Aligning Goals for Certification and Professional Growth: Building Cooperation Among Bachelor of Education Programs in Alberta

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This article chronicles a provincial collaboration between ten Bachelor of Education degree-granting universities in Alberta, Canada. This collaboration focused on the newly implemented Teaching Quality Standard (2018) in Alberta and its impact on preservice teacher practicums. Data were collected through curriculum mapping and interviews at each institution. Each institution analyzed their own data and shared themes at a number of group meetings. Two common themes arose: (a) the interconnectedness of practicum and teacher education courses and (b) the role of the Teaching Quality Standard as a development tool within practicum.

Cet article relate une collaboration provinciale entre dix universités de l'Alberta, au Canada, qui décernent des baccalauréats en éducation. Cette collaboration s'est concentrée sur la nouvelle norme de qualité de l'enseignement (2018) en Alberta et son impact sur les stages des enseignants en formation initiale. Les données ont été recueillies par le biais de la cartographie des programmes d'études et d'entretiens dans chaque établissement. Chaque établissement a analysé ses propres données et a partagé les thèmes lors de plusieurs réunions de groupe. Deux thèmes communs sont apparus : (a) l'interconnexion des stages et des cours de formation des enseignants et (b) le rôle de la norme de qualité de l'enseignement comme outil de développement dans le cadre des stages.

Ten degree-granting postsecondary institutions in the province of Alberta offer Bachelor of Education programs. Described here is the collective work of these institutions in examining how the newly implemented *Teaching Quality Standard* (*TQS*; Alberta Education, 2018) was reflected in each of their education programs. Through this collective work, participants were able to shift the dialogue from one of competition between institutions to one of cooperation among institutions. The paper presented here is both a chronicle of that collaboration as well as a discussion of the ways each institution was able to enhance its use of the *TQS*, including a greater awareness of the interconnectedness of practicum and other teacher education courses within each program as well the role of the new *TQS* as a development tool in practicum.

Context

Traditionally, universities have worked in isolation, often in competition with one another to attract new students and secure practicum placements for preservice teachers (PSTs). In 2016, the Werklund School of Education in Calgary hosted the first Field Experience Advisory Working Meeting to address a perceived desire for a more collaborative approach. This meeting included representatives from six Alberta degree-granting postsecondary institutions, central office administrators from eleven divisions in the Calgary region, and the Alberta Teachers' Association. The intent of this first meeting was to engage in a broad discussion regarding the strengths, the challenges, and the perceived changes required to improve practicum experiences and processes. Twenty-five individuals attended, and a generative and enlightening discussion ensued, creating the momentum that would result in an annual meeting. Now in its sixth year, the Field Experience Advisory Working Meeting has expanded to include 125 participants from school divisions across Alberta. All ten degree-granting institutions and three colleges are regularly represented, as is the Alberta Teachers' Association, and Alberta Education.

In parallel to the Field Experience Advisory Working Meeting, a small group of field directors had been meeting informally several times a year to share ideas and resources. In September 2019, Alberta Education implemented the new *TQS* (Alberta Education, 2018), adding another layer to the important conversations undertaken at these leadership meetings. The *TQS* differed from the previous teacher evaluation document, which outlined knowledge, skills, and attributes (Alberta Education, 1997), in that it defined for educators one key standard defining quality teaching. "Quality teaching occurs when the teacher's ongoing analysis of the context, and the teacher's decisions about which pedagogical knowledge and abilities to apply, result in optimum learning for all students" (Alberta Education, 2018, p. 3). Notable differences exist between the knowledge, skills, and attributes document (1997) and the *TQS* (2018) including an increased focus on the incorporation of Indigenous perspectives, a greater emphasis on the development of pedagogical relationships and lifelong learning, and the provision for a more robust enactment of the inclusive classroom. Six key competencies in the *TQS* are as follows:

1. Fostering Effective Relationships

2. Engaging in Career-long Learning

3. Demonstrating a Professional Body of Knowledge

4. Establishing Inclusive Learning Environments

5. Applying Foundational Knowledge about First Nations, Métis and Inuit

6. Adhering to Legal Frameworks and Policies

Each competency is followed by a list of possible indicators described as "actions that are likely to lead to the achievement of a competency and which, together with the competency, are measurable and observable" (Alberta Education, 2018, p. 3). Further, the *TQS* "provides a framework for the preparation, professional growth, supervision and evaluation of all teachers" (Alberta Education, 2018, p. 2). The field director group wondered how the new *TQS* would impact practicum experiences and how universities and schools might collaborate to develop a shared understanding.

