Factors of Practicum Experience for Pre-service Teacher's Sense of Readiness for Their Teaching Career

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Bachelor of Arts, Central China Normal University, 2014

A Project Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Education

In the Department of Curriculum and Instruction

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Abstract

The factors that contribute to a good practicum, an essential component to prepare pre-service teachers for their teaching careers, are examined in this paper. By reviewing the examples of teacher education institutions all over the world, some implications are provided for Chinese normal universities to improve the effectiveness of practicum. The duration of the practicum should be long and be distributed into several times. It is necessary to articulate the practicum with method courses to make pre-service teachers make more linkages between theory and practice. The comprehensive support from supervisor, mentor teacher and peers are critical. Reflection can help pre-service teachers gain new things by reviewing and become reflective learners in their future teaching. Triadic assessment and clear criterion should be used to ensure the fairness of the evaluation of teaching performance.

Keywords: practicum, pre-service teachers, method courses, support, reflection

Introduction

In the fall semester in 2007, the State Council of China implemented a free education policy in normal universities (teacher education universities), which were directly affiliated to the Ministry of Education. The Ministry of Education of PRC pays the tuition for normal education students. Those universities are Beijing Normal University, East China Normal University, Northeast Normal University, Central China Normal University, Shanxi Normal University, and Southwest University. This policy has also been implemented in Jiangxi Normal University since 2013 and Fujian Normal University since 2015. The students who enroll in these normal education programs can enjoy free tuition and incidental fee exemption and receive a monthly living allowance. In the remaining normal education universities in China, students have to pay tuition with no governmental aid. After graduation, those free-tuition normal university students are required to work as elementary and secondary school teachers in public schools for at least 10 years and cannot apply for full-time graduate programs during these years of service. The aim of this free normal education policy is to encourage youth to become lifelong educators and to create a large number of excellent teachers (General Office of the State Council of PRC, 2007).

As a free- tuition education student, I was admitted to a normal university in central China in 2008 for a four-year bachelor degree and majored in Chinese language and literature. During my four years of studies, I had to take subject matter courses and general education courses, and had field teaching practice as well. Most of the courses were taken between the first and sixth semester. At the beginning of the seventh semester, when I had finished all the pedagogical courses, I performed my practicum in a local high school for about 2 months (320 hours). During the practicum, the pre-service teachers were divided into groups with 8-10 members separately, and each group had a course instructor from the faculty of the university who acted as a supervi-

sor. In the field schools, each pre-service teacher was assigned to work with an in-service teacher. Even though the practicum experience was touted as being critical for "setting the stage for success or failure" in pre-service teachers' teaching performance and "future in education" (Yan & He, 2010, p. 57), the practicum took a small portion of my four-year university life, and seemed to be insignificant; lasting 2 months (320 hours) out of four years' study, 6 credits out of the 160 credits needed for graduation. After graduation, I worked as a Chinese teacher in a local primary school. However, as an in-service teacher, I felt unprepared for my work. I did not know how to make lesson plans according to the syllabus, and I felt unsatisfied with the quality of my interactions with students, as they were six years old and I did not understand how to communicate with them.

As with my four-year undergraduate degree, there are several components involved in teacher education programs. Main categories include "subject matter courses, general education courses (psychology, philosophy of education, assessment, etc.), practical pedagogy as well as the ethics of the profession" (Smith & Lev, 2005, p. 293). According to the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE; 2008), a pre-service teacher should take courses on "a broad liberal arts education," "an in-depth study of the subject" they will teach, "a foundation of professional and pedagogical knowledge," and "experiences in field schools" (p. 4). Among all of these components to teacher education, the practicum is considered to be an indispensable part. Darling-Hammond (2008) claimed that pre-service teachers' learning only in teacher education institutions' classrooms without practicum in field schools was insufficient, as both types of learning gave pre-service teachers the chance to test and rethink the knowledge gained from their studies and practical teaching.

Practicum experiences allow pre-service teachers to "apply and reflect on their content,

professional, and pedagogical knowledge, skills, and professional dispositions in a variety of settings" (NCATE, 2008, p. 29). Armutcu and Yaman (2010) also claim that practicums provide "real classroom" experience for pre-service teachers, allowing them to understand how to navigate relationships with students and other teachers, and practicum experiences could help preservice teachers "revise their previous knowledge, theories and beliefs" about teaching and learning after "an adaptation or assimilation process of new experiences in the real environment" (p. 32). Baek and Ham (2009) echo this statement by claiming that by practicing teaching skills in real classrooms and revising previous knowledge and theories, pre-service teachers can significantly improve their "practical teaching competence." What's more, with a deeper understanding of how to conduct relationships with students and other teachers, pre-service teachers can acquire better communication and cooperation skills. Thus, pre-service teachers would learn to solve problems by seeing things from other peoples' perspectives, with a more comprehensive consideration, which would contribute to their "maturity in character" (p. 277).

