# Reflecting on Pre-service Teachers' Practicum in Tanzania: Avenue for Professional Inquiry, Discovery and Growth

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## Abstract

*This paper is framed within Relational Cultural Theory (RCT) and Reflective in Practice Theory (RPT) lenses to explore the role of experiential learning in fostering professional inquiry growth, and relational building for six Canadian pre-service teachers posted to conduct practicum in Tanzania. This study uses field notes and reflective journal as main sources of data. The findings of this study indicated that practicum is an avenue to learn, unlearn and relearn about teaching. It is also a moment for novice teachers to connect and network with education stakeholders in other places or countries. Doing practicum in other cultures may stimulate collaborations such as global North and global South collaboration for a practicum done outside the country. However, acknowledging context as an integral part of experiential learning must be emphasized. In this case, interrogating assumptions and converging perspectives during practicum in a foreign country is a precursor towards effective teaching.*

*Keywords*: *cross-culture, experiential learning, global north, global south, Tanzania*

## Introduction

Experiential learning also known as practicum or field experience is a core component in teacher preparatory programmes. Drawing from this understanding, this paper discusses how experiential learning may enable pre-service teachers learn how to teach, inquire and build relations with students and teachers in a foreign country. The paper also reports how experiential learning may foster pre-service teachers' pedagogical competencies to improve the learning outcomes of students under their charge. The central argument in this paper is that unless practicum is divorced from *performativity syndrome*-the practice where grading is emphasized over learning, the contribution of practicum as part of teacher preparatory programmes and a means to prepare competent and qualified teachers remains a myth.

Effectiveness of teacher preparatory programmes may be partly evaluated based on how the programmes can foster teacher professional inquiry, discovery and growth of the pre-service teachers. One of the strategies towards developing and promoting the elements named above among the novice teachers is through practicum. As Sarason (1993) aptly put it, practicum or field experience is a moment that requires the pre-service teachers translate, transfer and apply what they have learned at the university into the classroom by doing. It is by translating and transferring theory into practice that the novice teachers are endowed with practical aspects of teaching and learning including the acquisition of conceptual basis consistent with knowledge creation and dissemination.

According to Lee, Jian, Sora and Haines (2019), field experience is any practical work, teaching or study required by post-secondary providers as an integral part of a course that seeks to bridge the gap between theory and practice. Field experience focuses at equipping pre-service teachers with ability to translate and apply or transfer knowledge into deep understanding and practical skills. The review of the literature in teacher education shows that the phrase *field experience* can be used interchangeably with phrases such as practicum, work placement, work integrated learning and professional experience (Barton, Hartwig & Cain, 2015; Lee, Jian, Sora & Haines, 2019). In other contexts, such as Tanzania, field experience can be used interchangeably with phrases such as block teaching practice (BTP) or teaching practice (TP).

This paper is part of a self-directed reading summer course, which focused on exploring the role of experiential learning in teacher education. As a PhD student at the University of Victoria (UVic)-Canada, I was involved in this practicum with six Canadian pre-service teachers from UVic. Throughout this paper, I use the words: field experience or experiential learning and practicum interchangeably. Based on this knowledge, in this reflection paper I report on the role of experiential or field experience to understand learning and development of professional inquiry and growth of six Canadian pre-service teachers that took place in Tanzania during summer semester of 2019.

## The research question

The present study explored the role of experiential learning in professional inquiry and growth of the pre-service teachers. As noted earlier, the study involved six Canadian undergraduate student teachers posted to conduct practicum in Tanzania. The study also involved one graduate student (the author) who was doing a self-directed course, a component of summer programme of the University of Victoria for graduate students. Therefore, this study was framed to answer the following research questions: How do experiential learning shape

pre-service teachers' learning to teach during practicum in a foreign country? Relatedly, in what ways are student teachers' relationship built and maintained?