The opportunity to look more deeply into the impact of the *TQS* on teacher education, particularly practicums, presented itself in 2018 when Alberta Education opened a call for grant

applications. The field directors provided input into a grant application on examining the impacts of the new *TQS* on practicum experiences specifically and to share best practices among institutions more generally. This grant application resulted in regular leadership meetings of field directors and/or associate deans of undergraduate faculties from all ten Bachelor of Education degree-granting institutions. This group was also joined by representatives of three colleges. The colleges did not collect data nor were they named as research contributors, but they attended and made vital contributions to the subsequent conversations. In these conversations, a common vocabulary for practicum experiences was developed and is applied within this article. Although role titles vary across the province, the following terms have been chosen for those who play an important role in the teacher education practicum.

- Field Director—a member of the postsecondary institution who oversees the practicum placement process and monitors student experience. Also commonly referred to as a Practicum Coordinator.

- Field Instructor—a member of the postsecondary institution who observes preservice teachers in their practicum placements. Also commonly referred to as a University Associate or Field Supervisor.

- Cooperating Teacher—a member of the K-12 school system who mentors and evaluates preservice teachers. Also commonly referred to as a Mentor Teacher, Supervising Teacher, or Partner Teacher.

- Preservice Teacher—a student in a teacher education program undertaking a practicum placement. Also commonly referred to as a student teacher.

This group of ten universities gathered in leadership meetings six times over two years to answer three main research questions: 1) How do current assessment practices align with the newly created *TQS*? 2) Which aspects of practicum are working well and which are problematic, unfulfilled, or missing? 3) What promising practices may inform future implementation of the *TQS*?

Members of the group came from around the province to meet and discuss these questions and share assessment practices and documents relating to the field experience. In addition to this informal sharing of ideas, each of the ten universities involved agreed to collect data about the impact of the new *TQS* on the field experience. This was accomplished through a curriculum mapping exercise undertaken by each institution and through focus groups and/or interviews with field instructors at the various postsecondary institutions. By sharing best practices among institutions and engaging in collective data analysis, the group aimed to ensure that each institution could draw from one another to further improve the already excellent work occurring among teacher education programs through increased alignment between theory and practice.

Literature Review

The practicum has been described as a "complex enterprise" because it relies on universities, schools, field instructors, cooperating teachers, PSTs, and students in the classroom to work together to provide an opportunity for the PST to put their knowledge into practice (Allen & Wright, 2013; Brown, 2008). PSTs frequently describe the practicum as the most valuable component of their teacher education programs (Bullock & Russell, 2010; Ralph et al., 2008; Vick, 2006). The practicum has long been viewed as the opportunity for PSTs to connect theory with

practice (Allen & Wright, 2013; Brown, 2008; Smith & Lev-Ari, 2005) as well as the site of authentic teaching experiences. It allows PSTs to teach and develop relationships with students, cooperating teachers, and field instructors (Haigh & Ward, 2004; Ralph et al., 2008).

However, practicums must do more than just provide an opportunity to practice teaching; they need to provide opportunities for PSTs to try new ideas and learn from their teaching (Johansson & Sandberg, 2012; Schulz, 2005; Sivia & MacMath, 2016). In order to learn from their teaching, PSTs must engage in reflection about their teaching (Brookfield, 2009; Mulholland et al., 2010; O'Connor et al., 2015; Schön, 2009). For reflection to result in better teaching, PSTs must become reflexive in their thinking (Hill et al., 2018; Naested et al., 2010). Reflexivity involves not just reflecting about what went well and what did not, but also considering how to change teaching practice to improve (Broad & Tessaro, 2010; Hattie, 2009; Hill et al., 2018; Sivia & MacMath, 2016). These elements found in literature were also evident in the *TQS*, highlighting the relevance of this document in practicum experiences for preservice teachers.

The Development of the *TQS*

Government and community partners collaborated to develop the Alberta *TQS*. Community partners included academics who provided the research background for its development (AADE, 2012; Brandon et al., 2016) and helped to define teaching competence: "knowing how to act by making appropriate choices and the proper use of various resources in highly complex situations" (Friesen in Brandon et al., 2016, p. 104). The *TQS* represents a broad consensus on teaching competence including the knowledge, skills, and attitudes that teachers apply to support student learning (Alberta Education, 2011; Danielson, 2007; Organization of Economic Cooperation and Development, 2005; Stronge, 2018). The indicators provide a range of teacher actions that may demonstrate each competency.