A good teacher must be able to demonstrate strong abilities in several areas. First, in teaching performance, which includes good subject and curriculum knowledge, teaching well-structured lessons, and maintaining good classroom management. Teaching performance serves as a base because teaching is a teacher's basic task. Second, a good teacher must promote the development of their students. Teachers have to make accurate and productive use of assessment measures to realize good outcomes and progress of students. What's more, teachers need to connect students with sources of information and knowledge through their familiarity with curriculum resources and technologies. Instead of merely feeding students knowledge, teachers should also provide resources to students that promote their self-study abilities. As teaching is a cooper-

ative role which cannot be filled by teachers alone, the third area in which teachers should excel is in maintaining good relationships with all concerned parties by structuring positive interactions with students, collaborating with other teachers, and working with parents. Finally, a good teacher should possess some tacit knowledge on how to handle spontaneous problems, make daily decisions, and develop a professional vision (Darling-Hammond, 2008; Smith & Lev, 2005; Department for Education of UK, 2011). Teaching performance and classroom behaviour lays the foundation for good teaching. What's more, by providing students with learning resources, teachers not only pass on knowledge to students, but also turn them into life-long learners. Meanwhile, good relationships can contribute to the above two aspects, as they can make students more open to teachers, and sharing curriculum resources and technologies with other teachers can be helpful in teachers' self-improvement.

The practicum plays an essential role in the development of a teacher, but there is a big gap between the claim and the reality of the practicum in Chinese normal universities. For this reason, I wanted to research the aspects that contribute to a good practicum, which can allow pre-service teachers to be better prepared for their future profession. Several key factors for practicum have been suggested. The first factor that has been mentioned a lot is the length of practicum. Crowther and Cannon (1999) pointed out that "an extended practicum experience" could give more positive influence to pre-service teachers than "a shorter practicum experience" (p. 24). Quick & Sieborger (2005) suggested that it's better for pre-service teachers to "spend more time" (p. 1) in field schools. The extended practicum time can make pre-service teachers "extraordinarily well prepared" (Darling-Hammond, 2006, p. 305) for their future teaching. The articulation of courses and practicum experiences is another key factor (Allsopp, DeMarie, Alvarez-McHatton, & Doone, 2006). Beck & Kosnik (2002) pointed out that combining the practicum and method

courses together was a "critical inquiring approach" (p. 83). Apart from this, help from supervisors, mentor teachers, and peers are also critical (Smith & Lev, 2005). Supervisors' help and "friendliness or support from the mentor teacher" are important to pre-service teachers during their practicum (Beck & Kosnik, 2002, p. 86). "Diverse faculty and peers" help pre-service teachers to learn from "multiple perspectives and different life experiences" during their practicum (NCATE, 2008, p. 37). The fourth factor is pointed out by Zhu (2011), stating that reflection could also help pre-service teachers, "improve their teaching practice" and ready them for their careers (p. 769). Cattley (2007) suggested that with reflection, pre-service teachers are "more likely to shape a robust professional identity" (p. 341). Besides, "assessment practices and procedures" of pre-service teachers is "one of the most significant" issues related to the practicum (Brooker, Muller, Mylonas, & Hansford, 1998, p. 5). NCATE (2008) also stated that assessment could improve pre-service teachers' performance during practicum. These five factors, namely, length of practicum, articulation of practicum with method courses, comprehensive support, self-reflection of pre-service teachers, and assessment, are mentioned in the research in this area.

The purpose of this paper is to offer some implications for the practicum in Chinese normal universities to better prepare pre-service teachers for their future teaching practice. I aim to achieve two goals: (a) to report on the important factors that contribute to a practicum, based on literature about teacher preparation from all over the world and (b) to improve the condition of the practicum in Chinese normal universities and generate useful ideas for teacher educators.

My course of research has altered during the process of writing this paper. At first, I wanted to compare teacher education problems in China to those of the rest of the world. However, in communication with my supervisor, I realized the topic was too broad for this paper.

Therefore, we narrowed our focus to the practical aspect of teacher education, namely practicum. After that, I read several articles about practicum, and wrote down terms that appeared frequently in the literature, such as length, method courses, supervisors and mentor teachers, reflection, and assessment. The online library of the University of Victoria, ERIC (Education Resources Information Center), and JLS (Journal of the Learning Sciences) were the databases used for my research. I used some methods to narrow the scope of literature. The first was using two or more key terms at the same time. For example, when I searched "practicum" in ERIC, there were 5798 results, but added another search term, "practicum AND length," the result was only 53. Another method was choosing literature according to the date of publication. As I wanted to examine problems revealed in Chinese teacher education practicums in recent years, I sorted the articles by publication date and chose the most recent and useful. The third method was to choose articles from all over the world, as I wanted to learn from the experiences had in other countries. I found articles from different areas of the world including North America, Europe, Asia, and Australia and Oceania. Through those methods, I chose the literature I needed for my research.

Some terminology used in this paper needs to be defined: Students enrolled in teacher education programs are labelled student teacher, teacher candidate, or pre-service teacher. In this paper, the term, "pre-service teacher" will be used to refer to students enrolled in a teacher education program. The term, "supervisor" refers to a teacher educator who works in teacher education institutions and gives instructions to pre-service teachers during their practicum. "Mentor teacher" refers to the professional teacher who works in K-12 schools and acts as an instructor or a role model for the pre-service teacher, and "field school" refers to the K-12 school where the practicum takes place.

Review of Literature

Length and Number of Practicum

The length and the number of teaching experiences is a critical aspect of the practicum. In "most of the countries" in the world, the practicum is "interwoven throughout the teacher education program," (Manzar-Abbas & Lu, 2013a, p. 175) although there is some variation from country to country. In order to analyze the character of practicum amidst the enormous diversity across the globe, only programs that provided sufficient information about the time and distribution of the practicum were considered in my research.

