertain whether their associate teachers are initially interested in participating.

Hello, may I speak with…………………………

My name is Katherine Wainman and I am a doctoral student with the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education with the University of Toronto. I am in the final stages of completing my doctoral degree and to that end I am conducting research with respect to associate teachers and their experience as a part of the practicum process. After having enquired at your school, I know you are an associate teacher and I would love to hear your perspective.

The data that I will be collecting will be based on 1 one-hour audio-taped interviews with a total of 10 associate teachers like yourself. I appreciate that you are currently teaching and participating as an associate teacher in a practicum; therefore, I am very flexible as to when this interview will take place. If you do not feel comfortable being audio-taped then I would be most pleased to take field notes.

Analysis of data will involve stripping of all identifying information and only the researcher and supervisor will have access to the original information.

You may know that I am a curriculum leader with Upper Grand District School Board; however, you should not feel compelled to agree to participation in the study if it is not of interest to you or if you do not feel comfortable with the study.

Based on this information, would you be willing to participate?

Thanks very much for your time and have a great day!
Appendix C

Participant Consent Form

I, ____________________________________ consent to be part of the preservice teacher research conducted by Katherine Wainman, and to have my comments quoted anonymously by her in writing and presentations arising from the research.

I understand that the interview will be recorded off site. I understand that identifying names will be replaced with pseudonyms. Audio tapes will be stored in a secure office and will be destroyed as soon as they have been transcribed. These tapes will not be seen by anyone who is not involved in this research study. They will be solely used for the research purposes.

Signed: _____________________________________________________

Date: ______________________________________________________
Appendix D

Interview Questions

1. Could you describe to me what you believe is important to understand about teaching? What is the role of the teacher? What is important for a teacher to know?

2. How would you describe your teaching style? How would you describe your style as an associate teacher? Are they the same? Are they different? If yes, in what ways are they different?

3. Before participating in the practicum could you describe for me what you imagined it would be like? How did this match with the reality of being an associate teacher?

4. Reflecting on your practicum experience as an associate teacher, how would you describe your experience with the preservice teacher?

5. Could you share with me your experiences as an associate teacher? What were some of the positive aspects? What were some of the drawbacks?

6. How has working with a preservice teacher changed your thinking about teaching?

7. How has being involved in practicum helped you to understand teaching?

8. If you were going to offer advice to an associate teacher participating in a practicum for the first time, what would you say? What would you suggest or advise to the faculty of education or the supervisors?
Appendix E

Interview Topics

Expectation of the practicum.

Hopes/wishes/ ideal experience of the practicum.

Preparation for the practicum

Emotional experience.

Communication (teacher candidate, colleagues, supervisors, faculty)

Decision making.

Situational factors.

Personal meaning of the practicum experience.
Appendix F

Probing Interview Questions

How would you describe the practicum experience?

How would you describe your relationship with the preservice teacher?

Do you have any thoughts or feelings you would like to share about the practicum?

Could you describe these feelings?

What kind of effect do you think the practicum has had on your career?

What kind of effect do you think the practicum has had on your understanding of what teaching is really about?

Did you feel prepared for the practicum?