The previous *TQS* (Alberta Education, 1997) included interim and professional certification, but both new and experienced teachers are expected to meet the new *TQS*. This presents a challenge for assessment and supervision of preservice teachers who are still developing competence and may not yet meet the standard.

The Role of the TQS in Practicum

The *TQS* was developed to more accurately reflect the changing nature of classrooms. Teacher education programs are required to adapt to this changing nature of both society and schools (Danyluk & Burns, 2016; Foster et al., 2010; ten Dam & Blom, 2006) and to ensure PSTs are not simply replicating outdated practices (Bullock & Russell, 2010; Lortie, 1975). Contemporary classrooms are composed of a wide variety of learners, including those with specific learning requirements such as emotional, physical, cognitive, and medical needs. In order to meet the challenges posed by the shifting nature of schools, PSTs must be grounded in a liberal education, have subject matter expertise, and possess technical and professional knowledge (Schulz, 2005).

Assessment of teaching practice during the practicum is crucial to determining PSTs' growth, ability to set professional goals, and readiness to teach independently in their own classroom (Aspden, 2017; Darling-Hammond, 2006; O'Connor et al., 2015). Summative assessment in higher education has been described as a high-stakes endeavour with critical consequences (Maclellan, 2004). This is especially true during the practicum; formative assessment is provided, but summative assessment ultimately determines whether PSTs will be able to enter the teaching

profession.

The practicum is a complex endeavour in that field instructors have the dual role of assessing and counselling or supporting the PSTs in their development (Ciuffetelli-Parker & Volante, 2009). This role ambiguity is also present for the cooperating teacher. Cooperating teachers view their roles as supporting and challenging PSTs, but they also share the responsibility of providing formative feedback (Green et al., 2018; Roscoe, 2013) and assessing their performance (Beck & Kosnik, 2000). The degree to which field instructors and cooperating teachers take up these responsibilities is largely dependent on how they view their roles. The *TQS* provides a standard that informs the type of feedback cooperating teachers and field instructors provide to help PSTs to grow in competence.

Methodology

Qualitative data collection and analysis were framed by a collective case study methodology (Merriam, 1998, 2009; Stake, 1995, 2006). A case study is an in-depth exploration of a bounded system (e.g., activity, event, process, or individuals) based on extensive data collection (Creswell, 2007). "Bounded means that the case is separated for research in terms of time, place or some physical boundaries" (Creswell, 2012, p. 465). In a collective case study (Merriam, 2009; Stake, 1995, 2006), multiple cases are described and compared to provide insight into an issue. The issue of field experience assessment that was studied by this group constituted a bounded system, as each case was an Alberta postsecondary institution offering a Bachelor of Education degree.

This research was organized around two main activities. First, a curriculum mapping exercise was completed using course outlines of practicum courses exclusively. Field directors and/or associate deans from nine of the ten participating institutions completed the mapping process for their university and then met to share their results. Through this mapping exercise, the participants endeavoured to identify any gaps between the existing curriculum and the new *TQS*. Following this, field instructor focus groups or interviews were held in the spring of 2019 with six of the ten institutions. Whether individual interviews or focus groups were held was left to the discretion of the institution and was most commonly determined by the ethics approval process at each particular institution. Each focus group or interview was conducted by a graduate research assistant and each followed the same protocol, employing the same questions which were audio recorded for accuracy and transcribed verbatim. The number of field instructor participants included in focus groups or individually interviewed varied between institutions depending on the size of the teacher education program. Field instructors were asked about their perceptions of the new *TQS* and its potential impact on field experience curricula. The data presented in this paper is focused on the field instructor focus groups/interviews as well as the curriculum mapping undertaken by each institution.

All data were analyzed thematically by each individual institution, followed by a collaborative discussion to look for trends and themes that emerged across postsecondary institutions. Though there was some variation in issues identified by each institution, common themes across institutions allowed for collegial discussion on the ways in which the new *TQS* could be applied to the preservice teacher practicum.