Length of practicum. Among the six teacher education programs included in this paper, the shortest length of practicum was 360 hours, the longest length was 660 hours, and the average length of their practicums was about 475 hours, which is almost 3 months (8 hours per day, 5 days per week). In North America, the practicum structure of Salem State University in the USA is a total of 375 hours which is composed of two parts: the first is "at least 75 hours as pre-practicum experience" and the second is "300 hours for student teaching," which is almost a "full semester" (Manzar-Abbas & Lu, 2013a, p. 175). The "one-year, post-baccalaureate teacher education program" at the University of Toronto in Canada requires pre-service teachers to take part in a "pre-service teacher experience program" for 6 hours per week for 10 weeks, followed by a 120-150 hour "practice teaching session" in the "same school and classroom" for "each of the two semesters" (Beck & Kosnik, 2002, p. 83). The total practicum length at the University of Toronto is 360 hours.

In Europe, situations vary according to the criteria of different universities. At the University of Glasgow, UK, pre-service teachers have practicum experience throughout the entire program. During each school year, pre-service teachers have to go to field schools 6 hours per

week for 6 weeks, have a 120-hour teaching practicum session "in a middle or primary school," and a 300-hour teaching practicum during the last semester of the program, which is a total of 456 hours (Manzar-Abbas & Lu, 2013a, p. 176). In Switzerland, pre-service teachers at the University of Bern have to pass three stages of practicum. The first practicum lasts between 120 and 180 hours and "takes place after the first semester," and the second, 90-hour, practicum takes place after "four semesters." During the last year of the program, pre-service teachers take part in a 180-hour practicum. The entire time allocated for practicum is around 450 hours (Hascher, Cocard, & Moser, 2004, pp. 627-628).

As for Asia, according to Manzar-Abbas and Lu (2013a), pre-service teachers at the National Institute of Education Singapore have four practicum experiences, which last for 60, 150, 150 and 300 hours accordingly during different semesters for a total of 660 hours. The University of Hong Kong has pre-service teachers take part in a practicum three times throughout the program, for a total of 570 hours.

From the above six programs we can see that the total time for the practicum varies in different teacher education institutions around the world. The practicum time for the Salem State University applies for both undergraduate and graduate pre-service teachers, and the program at the University of Toronto is post-baccalaureate and lasts only for one year, while the remaining four programs are for bachelor degrees. The practicum time for undergraduate programs are longer than the post-baccalaureate programs. This may be for two reasons, the first being that the four-year study period allows more time for undergraduate pre-service teachers to spend in field schools. The second reason is, as post-baccalaureate pre-service teachers already have their undergraduate practicum experiences as a foundation, they need to spend less time in field schools. Another element is that all teacher education institutions arrange their practicums to occur in

more than one session, regardless of the country and the duration of the program. Therefore, we can conclude from those examples that pre-service teachers in undergraduate programs have longer practicum times than those in post-baccalaureate programs, and it's better to distribute the practicum into different terms, so that the field experiences can be interwoven into the entire teacher education program.

As for an appropriate length of time for the practicum, the results of surveys vary. Some research claimed that the practicum should be long enough to better prepare pre-service teachers for their careers, while others asserted that a short practicum is enough to prepare pre-service teachers. Results from a study of a teacher education institution in the United States advocated that longer practicums had a positive influence on pre-service teachers' readiness for their future professions. The results compared the experiences of 64 pre-service teachers from the mid-west, who had practicums that took place over only one lesson that lasted from 1.5 to 2 hours with pre-service teachers from western universities whose practicums lasted for 120 hours in total. They indicated that a longer practicum time "positively influence a pre-service teacher's personal teaching efficacy beliefs" (Cannon, 1997, pp. 254-257) when compared to a single, one-time-only practicum experience. The 120 hours of practicum time allowed for daily routine student contact time, and pre-service teachers "gain[ed] twice the effect of teaching experience" when compared with 2 hours of students contact time (pp. 254-257).

However, there are some studies that found different results. A study conducted by Crowther and Cannon (1999) found that with regards to building "prolonged relationships with children," a practicum length of 144 hours was more effective, but in terms of creating "an effi-cacious teacher," there was "no qualitative difference between the 144 and 45-hour practicum" (p.

23) from the pre-service teachers' standpoints. The thing to note here is that the term "efficacious teacher" was not defined in their study.

From the above two studies, we can see that with only one chance to teach a lesson for about 1.5 to 2 hours, the pre-service teachers from those mid-western universities could only acquire initial impressions on teaching, and had no opportunity to adjust their teaching based on experiences or to get to know the students. Meanwhile, the pre-service teachers from western universities who had 120 practicum hours had more opportunities to practice their teaching skills and more contact with students. With this deeper understanding of students' characters, those pre-service teachers were able to better communicate and cooperate with them during classes, which would definitely enhance their readiness for future teaching. It may seem that Crowther and Cannon's study refutes this by claiming that a short-length practicum is enough for pre-service. However, this is not necessarily the case. With 45 hours, pre-service teachers were able to know how to perform in class and adapt themselves to the daily work, but having a 144-hour long practicum could help them to maintain better relationships with students, which would enhance interaction between pre-service teachers and students, and thus contribute to an overall better teaching performance. Meanwhile, with a longer practicum, pre-service teachers would gain more confidence and had more time to explore how to teach, as they were more familiar with the teaching routines and target students. Therefore, the longer practicum, which contributes to the relationship between pre-service teachers and students, also has a positive influence on pre-service teachers' teaching performances and their readiness for their careers. The longer the practicum lasts, the better the relationship between pre-service teachers and students. Thus the pre-service teachers will have more confidence in their future teaching. The statistics in these two surveys indicate that the longer practicum is better than the shorter practicum for building

good relationships between pre-service teachers and students, and also contributes positively to their in-class performance, but they do not indicate whether 120 hours or 144 hours is best for practicum.