**The placement context: Juhudi Demonstration Primary School**

Juhudi (pseudonym) is a public demonstration primary school owned by one of the higher learning institutions in Tanzania. The school uses the national curriculum as a road map to realize its mission of quality education for all. Meantime, the school is committed to move away from a traditional teaching and learning approach where teachers are regarded as experts whose role is imparting knowledge to students. Being owned by a university college in teacher education, Juhudi seeks to become an exemplar public primary school where students are taught by highly qualified and motivated teachers in both pedagogy and content. In addition, the school is determined to attract many teachers or educational experts within and outside the country who would wish to come and share knowledge and expertise through teaching and other avenues to ensure quality learning to students.

To achieve this goal, Juhudi demonstration primary school has remodified its curricula. One of the areas that have been impacted by the new curricula that are currently being implemented is the language of instruction. Instead of using Kiswahili as the language of instruction from Grade One to Grade Seven as a policy requirement for all public primary schools, Juhudi has introduced English to be the language of instruction from grades one through seven. As part of this transition, Grades One and Grade Two have now switched completely from Kiswahili to English and these are class levels where the six Canadian pre-service teachers from UVic conducted their practicum.

**Theoretical underpinnings**

This reflection paper is framed within the family of experiential learning perspectives. Experiential learning according to John Dewey and his associates involves knowledge construction and meaning-making processes that draw largely from experiences (Kolb, 2015). Thus, experiential learning is characterized by authentic practice-based actions that are negotiated within real life experiences and reflections (Kolb, 2015). Drawing from experience and reflection as core elements of experiential learning, this paper takes on Reflective in Practice Theory (RPT) and Relational Cultural Theory (RCT) to conceptualize pre-service teachers' practicum. On the one hand, the RCT provides insights on the centrality of relationality and how pre-service teachers can engage in and maintain meaningful relationships during fieldwork experiences. On the other hand, RPT offers an understanding concerning the importance of reflecting on practices. It explains the need to deeply explore, reexamine and reflect

on assumptions taken for granted in the course of action. Importantly, these theories acknowledge that knowledge is socially constructed and culturally and politically situated. Moreover, the theories complement each other in the sense that they both acknowledge that professional growth and discovery are well nurtured in relationships. Further, the theories demand that the novice teachers reexamine their assumptions, beliefs and actions to foster and maintain positive relationship with students and fellow teachers when they are engaged in real life experiences. In addition, developing relational competencies and being reflective in actions are central to one's professional growth and development (Schon, 1987).

## Relational Cultural Theory

This theory emphasizes on the development of competencies that are central to the creation and maintenance of relations. Such as the capacity to recognize and attend to the needs of others (Edwards, Davids & Harris, 2013). RTC sees interdependence and interconnectedness with others as fundamental elements for human development and psychological wellbeing (Comstock et al., 2008; Edwards, Davids & Harris, 2013; Jordan, 2017). In addition, the theory extrapolates that human relations and professional growth are sustained through interactions that involve three aspects, namely mutual engagement, mutual empathy and mutual empowerment. In teaching, mutual engagement leads to a special connection between the teacher and student. Key to fostering and maintaining the teacher-student connection is engagement that involves reliable contact and support (Edwards, Davids & Harris, 2013). Besides mutual engagement, the theory also postulates the need for mutual empathy. According to Edwards, Richards and Harris, mutual empathy is about willingness to be moved by other's experiences and the intention to move the other by being authentic. Mutual empathy acknowledges the importance of the teacher to know the needs of their students and be ready to learn from them. Lastly, the mutual empowerment dimension is enhanced when the teacher and student are working together to create a deeper and more meaningful relationship. Thus, learning to teach especially during practicum is developing through the above highlighted dimensions. As the literature substantiates, teaching is fundamentally relational (Freire, 2005; Phillips & Benner, 1994) and it involves many levels of interactions that range from classroom student-teacher interaction to pre-service teacher-host staff members' interaction and the larger community interaction. It is from this understanding that this paper draws largely on RTC to explore how learning to teach in field experience can contribute to pre-service teachers' professional growth and discovery.