Participants

The ten Bachelor of Education degree-granting universities in Alberta were named as

collaborators on a grant from Alberta Education to examine the impact of the new *TQS* on practicum. In nine of the ten institutions, curriculum mapping was completed to better understand the connection between the new *TQS* and its impact on practicum within the institutions. Additionally, in six of those institutions, interview and/or focus group data were collected whereby field instructors were able to more fully discuss their perceptions of the impact of the new *TQS* on the practicum experience. Finally, nine out of the ten institutions participated regularly in leadership meetings where data were shared and themes were analyzed. See Table 1.

Findings

Through the sharing of data among the universities, two primary themes emerged. The first of these themes was the interconnectedness of practicum and on-campus courses. The second theme highlighted the role of the *TQS* as a development tool that could guide the work of preservice and in-service teachers alike, providing a continuum along which career-long growth could occur.

Curriculum Mapping Findings

After the curriculum mapping exercise was completed in each of the universities, representatives from each institution gathered in January 2019 to share themes that emerged within their programs. Through an open, collegial discussion, commonalities were identified. Three general themes related to curriculum gaps, that were common to all ten institutions, emerged.

First, all institutions identified gaps within practicum courses where the *TQS* competencies were not sufficiently explicit. As a result, institutions prioritized the identification of PST assessment criteria within their practicum courses to make the competencies more visible. Second, the institutions noted that additional attention needed to be paid to the ways in which Indigenous perspectives could be included in an authentic way. Too often the burden was on the

Table 1

Institution Demographics and Level of Participation

Institution Pseudonym	Demographics	Participants			
		Grant development	External Institutional leadership meetings	Internal Curriculum Mapping study	Internal interview data collection
Uni 1	Urban, small teaching university	☒	☒	☒	☒
Uni 2	Rural, small teaching university	☒	☒	☒	☒
Uni 3	Urban, mid-sized teaching university	☒	☒	☒	☒
Uni 4	Urban, small teaching university	☒	☐	☐	☐
Uni 5	Urban, mid-sized teaching university	☒	☒	☒	☒
Uni 6	Urban, small teaching university	☒	☒	☒	☒
Uni 7	Urban, large, research university	☒	☒	☒	☒
Uni 8	Urban, large, research university	☒	☒	☒	☐
Uni 9	Urban, small, teaching faculty	☒	☒	☒	☐
Uni 10	Urban, mid-sized teaching university	☒	☒	☒	☐

cooperating teacher to support the PST in meeting this competency. Suggestions to address this issue included having a course on Indigenous perspectives, integrating this content in a variety of classes, or using both a stand-alone course and integration. It was also suggested that course preparation prior to practicum was necessary to ensure a better understanding of decolonization. Finally, another area needing attention was inclusion. Some participants suggested using the term "inclusive environment" instead of "classroom environment." By making inclusion more explicit in the lesson plans or connecting it to courses, PSTs might be better prepared to meet this standard.

At the conclusion of the meeting, institutional representatives agreed that this gathering provided a rich experience of working together rather than in silos. The very act of collaboration raised the bar, as participants learned from one another and returned to their home universities with ideas and strategies on how to better align, not only their practicums but their teacher education programs, with the *TQS*.

Field Instructor Focus Group/Interview Findings

Interconnectedness of Practicum and Teacher Education Courses

Across all ten universities, the curriculum mapping exercise led to the identification of how the *TQS* was evident or not in the practicum course outlines and evaluations. The *TQS* represents the competencies PSTs must demonstrate in the practicum setting, and the mapping exercise highlighted the importance of also considering the courses that precede practicum because "if you're going to change a student's mindset, it can't happen just in the practicum. You've got to set them up for success in the program before they get there" (Uni 5). Each of Alberta's teacher preparation programs vary in terms of the courses that comprise their degrees, but all institutions agree that the courses help to equip their students with the competencies to be successful in practicum settings. In some institutions, the language in course outcomes mirrors the *TQS*, as observed by one field instructor: "All of the courses [and] the objectives ... and the competencies that are connected are around [our program outcomes], and all of those seem to have stems where the language is not unlike the language of the *TQS*" (Uni 5). For field instructors who also teach on-campus courses, they found it especially helpful "to align the course syllabus with those standards" (Uni 2) and "use these *TQS* standards as part of the 'how and what' we should be teaching, and referring to them within our own coursework. So, that's been nice as a connection" (Uni 7). University programs are now working to embed more *TQS* competencies in their course outlines throughout the program to better prepare their PSTs for practicum.