In light of the different perspectives mentioned above, it is advisable to have a practicum that lasts for almost a whole semester (640 hours), which provides pre-service teachers enough time to become familiar with basic teaching routines, implementing syllabus, and understanding students' personalities. The longer practicum can also provide pre-service teachers with more opportunities to apply the skills learned in their teacher education institutions, and thus to improve.

Another factor to note is that, even though the total practicum length can be regulated by teacher education institutions, the actual time that pre-service teachers are given to teach in-class cannot be ensured. Some pre-service teachers at Vaal University complained of having few opportunities to teach in their practicum classrooms because their mentor teachers did not have confidence in them and thought they would waste students' time (Kiggundu & Nayimuli, 2009). Therefore, it is necessary for teacher education institutions and field schools to reach an agreement about the exact amount of time and number of classes that pre-service teachers should teach during practicum.

Number of practicums. The distribution of the practicum is also very important as pre-service teachers can benefit more from two or more practicums. It was reported that pre-service teachers who were involved in an 8-week schedule of 1 hour per day gained more skills in "lesson plans, unit plans, and comfort dealing with student-to-student conflict" than those who "had only experienced 4 weeks" in the field school with 2 hours per day (Wyss, Siebert, & Dowling, 2012, p. 605). Though both groups experienced an equal amount of time in the field school, it is

possible that being on site for a longer stretch of time helps in getting to know the students and this may account for the difference in gains. What's more, "dividing practicum into different phases" can solve potential mismatches between the mentor teacher and pre-service teacher without hurting "anyone's feelings or ego" (Manzar-Abbas & Lu, 2013a, p. 182). As a pre-service teacher can work with a different mentor teacher for each practicum, if they were not suitable work partners, this problem could be naturally solved for the next practicum without causing conflict. Meanwhile, pre-service teachers are able to gain a variety of views on teaching by cooperating with a number of mentor teachers. According to Cattley (2007), "the sustainable aspect of identity" of a pre-service teacher is very "vulnerable from one practicum experience to the next," as each field school can be very different from the others (p. 338). In Cattley's study, the pre-service teachers at Flinders University in South Australia who experienced three practicums in different field schools developed a sense of "heavy responsibility" through their set of practicums, including "a sense of professional competence" by "interacting with various members of the school community," and understanding the "paradoxical nature of teachers' work and perspective taking of others" (p. 343).

From these results, we can conclude that practicums lasting for longer periods of time provide more opportunities for pre-service teachers to apply their theoretical knowledge in the school context and build better relationships with students, thus making them more prepared for their future teaching. What's more, teacher education institutions and field schools should reach an agreement to ensure the exact, actual teaching time for pre-service teachers. Apart from this, distribution of the practicum is also very critical. Dividing the practicum into several different stages, which last throughout the entire teacher education program, helps pre-service teachers

become more aware of their responsibilities and become familiar with real teaching life by connecting with various school faculties, students, and parents. Therefore, the practicum should last at least for a whole term, and be distributed into several sections.

Articulation of Practicum with Method Courses

Along with teaching practicum, theoretical courses are also defined as an indispensable part of teacher education. Such courses provide pre-service teachers with "a systematic explanation of theories to improve their theoretical competence" (Baek & Ham, 2009, p. 272). An important component of theoretical courses is the so-called "method courses (such as lesson planning, course planning)," which are more practical, taught by professors "with an academic background" that "serve as a bridge between the theoretical knowledge of teaching and the practical knowledge of teaching" (Smith & Lev, 2005, p. 298).

Some teacher education programs often have practicum articulated with method courses "throughout the program" (NCATE, 2008, p. 32). There are three types of articulation of practicum with method courses that are usually adopted by teacher education programs, namely campus-based courses, field school-based courses, and microteaching.

Campus-based courses. Some teacher education programs "integrate the practicum with the campus program by emphasizing a critical, inquiring approach in both settings, addressing issues from the practicum in campus courses" (Beck & Kosnik, 2002, p. 83). This kind of articulation is used in a lot of teacher education programs. At the University of Colorado Denver, the pre-service teachers who had enrolled in their Initial Professional Teacher Education program took methods courses "simultaneously at the university" during their "first three" practicums (American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education, 2010, p. 7). Allen & Peach (2007)

mentioned a regional Australian university that also took this approach by interweaving the method courses and practicum. The teacher education program in that university offered a 100-day experience in field schools and had a 2-hour tutorial course every week on campus during the second practicum.

We can see that both teacher education institutions that adopt this kind of articulation have more than one practicum, but the former has this kind of integration during the first three practicums, while the later adopts this method for only the second practicum. When practicums are distributed into several sections as in the above examples, the first several practicums are not very long (except for the last practicum), ensuring the schoolwork and teaching burdens are not too heavy for pre-service teachers. Therefore, they have enough time and energy to partake in campus-based courses and assignments at the same time as they perform their practicum. The teacher education institutions with several short-length practicums make it possible to take campus-based courses at the same time as a practicum.