## Reflective in Practice Theory

Pioneered by Schon (1987), the reflective in practice theory is premised on skillful strategies to solving real-world problems. It is a non-technical epistemology that requires individuals to deeply explore and test assumptions and attend to the context as they encounter problematic situations (Schon, 1987). Naming and framing are parts of the process by which practitioners come to understand what is going on in practical situations. What distinguishes reflection-in-action from technical-rationality model of practice is that knowledge in the former is inherently practical and contextual based while in the later knowledge is systematically and theory driven.

According to Schon (1987) RPT is bounded by an *action-present* and is more or less immediate depending on context or situation the practitioners are working in (Usher, Bryant & Johnston, 1997). The RPT draws largely on coaching, learning by doing and reflective practicum as central elements to reflection-in-action epistemology and the professional growth. This presupposes that both professionals and would be professionals need coaching and learning by doing in their daily practices instead of relying on professional technical skills that do not acknowledge the context and uniqueness of the situation they encounter. By reflective practicum students learn by doing and by the help of their mentors. Learning by doing serves two purposes that include enabling students to become proficient in a kind of reflection-in-action and by dialogue between the mentor and student, a reciprocal reflection-in-action (thinking what they are doing while they are doing it) is enhanced.

## Research Methodology

Based on this insight and the purpose of the study, I selected field notes and reflective journal as the main data sources, which later guided my reflection in the course of data analysis and reporting the findings.

## Field notes

Scholars argue that field notes taking is an integral part of documentation and analysis in qualitative research (Flick, 2014; Maharaj, 2016). Flick (2014) further argued that the production of reality in texts starts with field notes taking. The purpose of note taking during fieldwork is to generate observational data by recording participants' behaviours or actions and the context in which the practices are occurring. Taking field notes aims to capture the researcher's own thoughts, feelings, impressions, and insights (Flick, 2014; Miles & Huberman, 1994).

In order to capture what is going on during fieldwork, field notes are usually supplemented with theoretical memos and researcher journals to record the researcher's conceptual reasoning and methodological decisions. The motive of supplementing field notes with other self-report techniques is largely to document thick data about the phenomenon at hand. Thus, field notes in this study were employed to capture the researcher's own thoughts and reflections about the topic under investigation. Data from field notes were thus supplemented with informal observations and conversations the researcher had with pre-service teachers during the practicum. To aid my reflection, analysis and report of the findings, field notes were taken immediately after being in the field by simply jotting down what I observed in and outside the classroom when the pre-service teachers interacted with students and host teachers. Most importantly, field notes captured issues related to environment or context in which experiential learning took place. The field notes also contained information about pre-service teachers' involvement in pair teaching and the researcher's reflection about teamwork.

**Research Journal**

Reflective journals are unique data collection methods that enhance the documentation of qualitative information that cannot be achieved by other data collection tools. As Phelps (2005) observed, reflective journals are important means for the collection of data in qualitative research that provide significant insights not always achieved through other ways of data collection.

It is widely documented in the literature that reflective journals are sources of qualitative data (Bashan & Holsblat, 2017; Jasper, 2005; Ortlipp, 2008) and they have been increasingly recognized as analytical tools for analyzing qualitative data (Phelps, 2005; Jasper, 2005; Ortlipp, 2008). Thus, this study considered reflective journal as an important tool that guided reflection in the course of data description, analysis and reporting of the findings. In teacher education, scholars argue that journals are employed to facilitate reflective thinking, an important component of experiential education (Bennion & Olsen, 2002; Jasper, 2005). In this study journal entries were recorded along field notes to record my comments, reflections and observations made concerning the pre-service teachers' interaction and description of the context in its totality including the working atmosphere, weather, people and events. It thus, contained contextual information, informal conversations and observations recorded about pre-service teachers and events they were involved in. This information was obtained through conversations and interactions I had with pre-service teachers, Juhudi primary school management and host teachers.