The new *TQS* differs from the preceding standard in that in-service teachers and PSTs are expected to meet the same competencies. This parity in expectations has opened up important professional conversations about teacher assessment. As demonstrated by the following quote from a field instructor, many cooperating teachers were familiar with the new draft of the *TQS*, and there appeared to be alignment with the university expectations regarding the *TQS* competencies: "My partner teachers ... were really well aware of the *Teacher Quality Standard*. ... So, they must be getting some professional development in their schools, because they are so aligned with what we are doing at the [university]" (Uni 7).

The *TQS* also provided an opportunity for cooperating teachers to have deeper conversations regarding quality teaching with their PSTs and field instructors. As one field instructor explained,

> I thought there were more professional conversations this year with the new *TQS* … between the cooperating teachers, the students, and myself. Because it's a new document, we actually had really great professional conversations, where before, it was, 'Well, these are the standards.' Everyone knew them, and it was more mundane, step by step, what we were evaluating you on. So, it was a lot deeper conversations, I felt, this year. (Uni 3)

These professional conversations helped cooperating teachers, field instructors, and PSTs to speak deeply about quality teaching.

The *TQS* has helped to identify gaps in knowledge for field instructors, cooperating teachers, and PSTs, particularly with regard to foundational knowledge about First Nations, Métis, and Inuit. In the data, it was evident that field instructors wanted more professional learning to ensure they were optimally preparing PSTs for practicum. "So, as a field supervisor, how do I understand these outcomes, or these indicators? And particularly when you take a look at number 5 [Indigenous perspectives]" (Uni 7). Another field instructor concurred, noting that "it's going to take some time and education before I think people are going to be comfortable with sharing what they feel is going to be respectful to that particular culture" (Uni 6). Along with schools, universities are working to build capacity, especially for this particular competency.

Field instructors observed that often cooperating teachers were apprehensive about their lack of Indigenous knowledge to meet the requirements of competency five and looked to the PSTs for ideas and resources. According to one field instructor, cooperating teachers made comments such as "[I] really enjoy having a PST because I learn so much" (Uni 3) and referred to their PSTs as "cutting-edge" (Uni 3). Another field instructor reported,

> Our partner teachers [are] saying, 'We don't really know what we need to do.' … And so our students, in all honesty, sometimes have a little bit more knowledge going in to be able to share that. And that helps the school. (Uni 1)

The universities have been building PST capacity by requiring Indigenous coursework and incorporating experiential learning opportunities.

The TQS as a Development Tool Within Practicum and as a Continuum for Career Growth

The second major finding was that practicum ignites PST learning and helps to identify professional goals. One reported strength of the *TQS* was the clear standard that it sets for all PSTs and in-service teachers in the field, including the cooperating teachers. Before the *TQS*, field instructors found that everyone was "coming from their own point of view or their own passion," whereas the "greatest strength is now we're all looking for and assessing the same things" (Uni 7). Field instructors also shared how they used the document to aid struggling PSTs by pointing to the *TQS* and generating a plan to improve in a particular area. "When I am seeing a student teacher who is not meeting these standards, it provides the groundwork for me to move forward with that student teacher, to pinpoint exactly where it is" (Uni 7). Similarly, the *TQS* can be used as an informative tool that "helps guide them on setting some smart goals for their remaining time in their practicum" (Uni 5). Field instructors were able to use the *TQS* as a guide and scaffold for their PSTs because it articulates clear expectations.

The data collected from the individual institutions reinforced the concept that attaining

excellence should be a lifelong professional pursuit and is not meant to be achieved during PST education. The *TQS* is a standard of excellence for in-service teachers; however, having the identical standard for PSTs and in-service teachers meant that cooperating teachers struggled to assess appropriately. One field instructor commented that her cooperating teachers ask, "What level of expertise should I be able to see of a second-year student or a first-year student? … What does 'satisfactory' look like?" (Uni 3). Further, it created a dilemma for field instructors and cooperating teachers to assess PSTs according to professional competencies they might not feel fully competent in meeting themselves.

In practicum assessment documents, "mastery" and other similar terms were used to describe exemplary performance in practicum. However, these were contested terms for participants because such terminology suggested novices could be masters despite their inexperience, or that mastery was achievable in teaching for educators who are expected to be lifelong learners. As one field instructor commented, "I don't think there's a teacher on the planet that has mastered anything. I mean, they're very good, they're competent, but they're always striving to get better" (Uni 3). Participants questioned how to interpret the samples provided under each *TQS* competency: "Okay, is mastery having experience, skill, and competence? [pause] I'm asking the question because if I'm saying the student should have mastery of number 3, do I look for all these indicators? So what does mastery mean?" (Uni 2). Clarification around what competence looks like for a Year 1 PST compared to a Year 2 PST in their final practicums was suggested.