Field school-based courses. Some teacher education programs give method courses at the field schools where the pre-service teachers perform their practicum. Theoretical knowledge is taught in combination with pre-service teachers' teaching experiences through seminars or lectures in field schools. According to Freese (2006), this situation is similar to the Master of Education in Teaching program at the University of Hawaii. For the "two-year graduate program," "the pre-service teachers take six credits of university coursework (professional studies seminars) during the first two semesters of the program." At the same time, they performed their practicums in the field school, "spending twelve hours per week in the field both semesters" (p. 119). The weekly seminars on site in the field school provided an opportunity for pre-service teachers to connect theory with practice by discussing and reflecting on classroom

experiences and dilemmas. The Department of Special Education at the University of South Florida taught three courses in the field school: two "special education courses" and one "foundations course" along with the practicum. For example, "instead of watching a videotape of classroom management practices," the students observed "two Kindergarten and fifth-grade teachers' practices" and went back to class to discuss "the practices they had observed." The instructor also taught pre-service teachers to use "course-based assignments" in the "practicum school setting" (Allsopp et al., 2006, pp. 22-23). Zhu (2011) also described another articulation at an Eastern research-intensive university in the Unites States. Besides weekly seminars in the field school, model lessons were given by instructors to demonstrate "different pedagogies and delivery systems to different groups of students" (p. 770).

These three examples exhibit several activities involved in field school-based courses: weekly seminars, model lessons, class observation, and class discussion. With weekly seminars in field schools, pre-service teachers have the opportunity to communicate with supervisors about the confusions and dilemmas they have faced during their practicum, and can seek solutions in time. By attending model lessons, pre-service teachers can learn some teaching skills more intuitively than they would by reading books. Through class observation, pre-service teachers may discover some interesting and unexpected phenomena, which can be discussed in class. Those phenomena may concern some tacit knowledge, such as establishing credibility with students, handling unexpected situations in classrooms, and so on. The class observation and discussion can enhance the knowledge gained from books. Through those ways, field school-based courses can make more linkages between theoretical knowledge and practical teaching.

Microteaching. The third articulation, microteaching, allows methods instructors,

who are experts in both the subject matter being taught and pedagogy, to teach pedagogical knowledge to the pre-service teachers. Tamir (1988) described a microteaching model, which could be "characterized as holistic and subject matter oriented" (p. 107). The microteaching involved "team planning" and "team teaching" of "whole lessons" by groups of pre-service teachers. The students involved in the microteaching volunteered to attend the university. The microteaching lessons were videotaped and "a detailed analysis based on the review of the videotape" (p. 107) took place immediately after the classes. The instructor and the pre-service teachers also reflected on their teaching performances and discussed matters that emerged "from the particular events in the lesson." The microteaching experience was found to provide "a smoother passage to the reality of the classroom" (p. 107).

We can see that, in microteaching, the discussion between pre-service teachers and supervisors is timelier than in the other two methods of articulation, and therefore more detailed questions and problems can be remembered clearly and thus generate a more comprehensive discussion. What's more, because microteaching classes are recorded, pre-service teachers can observe themselves and discover their own strengths and weaknesses, which allows them to have a clearer image of their teaching performance. Tamir (1988) claimed that through microteaching, pre-service teachers "felt that they indeed learned a lot" about "personal performance," "subject matter" knowledge, "general pedagogical knowledge," and "subject matter specific pedagogical knowledge" (p. 108).

However, microteaching is not as authentic as practicum in field schools. A pre-service teacher at a normal university in central China pointed out the tension between vision and reality. During microteaching, the pre-service teacher's peers acted as her students, and they could an-

swer all of her designed questions "without any difficulties." By contrast, during actual teaching experiences, the students usually could not answer the pre-service teachers' questions as expected, which resulted in pre-service teachers' inability to design "teaching procedure" and "proper questions for the students" (Yan & He, 2010, p. 63).

Some different voices have also been heard on the topic of articulation of practicum with method courses. Pre-service teachers who enrolled in the Technology Post-graduate Certificate in Education program at Vaal University in South Africa had to take method courses on campus while performing their practicum in field schools. The pre-service teachers found their schoolwork, such as preparing "for their lessons at schools" and completing "assessment of learner work" to be inconvenient because they were also required to finish their "own assignments" for the method courses, which was a challenge to them (Kiggundu & Nayimuli, 2009, p. 350).

Through the review we can see that method courses can be articulated with practicum in three ways: campus-based courses coinciding with the practicum, field school-based courses, and microteaching. Each method has its advantages and disadvantages. The on-campus based courses allow pre-service teachers to transfer theories about teaching skills into action immediately following on-campus courses, and problems and confusions that arise during practice teaching can be solved during the on-campus courses by communicating with course instructors. However, the campus-based courses can be a burden for pre-service teachers during practicum, if there are too many assignments and schoolwork at the same time. The quality of learning during both campus-based courses and practicum cannot be guaranteed, as pre-service teachers' energy and capabilities are limited. As for field-school based courses, pre-service teachers are able to learn teaching skills and some tacit knowledge in a more direct and intuitive way through model lessons, class observations, and class discussions. Pre-service teachers can solve problems in a timely manner

as supervisors give weekly seminars in the field schools. One potential issue is that the weekly field-school based courses may affect the normal practice teaching or schoolwork schedule of pre-service teachers, as they must coordinate their schedules in order to get together. Microteaching also allows pre-service teachers to get instructions from supervisors in a timely manner as the discussions happen immediately after the microteaching classes. What's more, since classes are recorded, pre-service teachers can have a clearer idea of where their strengths and weaknesses lie. However, since microteaching cannot provide the opportunity for pre-service teachers to have contact with other schoolteachers and staff, and they therefore cannot learn cooperation skills, it is not as authentic as the other two types of articulation and is not recommended. The other types of integration provide pre-service teachers with better chances to link theory to reality, but they all have some difficulties in application. This issue is considered further in the second part of this project.