## Data Analysis

With reference to the research questions and theoretical lenses guiding this study, data analysis adopted in this study was interpretive phenomenological analysis framework (IPAF). According to Bashan and Holsblat (2017), interpretive phenomenological analysis is enhanced through repeated readings and re-readings of collected texts or narratives. Thus, IPAF in this study meant to explore and reflectively describe how experiential learning may shape pre-service teachers' professional inquiry and growth during practicum. It is worth mentioning here that the decision to take field notes and keep reflective journal during the entire practicum meant not to analyze them later. As such, accounts presented in this study are "honest and not self-censored" (Mosurska, 2021 p.2). Therefore, the decision to turn the texts and narratives jotted down in field notes and journals into a reflection paper was intuitive. Therefore, after coding was accomplished, the first level of data analysis began with reading and re-reading of multiple field notes and journal entries recorded during data collection. Field notes and journal entries were integrated with informal observations and conversations I had with the pre-service teachers after their classroom sessions and or during break times.

The second level of data analysis phase involved the review of several journal entries, field notes, informal conversations and classroom observations. Several journal entries and field notes were further reviewed and those that seemed to answer the research questions were selected and subjected to the second level of data analysis and interpretations. At this stage the researcher goes beyond mere description of the phenomenon to include analytical description or interpretation of data and clustering. As such, data in this study were triangulated in a variety of ways to ensure credibility of the study findings. Thus, along data analysis, reporting of the findings in this study was supported by quotes from the field notes and journal entries that unpacked what occurred from the pre-service teachers' perspective and the process they were involved in.

## Research Findings and Discussion

## Familiarization

As pointed earlier, this practicum was part of my self-directed course that explored the role of experiential learning in preparing future teachers. My participation in the practicum was a bit different from the other six Uvic undergraduate students who had been assigned classes to teach. My job in this practicum was to assist Uvic undergraduate students to settle in a new Tanzanian culture of which I am familiar meanwhile, I was involved in observing teaching and learning in Tanzania with an outsider and insider lens. Using the research journal, I wrote the following information down to convey the

centrality of familiarizing to the placement context as an initial step towards building relationship and connections:

> After we arrived at Juhudi Demonstration Primary School, pupils showed up through their classroom doors and windows and started shouting happily and cheering us up. I presume, they might have been told about the coming of the pre-service-teachers from Canada. (Research Journal).

The excerpt above illustrates the importance of familiarizing to the placement context before the actual teaching begins. The essence was to enable pre-service teachers meet students, mentor teachers and the school management and familiarize with school daily routines and the school culture in general. Further, the excerpt points out at the need for a warm and welcoming working environment. It is from this kind of environment where true connections between students and teachers can be realized. Edwards, Davis and Harris (2013) refer to this as mutual engagement. This act of cheering the pre-service teachers on the reporting day was a polite and welcoming gesture to all pre-service teachers. Presumably, this gesture contributed a great deal to the pre-service teachers' smooth adjustment and settling in to a new culture and connecting with both students and the entire school community. Moreover, it signaled a sense of connectedness and the desire to learn from other cultures as shown by grade one and grade two students.

Drawing from both the literature and my own working experience I have noticed that a warm, friendly and welcoming working environment fosters respect and mutual relationship among the people involved. It is also regarded as a sign of acknowledging other peoples' contributions to achieving collective organizational goals. This kind of working environment regardless of the nature of the institution involved has proven to have higher achievements and efficiency as well as long-lasting and positive interpersonal relationship. This is because the warm and friendly working environment is said to promote collective actions and cooperation (Murphy-Graham & Lample, 2014).

## Collaborative Teaching and Mentorship

Data analysis also disclosed that on the reporting day, after a brief introduction by the Juhudi head teacher and after familiarizing ourselves with the school timetable, the head teacher called into the office the mentor teachers who came in to meet the pre-service teachers, introduced themselves and then jointly (the mentor and pre-service teachers) tabled the initial arrangements for the practicum on the following Monday. It is worth noting that at Juhudi, the six Canadian pre-service teachers worked in pairs together with one host

teacher who provided mentorship to them. Working in pairs or as teamwork and mentorship provides an important area of focus in teacher education that is highly emphasized and researched in the field and that is very crucial in experiential learning.