As indicated above, competency five, related to Indigenous knowledge, created some anxiety for many cooperating teachers, who were themselves progressing in this competency. As explained by one field instructor, some cooperating teachers admitted "we don't really know what we need to do" and "[we are] trying to figure it out as a school" (Uni 1). For some, this created "confusion and fear that teachers may be doing the wrong thing, or may be disrespectful, which is totally not their intent" (Uni 6). This lack of competence reported by cooperating teachers to field instructors put pressure on PSTs, who have often taken classes that have introduced them to integrating Indigenous perspectives and are seen as having some competency in this area. It is, therefore, challenging to assess this competency in PSTs during practicum when field instructors and cooperating teachers profess a shallow understanding of Indigenous perspectives and are, in many ways, learning from their PSTs.

The *TQS* competency "Establishing Inclusive Learning Environments" was another area requiring careful attention. Field instructors observed that working with cooperating teachers who already have a heavy load and are themselves developing this *TQS* competency can make it difficult for the teachers to model inclusive strategies for PSTs. Cooperating teachers were aware that "whatever exceptionality they have in a classroom, and even if they have an aide in the classroom, they are responsible for that" (Uni 2). Some universities are working to weave inclusive practices throughout all their courses:

> And already, we had quite a bit of the inclusive education in our [class]; but now, we'll have it all through our five competency areas. Dealing with so many mentor teachers, we had to make it as concrete as possible (Uni 5).

It was apparent that PSTs and in-service teachers, alike, were striving to improve their competencies in inclusive education.

Discussion and Implications

The work undertaken by the postsecondary institutions discussed here was done to examine three research questions. These were: 1) How do current assessment practices align with the newly created *TQS*? 2) Which aspects of practicum are working well and which are problematic, unfulfilled, or missing? 3) What promising practices may inform future implementation of the *TQS*? Each of these questions will be discussed below.

How do Current Assessment Practices Align with the Newly Created TQS?

In Darling-Hammond's (2006) research, teacher education program design required developing courses and practicum around a "professional knowledge base in teaching and teacher education based on general consensus about what it is that teachers and teacher candidates should know and be able to do" (p. 123). In Alberta, the *TQS* represents this consensus and is helping postsecondary course instructors and field instructors to work together to prepare PSTs to meet the standard. The findings presented here demonstrated that the *TQS* was well aligned to those elements of quality teaching each participant deemed important to assess. However, challenges to the assessment of these areas were uniquely tied to the field instructors' and cooperating teachers' personal feelings of capacity to perform the various key competencies themselves. As discussed earlier, assessment of PSTs is based on determining their competence to lead their own classroom (Darling-Hammond, 2006), but within a complex and ever-changing system (Danyluk & Burns, 2016; ten Dam & Blom, 2006). The representatives in this study recognized that increasing the competence of the assessors was equally important to designing assessment tools from the TQS, particularly with reference to the Indigenous knowledge and inclusion competencies.

Whereas some of the field instructors and cooperating teachers felt comfortable with integrating Indigenous culture and history into their teaching practice, others felt very uncomfortable with their own knowledge, skills, and abilities in this regard. As a result, the participants expressed some hesitation about assessing this competence in PSTs. The *TQS* provided some indicators for incorporating foundational knowledge about First Nation, Metis and Inuit peoples; however, these concepts required a deep knowledge of Indigenous cultures, history, and practices that some field instructors and cooperating teachers felt they did not have. Moving forward, the institutional representatives discussed a commitment to working on this area of the *TQS* for field instructors, cooperating teachers, and PSTs alike, recognizing it as a developing area of competency for all involved in PST education.

A clear strength of integrating the *TQS* in PST assessment is that it promoted reflection (Brookfield, 2009; O'Connor et al., 2015; Schön, 2009) on personal teaching practice by all the educators involved in practicums. While assessing PSTs on the competencies, the field instructors and cooperating teachers were also prompted to examine the effectiveness of their own teaching practices. Rather than merely acting as a checklist for determining a PST's readiness for classroom learning, it formed a basis for career-long reflective practice. Because the *TQS* was intended as a living document for all educators, using it as a starting point with PSTs provides a foundation for growth across the spectrum of their professional careers.