Comprehensive Support

A survey of 480 pre-service teachers from the largest teacher education institution in Israel indicated that "institutional-based supervisors," mentor teachers, and peers were regarded as the most supportive resources during the practicum (Smith & Lev, 2005, p. 289).

During practicum, pre-service teachers need academic support as well as emotional support, since they may feel unconfident and uneasy in new environments. Both supervisors and mentor teachers can provide those supports to them. According to The Clinical Preparation of Teachers of the United States, supervisors should be able to "positively communicate with" and give support to pre-service teachers in their "often-challenging" field experiences (AACTE, 2010, p. 5). Pre-service teachers at a regional Australian university in Allen and Peach's (2007) survey

also stated that they "sought advice from their supervisors," and they thought it was a positive way of "dealing with problems" as they were able to benefit from "the more experienced teachers' knowledge and proficiency to improve their own practice" (p. 28). This kind of support can be realized with campus-based courses and field school-based courses. Apart from this, the pre-service teachers from a teacher education program at the University of Toronto mentioned that friendliness and trust from mentor teachers was "a key component of a good practicum" as this kind of emotional support could help them "do a better job as a teacher and grow as a teacher" (Beck & Kosnik, 2002, p. 86). What's more, by "observing mentor teachers' lessons," pre-service teachers who came from Leiden University, Netherlands were able to have access to "practical knowledge" about teaching (Zanting, Verloop, & Vermunt, 2003, p. 204). Being supported by supervisors, pre-service teachers may feel more secure. Meanwhile, a supportive attitude from mentor teachers can make pre-service teachers feel welcome in the field schools. What's more, the weekly school visits and field-school based courses by supervisors provide pre-service teachers more theoretical knowledge, while mentor teachers give them more help in practical experience as they stand at the frontier of teaching.

Therefore, it is necessary for these two parties to have a cooperative relationship in order to achieve better results. The Clinical Preparation of Teachers of the United States stated that pre-service teachers should "exhibit consistent success" through substantial practicums "in a challenging school setting supervised by both university- and school-based faculty" (AACTE, 2010, p. 11). Several teacher education institutions make use of cooperation between supervisor and mentor teacher in the guidance of pre-service teachers. Beck and Kosnik's (2002) paper revealed that in a "one-year post-baccalaureate teacher education program" at the University of

Toronto, “all members of the faculty team, including subject specialists,” had to “serve as practicum supervisors.” Apart from this, the faculty team selects the mentor teachers and “makes decisions about who will continue in the role” (p. 83). This way, supervisors get to know pre-service teachers and mentor teachers well, and are able to provide them great support. In a four-year teacher education program in one of the largest teacher education colleges in Israel, the supervisors and mentor teachers shared continuous responsibilities through the whole program. During the first three years, supervisors and mentors supervised the pre-service teacher’s “practice teaching” together, and “the main responsibility” lay with the institution-based supervisors. In the fourth year, the field school was “required to appoint an experienced teacher to support and guide” the pre-service teacher (Smith & Lev, 2005, pp. 292-293).

As mentioned in the above section, supervisor and mentor teachers are able to offer this kind of support through field school-based courses, selecting and training mentor teachers, and supervising the pre-service teachers together. Meanwhile, through cooperation, supervisors and mentor teachers can have a better understanding of each other, and will be more consistent in their instruction of pre-service teachers.

Furthermore, findings show that pre-service teachers “seek and find support from their peers” (Smith & Lev, 2005). By working collaboratively, pre-service teachers were able to “critique and reflect on each other’s practice,” which demonstrated an advantage of putting pre-service teachers in field schools as a group rather than individually (NCATE, 2008, p. 31). In the University of South Australia, pre-service teachers were “directly involved in each other’s learning by being mentors for each other,” through which pre-service teachers could develop “interpersonal skills and critical reflection skills,” and provide “professional support for each other” during practicum (Cornu, 2005, pp. 362-364). During practicum, pre-service teachers from the

University of Utah often gave peer support "by visiting each other's classrooms." These "classroom visits" could "provide opportunities" for the pre-service teachers to "expand their observational experience," and to provide "their peers with informal feedback" (Tomaš, Farrelly, & Haslam, 2008, p. 662). Additionally, several pre-service teachers who had their practicum in secondary classrooms in the state of Sabah, Malaysia thought that "peer mentoring" was "an important part of the program," especially where mentor teachers "were perceived to provide only limited support" (Ligadu, 2012, pp. 355-356). The pre-service teachers found that peer mentoring was "helpful in assisting them daily in their lesson plans, teaching techniques, strategies, content, teaching aids and classroom management skills" (pp. 355-356). The NCATE (2008) pointed out that the "active participation" of pre-service teachers "with different experiences" was "solicited and valued" in practicum as pre-service teachers "reflect on and analyze these experiences in ways that enhance their development and growth as professionals" (p. 35).