It was evident that collaborative teaching had numerous advantages that enabled pre-service teachers to cope well with the classroom challenges encountered by the majority of the inexperienced new teachers at the beginning of their career as it is reported in the literature (Davies, & Heyward, 2019). For instance, they need to know how to cope with challenges related to classroom management such as how to deal with disrupting students, how to introduce and impose classroom rules and regulations as well as how to deal with their own dilemmas and psychological burnouts (Davies, & Heyward, 2019; Macías, & Sánchez, 2015). This is to say, with collaborative teaching the pre-service teachers managed to split classroom responsibilities between themselves and their mentor teachers. Besides the mentor's feedback, the pre-service teachers had an opportunity to offer immediate peer feedback to one another after the lesson something that improved their classroom management skills and other pedagogical skills on a daily basis.

Similarly, peer teaching enabled pre-service teachers to observe and reflect on their teaching practices, identify areas of strength and weakness and finally suggest ways through which they can improve. For example, data analysis disclosed that during classes, pre-service teachers would split responsibilities between themselves. Whilst one pre-service teacher was involved in the instructions of the lesson, the other pre-service teacher together with the mentor teacher would observe the lesson as well as assist in guiding students in group work activities in and outside the classroom. The observations made by the mentor teacher and fellow pre-service would be shared later to their team member for discussion of areas of strength and aspects where some improvement was deemed necessary.

In addition, mentorship offered by the host teachers helped the pre-service teachers in many ways. For instance, it enabled them work to improve learners' active participation in the classroom, it also enabled the pre-service teachers choose and apply teaching methods and strategies that suited learner's understanding, capability and characteristics – whether slow or fast learners. A special focus was on understanding students' needs first prior selecting the appropriate methods that would enable the achievement of those needs. Equally important, mentorship enabled pre-service teachers to learn how to deal with students who needed more assistance in the lesson. For example, I remember talking to one of the mentor teachers who said that given the English mastery of her pupils, she asked her team members (mentees) to slow down and/or

speak slowly when talking/teaching to enable the pupils grasp what they (pre-service teachers) are saying.

## Learning Students' Names and Transforming Perspectives

The findings presented under this section indicate that on the first day, the pre-service teachers and pupils spent time introducing one another. The pre-service teachers also used this time to learn about their pupils and explore their learning needs. Studies by Freire (2005) and Glenz (2014) suggest that understanding students' academic needs begins with knowing who they are as individuals. This includes knowing them historically, culturally and by their names. Empirical studies by Cooper, Haney, Krieg and Brownell (2017) and Middendorf and Osborne (1997) affirm the foregoing argument by substantiating that addressing or knowing students by names is beneficial in many ways. It enhances respect and improves classroom interaction between the teacher and students. It further makes learners feel cared and consequently develop a sense of belonging in the classroom. In addition, addressing students by names minimizes the chance of disruptive behaviours to occur in the classroom (Majani, 2020; Middendorf & Osborne, 1997).

Drawing from Tanzanian culture, knowing or learning ones' names signifies two key assumptions. One, it shows that you care about that person and therefore he/she is important to you. Two, it is an indicator that you are a person with great character who is interested to know others and their wellbeing. This is because in many cases in Tanzania (indeed Africa), names, surnames in particular, represent values and meanings based on occasions, time or life situations of when that person was born (Thornton, 1993). In order to get their feedback concerning how things unfolded on the first day of the classroom instruction, I talked to the pre-service teachers to find out if they encountered any challenges and how they responded to those encounters. Two pre-service teachers had the view that in the beginning pupils seemed a bit shy but as the lesson progressed, the pupils opened up and participated nicely in the lesson. However, they were surprised to see the majority of the pupils writing so nicely and legibly the same way Canadian pupils of the same level do (Grade One and Grade Two). The pre-service teachers' response above compelled me to write the following in my field notebook:

> Having a real-life experience in a different culture and social learning context, pre service – teachers are re-learning and unlearning some of the taken – for-granted assumptions. (Field notes).