Which Aspects of Practicum Are Working Well and Which Are Problematic, Unfulfilled, or Missing?

In discussing their particular programs, each postsecondary institution shared examples of successes and challenges. Several of the post-secondary institutions, for example, described adding another competency for developing professionalism in teaching. The *TQS* was seen to attend to the legal and ethical frameworks that all teachers must understand, but for post-secondary institutions the descriptor of professionalism went beyond understanding to demonstrating a professional attitude towards teaching. A professional attitude towards teaching expanded upon many of the indicators identified to include collaborating effectively with partner teachers, principals, and other school staff.

Using the *TQS* as a framework for lifelong learning about the profession offered an opportunity for teacher education programs to enhance an identified strength of the practicum, the capacity to provide PSTs with the knowledge, skills, and abilities to frame their on-going professional development. Rather than expecting PSTs to have mastered the competencies of the profession prior to entering it, introducing them to the expectations of the profession guided them towards developing the various competencies over the course of their career.

Regardless of whether the *TQS* was seen to enhance an area of strength or meet an area of challenge in the practicum, the field instructors in this study indicated that the one clear standard and its associated competencies helped to focus PSTs' efforts and clarify goals under the umbrella of a shared set of expectations across the province. Darling-Hammond (2006) noted the importance of this when she highlighted the need for "intensive, explicit efforts to develop shared meanings if [standards] are to be viewed as reliable assessments for determining recommendations for certification" (p. 129). Although the *TQS* in Alberta is still quite new, the participants believed that it was already helping to build a sense of shared meaning between cooperating teachers, field instructors, and the PSTs because all involved were using common language to describe effective teaching.

What Promising Practices May Inform Future Implementation of the TQS?

The participants in this work felt that the most promising practice in informing future implementation of the *TQS* was the very act of collaboration itself. The *TQS* in Alberta is opening conversations among schools and universities about what represents quality teaching practices. One example of the potential collaboration holds was noted with regard to the competency requiring the inclusion of foundational knowledge about First Nation, Metis, and Inuit peoples. The participants recognized that teacher education programs have been called upon to share research, not only among their faculty, but with K-12 school partners. This has led to PSTs sharing new ideas from their Indigenous education courses with their cooperating teachers and to field instructors being called upon to support both PSTs and their cooperating teachers as a new generation of teachers is educated to lead the way in the work of reconciliation (Evans et al., 2020). Partnerships between schools and universities are challenging universities to better understand the innovative practices that are breathing life into their local schools. There are clear indications that collaboration is breaking down the traditional theory-practice divide to enrich the practice of teacher educators, cooperating teachers, and PSTs. The *TQS* has provided coherence and common language for these collaborations.

Universities often claim to promote evidence-based teaching in schools but it is not

uncommon for schools to believe they have a better understanding of the realities of classroom life. When universities and schools collaborate together, there is tremendous potential for both groups to support PSTs in applying innovative practices that address the diverse educational landscape and complexities of teaching. When universities are familiar with innovative practices in K-12 contexts, and they are able to provide research that supports innovation, there are stronger connections between theory and practice and meaningful pedagogical relationships. The connection created by practicums between theory and practice has been evident with initiatives such as the design thinking cohort, where PSTs and cooperating teachers with a keen interest in learning about and using design thinking principles to create innovative learning experiences for students are matched together. In another rich collaboration following a professional development school model, PSTs in the practicum attend concurrent courses embedded in one of the local practicum schools. In addition, cooperating teachers are invited to join school-based seminars facilitated by a field instructor; each seminar employs critical questions to link theory and practice.

Conclusion

In the experience of the participants, the collaboration among the degree-granting institutions offering a Bachelor of Education program in Alberta provided the opportunity to shift the conversation about field experience from one of competition to collaboration. Although each institution offers a unique lens on teacher education, each program was enhanced by sharing assessment practices and participation in this study. Many of the competencies examined were part of the previous *TQS* document (Alberta Education, 1997) but the new *TQS* (Alberta Education, 2018) requires a more fulsome response to what it means to be an effective teacher.

As this work progresses, each institution will continue to examine how to best draw upon the *TQS* to align courses and practicum. Additionally, through continued conversations, the group that has formed will continue to work in a spirit of cooperation to build collaboration between the institutions and schools they serve, shifting the dialogue for the benefit of PST education.

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