As pre-service teachers have their own unique experiences and backgrounds, the way they deal with a similar situation may differ from one to the other. By communicating with each other and reflecting on their various approaches towards the same problem, pre-service teachers can obtain new ideas about teaching skills and ways to handle situations. Meanwhile, by working as a group, pre-service teachers can talk about the difficulties and problems they may face in the practicum, which sometimes are ignored by supervisors and mentor teachers, and learn from each other's methods and experiences.

The teacher education institutions included in this paper attach importance to the role of supervisors, mentor teachers, and peers in helping pre-service teachers make progress. The field

school-based courses and regular school visits by supervisors give teaching skill instructions to pre-service teachers. They can also help to solve the confusions and problems pre-service teachers encounter during practicum. However, as some supervisors do not have teaching experience in local field schools, their theoretical knowledge may not adapt well to the actual teaching situations. In contrast, mentor teachers possess vast teaching experience, and the skills they teach pre-service teachers can be very practical. The shortcoming of mentor teachers is that they may not be as up to date with new teaching methods, and be used to a traditional style, which is incongruent with what pre-service teachers learn on campus. Therefore, cooperation between supervisors and mentor teachers is particularly important as together they combine the latest theoretical knowledge and a great amount of teaching experience. What's more, by cooperating with each other, these two parties can give more consistent instructions to pre-service teachers. Apart from this, as pre-service teachers are newcomers, some mistakes and problems may be hard for them to solve, while supervisors and mentor teachers sometimes neglect them. At this point, peer support is critical. Peers will be more sensitive to problems similar to those they experience, and have a better understanding of one another. By visiting each other's classes and having collaborative discussions, pre-service teachers can solve common problems together. Therefore, supervisor, mentor teachers, and peers provide different forms of help to pre-service teachers, and they should work together to give comprehensive support to pre-service teachers.

Reflection of Pre-service Teachers

Reflection is also very critical to the pre-service teachers during practicum, because this builds the foundation for a reflective practice in their future careers. "As teachers are considered as professionals in the process of intellectual and professional improvement," reflection is "an indis-

pensable" aid that allows pre-service teachers to "combine theoretical knowledge with practice, to adopt critical thinking skills and to find solutions that fit best in unexpected situations" (Armutcu & Yaman, 2010, p. 34). McFarland, Saunders and Allen (2009) also believe that pre-service teachers who "spend time reflecting on their positive guidance skills may gain insight into how they can modify their practice with both individual students and whole groups," and they may realize "their ideas through practice to become better at implementing guidance" (p. 506). Meanwhile, pre-service teachers are "more likely to shape a robust professional identity" by reflecting "upon the breadth of their roles" (Cattley, 2007, p. 341).

There are several different methods commonly adopted by teacher education institutions to help pre-service teachers reflect, the most common being reflective journals, professional portfolios, reflective interviews, and reflective seminars.

Pre-service teachers are often required to keep reflective journals where they "recall and briefly describe" what they have observed in the mentor teachers' class, "what they would do if they were the teachers," and the successes and deficiencies in their own practice classes (Zhu, 2011, p. 769). The reflective journals should be given to supervisors "for comments and feedback" (Smith & Lev, 2005, p. 296). Those comments and feedback can help pre-service teachers to reinforce the teaching skills they have observed, and to gain some instruction on their own teaching, which will help with their reflection. By keeping reflective journals, pre-service teachers can "clarify and extend their thoughts and concerns" and supervisors can support pre-service teachers' "inquiry into their development as learners and teachers" (Collier, 1999, p. 174). Tadesse (2007) also states that reflective journal writing can help pre-service teachers improve their teaching skills, "learn the complexities involved in the teaching," and "develop their reflection skills" (pp.

350-351).

Professional portfolios usually include “samples of lesson plans, worksheets and other teaching materials, personal reflections on the teaching, and goal setting for the future lessons” (Smith & Lev, 2005, p. 296) to demonstrate pre-service teachers’ understanding about “content knowledge,” students development, “management and motivation strategies,” “communication skills,” “planning and instruction skills,” and “collaboration and professionalism” (Zhu, 2011, p. 767). Hopper, Sanford, and Bonsor-Kurki (2012) reported on 45 pre-service teachers at the University of Victoria, Canada, who built electronic portfolios during their practicum. They claimed that “portfolios have been identified as a tool for deep and durable learning, supportive of environments of reflection and collaboration,” and they are “effective for bringing about performance- and learning-related change” (p. 31). By building professional portfolios, pre-service teachers can reflect on what they learned in their previous courses or experiences, recalling primarily what happened or what they had gone through.

Reflective interviews usually happen between pre-service teachers and mentor teachers or supervisors. During a reflective interview, pre-service teachers discuss their teaching practice or questions that arose from visiting mentor teachers’ classes (Freese, 2006; Ligadu, 2012). The reflective interviews usually occur “immediately after completion” of the pre-service teachers’ teaching practice or mentor teachers’ modeling lessons (Collier, 1999, p. 175). Sometimes reflective interviews take place in the middle of the practicum when pre-service teachers meet with their supervisors or mentor teachers to “discuss their self-evaluations and reflect on their goals” (McFarland et al., 2009, p. 507). By participating in reflective interviews with mentor teachers or supervisors, pre-service teachers can have a clearer “self- awareness of weakness and strengths”

in their teaching, and "their surroundings" (Ligadu, 2012, p. 356).