The extract above implies that as Canadians and students who are born, raised

and taught in westernized learning styles, they came to realize that there are many ways to learning and because of this, there is no one approach that is superior over the other. This implies that, after practicing and experiencing teaching and learning in different context, the pre-service teachers are reflectively challenging some of their own taken-for-granted assumptions such as white or western supremacy. Consequently, the reflection in action they got involved in led them to alter some assumptions they had before about teaching and learning in Tanzania. This brings an interesting argument concerning the process of teaching and learning in the global south where westernized learning style is regarded superior over teaching and learning that is taking place in the south. This is also important because it illustrates the power of transformative learning expressed through experiential education. This presupposes that practicing teaching in Tanzania classrooms has fundamentally challenged the pre-service teachers' frames of reference and assumptions they had about leading to what Mezirow (2006) has referred to as learners' adaptation of newer and broader perspective.

With reference to Mezirow (2006) and the extract presented under this section, I argue that experiential learning in this case practicum, made an important contribution to pre-service teachers as persons as well as future teachers. This was possible after they had been exposed to new perspectives and understandings that led to adjustment and assimilation of new perspectives into their existing frames of references and practices. Usher, Bryant and Johnston (1997, p. 144) allude the same conclusion by arguing that "naming and framing are parts of process which we come to understand what is going on in practice. They further exemplify that through re-naming and re-framing we revise our views of practice and discover new action possibilities."

## Developing Student-Teacher Relationship

I leaned through this practicum that relational dimension provides a premise of understanding learning as a phenomenon situated in social contexts. Notably, teachers and students act as co-learners. Learning and teaching embedded in this model sees students becoming agents of their own learning as they create and innovate the whole learning process as they are being guided by their teachers. Relational model of teaching and learning provides an understanding to both teachers and learners that learning is a human phenomenon negotiated in social contexts. Therefore, teachers and learners as social beings need to develop positive relationship and interactions to enhance meaningful learning. The analysis of data identified some accounts that illustrate why teacher-student relationship is an important element of experiential learning for the six Canadian pre-service teachers and the pupils they taught.

After six weeks of practicum and after the pre-service teachers had left for a tour in Zanzibar, I received a call from one of my friends whose niece studies in grade two at Juhudi demonstration primary school, which I recorded in my reflection journal as follows:

> She told me that her niece, is curious to know when the pre-service teachers will be back to Juhudi because they are so friendly, caring and good teachers. She would love to have them in her class a little longer (Research Journal).

On the other hand, when I talked to one of the pre-service teachers about whether she had any plans to visit the school (Juhudi) in the future, she had the following to say:

I would definitely love to come back! There is a lot more things I'd like to try and experience. I would also love to see the kids again. It would be cool to see them when they are older! (Field notes).

Both the pupil's story and the pre-service teacher's response above illustrate the impact of student-teacher relationship to teaching and learning process. This implies that while positive student-teacher relationship may enable teachers to develop skills related to relationship building and classroom interactions including intercultural social networking, pupils may benefit highly from motivations, inspirations and conducive or caring learning environment created by the teachers. This suggests that while benefits flow in many directions, empowering relationship is central to experiential education and to future teachers in particular. It is worth noting that empowering relationships involve feelings of connectedness that are developed in situations.

Moreover, ability to motivate, inspire and create conducive learning environment where learners feel safe and engaged in the lessons are central pedagogical elements or competencies any effective teacher would like to master. Overall, as Giles (2008) observed, relational learning or student-teacher relationship is an important component in experiential learning because it describes a bond and interaction between students and teachers as human beings who live to relate or connect. Giles' argument is well captured in the response by one of the pre-service teachers described below.

On the last day of the practicum, I was chatting with one of the pre-service teachers and asked her this question, what was your pupils' reaction after learning that you are finalizing your practicum today? The pre-service-teacher responded by narrating that:

> I had kids that made us cards and two girls would not leave
> my side. The two girls got Sarah and Pianta's (two pre-service
> teachers) WhatsApp numbers and were extra loving. It was sad
> to say goodbye, I definitely lost a few tears. (Research Journal).

At face value, the relational learning can probably be interpreted to sorely focus on enhancing students' academic achievements. However, relational learning extends beyond academic life to social and emotional connectedness as illustrated in the extract above.

**Engaging in Transformative Teaching and Learning**

As part of self-directed course, I visited a nearby secondary school to Juhudi Primary School. The purpose was to observe teaching and learning experiences in Tanzanian classrooms from a transformative lens. According to Cranton (1996), transformative learning evolves through three phases, which I simply termed them as input, process and outputs. At the input phase, transformative learning requires learners to take control of their own learning through self-directed learning. For example, going to the library, searching and identifying literature relevant to the subject. As they take control of their own learning, they go through a critical reflection phase-a core component of transformative and experiential learning. This phase involves questioning and reflection on ones' assumptions and practices. Ability to question and reflect on assumptions and practices as they interact with different learning scenarios in real life situations is not an overnight event, but rather a process.

Finally, at the last phase of transformative learning, learners may experience change and growth of their practices (outputs) as the result of continued questioning of their own assumptions, values and perspectives. Therefore, transformative learning is acquired through experiential learning when individuals change their perspectives by questioning and challenging their assumptions. Schon (1987) referred to this as reflection in action. Nevertheless, Transformative learning is impossible without a motivation to involve in transformative teaching. Teachers need to orient students to this model of learning by being transformative themselves in their teaching practices. As Miller and Nakagawa (2002) put it, as teachers we cannot take students where we have not been ourselves. Based on this understanding and with experiential learning and transformative perspectives in mind, I observed some aspects that I later jotted down in my field notebook:

> It is apparent that classrooms are still dominated by teacher-
> led teaching approaches or activities. Besides, overcrowded

classrooms contribute to acute shortage of T/L materials (for example, core textbooks, reference books) and laboratory apparatuses. (Field notes).

Based on teaching and learning environment as indicated in the extract above, teaching and learning for transformation was hindered by several factors, which I categorized into three major groups. *Individualistic factors* where teachers are unable or unwilling to question and re-question their pedagogical assumptions and practices to see if the instructional methods, strategies or techniques they employ suit the learning context and nature of the learners involved. Unfortunately, in many cases things are taken for granted. *Systemic factors,* in which drawing from my own experience as a student and then teacher educator I assumed that transformative teaching and learning in this context is difficult to be achieved due to two reasons. One, because teachers were trained under the traditional model where self-reflection and personal assessment were not emphasized enough. Two, because teachers are simply unwilling to reflect on their practices because they are not adequately motivated doing their job.

*Structural factors* are challenges beyond the teachers' reach. For instance, I could not see how factors such as overcrowded classrooms, acute shortage of teaching and learning materials could support teachers to plan for lessons that nurture transformative teaching approaches. In summary, individualistic, systemic and structural factors have implications for experiential learning. As noted earlier, paying attention to context is a critical variable towards effective teaching and maximization of students' learning outcomes. Paying attention to context may be enhanced by questioning and challenging ones' own assumptions, beliefs, which in turn inform ones' practices. Thus, in order to maximize pre-service teachers' professional inquiry and growth, teaching for transformative embedded within reflection and questioning of own assumptions and practices ought to be nurtured and be regarded as an integral part of the practicum.

## Creating Community Learning and Professional Ties

The analysis of data in this study disclosed that despite some challenges hindering successful experiential learning and transformative teaching as reported in the previous section, there are efforts made so far to create professional learning community. In teaching, professional learning community is regarded as an avenue where professionals work together to share expertise and practices to improve students' learning (Hall & Hord, 2006). As disclosed from the data, mentoring of the pre-service teachers had positive impact on the learning outcomes of pupils.

In Grade Two where I observed lessons, the subject/mentor teacher had arranged and invited a guest speaker (a university lecturer from one of the public higher learning institutions) to come and talk about "Good relations in the society", this topic is taught as part of Social Studies in Grade Two. This topic meant to equip Grade Two pupils with how to relate with others and become responsible members of the society. In addition, inviting guest speakers from the university meant to create and strengthen the learning community of teachers as practitioners and lecturers as researchers and knowledge producers. The analysis of data in this study disclosed that by inviting lecturers or researchers to schools was a stepping stone to unlock the impermeable school and university boundaries that have existed for a long time in Tanzanian education system.

At the same time, it is worth noting that partnering the university with the community at large provides a new dimension to the Tanzania education system. It initially acknowledges the roles the wider community plays in the creation of knowledge. This in turn, urges stakeholders to work collaboratively in solving problems that face the community. LeBlanc, Léger, Lang & Lirette-Pitre (2015, p.2) argued that "learning/knowledge has to be achieved through the solutions that are proposed to meet the needs of the community." In the same way, education goals ought to be set collaboratively, instead of a few educational stakeholders imposing their own views/beliefs over others.

## Conclusion and Implications

There are mainly two notable lessons, which I can draw in this paper regarding experiential learning. Firstly, by experiencing how developing countries including Tanzania can approach and practice teaching and learning, the pre-service teachers involved in this study learnt several lessons both personally and professionally. Through this practicum they may have realized that there is no fixed way to teaching and learning. In addition, they may have learned that it is possible to teach or learn without computers, smartboards, photocopiers and other instructional technologies, things they are used to in their home learning contexts. This awareness and transformation has implications to teacher education because teacher preparatory programmes that involve practicum in a foreign country must prepare pre-service teachers with flexibility and desire to try new approaches and methods of teaching to enhance effective teaching and learning.

Secondly, as a teacher educator, I have also learnt that it is important to contemplate on practicum as an avenue where the novice teachers are given chance to implement what they have learned about how to teach while they

are being supported by supervisors and mentor teachers. Practicum should not be regarded as a moment to assign grades to pre-service teachers as it once happened to me as a teacher trainee.

I recall my own practicum experience being so stressful and performance (grade) driven. I further remember student trainees spending more time and energy to prepare well lessons after learning that the assessor who would be a professor or lecturer was coming to assess us. When the assessment was over we relaxed because we perceived practicum as an opportunity for grading and not a moment to practice what we have learned in the university classrooms about how to teach. Recalling on my own experience as a teacher trainee and looking at it from a transformative perspective, I substantiate that there exist differences between the Canadian and Tanzanian teacher preparatory programmes, especially the practicum aspect.

In Canada, practicum is viewed as more feedback oriented rather than grades. As such, during practicum, pre-service teachers are assessed as either pass or fail. Besides, several teacher education programmes in Canada are implementing professional development school-based practicum, where pre-service teachers spend much of their time within one school as practising teachers. In addition, some teacher education programmes from the universities of Prince Edward Island, McGill, Victoria, Saskatchewan, Mount Royal and the University of Manitoba are conducting part of their classes in public school classrooms. This is done to engage pre-service teachers more concretely with in-service teachers and students in schools. Alternatively, for teacher education programmes that are unable to offer courses in schools, partner schools with the university have been highly encouraged and practised.

Lastly, the Canadian teacher education system acknowledges mentoring as an integral part of the practicum in schools. Host teachers volunteer as mentors to guide and support pre-service teachers throughout the practicum periods. The mentors are expected to support pre-service teachers on how to teach, classroom management, lesson planning and assessment of students' learning outcomes. The preservice teachers – mentor relationship is encouraged to equip pre-service teachers with feedback skills, critical reflection in teaching and connect theory to practice.

In summary, this paper has explored the role of practicum in fostering relationship building, professional growth and discovery of pre-service teachers. Drawing from the family of experiential learning perspectives including Relational Cultural and Reflective in Practice theories, I have underscored how doing

practicum may aid pre-service teachers to change perspectives after they have experienced and reflected on assumptions and practices they take for granted about teaching and learning in a foreign country. I have also identified three key themes that are important to enhance smooth experiential learning, namely relational learning, mentorship and school community partnership creation. Lastly, I have learnt that practicum becomes an important component in teacher preparations if it is treated as an opportunity to learn and translate theories into practice instead of viewing it from a performance viewpoint.

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