Another type of reflection is the reflective seminar. Pre-service teachers make several visits to their peers' classrooms and make note of "comments for subsequent discussion with the observed" pre-service teacher during group seminars. These seminars support "collaborative reflection between peers" (Collier, 1999, p. 175). The peer reflection provides a platform for pre-service teachers to gain from one another a different perspective in an equal environment (Caruso, 1991 and Raney & Robbins, 1989; as cited in Collier, 1999.).

Many researchers believe that reflection can help pre-service teachers to "improve their teaching practice" and "prepare [them] for their full-time" teaching careers (Zhu, 2011, p. 769). Pre-service teachers can reflect on their practice in various ways, including via reflective journals, professional portfolios, reflective interviews, and reflective seminars to learn from model classes and advice of experienced teachers and peers. However, those four reflective tools have their advantages and disadvantages. The reflective journal and professional portfolio are documented forms of reflection, while the reflective interview and seminar are conversational forms. The reflective journal can help pre-service teachers keep records of their thoughts throughout the practicum process, making them convenient for pre-service teachers to review. Professional portfolios, which contain lesson plans, teaching materials, worksheets, and so on, are also convenient for pre-service teachers to review in order to gain new knowledge by looking back. Both of these two forms can be used for assessment as they are written documents and can be kept until the end of the practicum. However, these two forms of reflection are time consuming. As the reflective journal and professional portfolio are written forms, it may take a long time for pre-service teacher to complete these reflections. Tadesse (2007) claimed that keeping a reflective journal is "time consuming" when paired with "routine teaching activities" for pre-service teachers in field

schools (p. 353). Building a professional portfolio also "requires a lot of time and energy" (Zhu, 2011, p. 769). This is an especially big burden for pre-service teachers who have to do a lot of schoolwork during their practicum. The conversational forms of reflection, reflective interviews and seminars, do not take as much time as the former two. The conversational forms of reflection are timely, and the face-to-face communication can make for more direct expressions. Pre-service teachers are also able to receive feedback from supervisors, mentor teachers, and peers more quickly, which enables them to become aware of their strengths and weaknesses faster. The shortcomings of these two forms are that after the conversation, pre-service teachers may forget the feedback received. The reflective seminar requires that all peers, and sometimes even the supervisor or mentor teacher attend, therefore they must adjust their schedules, which may make for an interruption of normal schoolwork for everyone.

When considering pre-service teachers' time and energy (as they have to complete their schoolwork, such as preparing for lessons and marking students' assignments), it's better for them to adopt the conversation forms of reflection, namely, reflective interviews and reflective seminars. Pre-service teachers can take notes during the conversations, which can serve as written reflections. By looking back on their notes, pre-service teachers also can review the experiences of their practicum, and gain new insights from them. Therefore, reflective interviews and seminars are recommended as pre-service teachers' reflective practice. Some justifications of these two forms will be discussed in the second part of this paper.

Clear and Fair Assessment Standards

Another significant issue related to the practicum is "the assessment practices and procedures" (Brooker et al., 1998, p. 5). By reviewing evaluations from teacher educators, pre-service teach-

ers can "reflect on their own practices more accurately" as the information enables them "to make realistic adjustments to their current" and future teaching performance (McFarland et al., 2009, p. 510). However, there are some deficiencies in the assessment process during practicum. The first issue is that pre-service teachers' voices may not be heard in the assessment. Ortlipp (2003) questioned "how safe" pre-service teachers "feel about speaking up" when they "access the power relations that operate in triadic assessment" including pre-service teachers, supervisors, and mentor teachers (p. 227). What's more, the assessment sometimes takes place only in field schools, and this issue "is strongly opposed by a number of institution-based" supervisors (Smith & Lev, 2005, p. 293) as differences between mentor teacher and pre-service teacher may influence the fairness of results (Manzar-Abbas & Lu, 2013b). If there is poor cooperation between the pre-service teacher and their mentor teacher, the evaluation given by the mentor teacher may be far below the actual performance of the pre-service teacher. However, if the supervisor and pre-service teacher are involved in the assessment process, the situation will not be so dictatorial. What's more, a triadic assessment is consistent with the desire for comprehensive support, and the assessment and suggestions from supervisors can help pre-service teachers have a well-rounded reflection. Another problem is that the criteria for assessing the practicum is not well articulated, and grading procedures may not be explicit for pre-service teachers, supervisors, and mentor teachers. As a result, there is "little comparability of results within and across schools," the "levels of competence" of pre-service teachers are not clear to teacher education institutions and "employing authorities," and the pre-service teachers are not able to understand the progress they have made through the practicum (Brooker et al., 1998, p. 6).

In order to address the triadic assessment problem, some teacher education institutions

make adjustments to the assessment process. For the practicum implemented in the School of Early Childhood Studies at the University of Melbourne, for example, the task of assessing pre-service teachers was shared by three participants: the supervisor, mentor teacher, and the pre-service teacher. "At the end of the practicum period," those three parties met "together for a prolonged period of time" to have a triadic assessment of the pre-service teachers. The "overall reaction" of mentor teachers "to the triadic process" showed that "99.2% rated it as useful to positive," "7.1% were neutral in their rating," and only "0.7% rated it negatively." All supervisors that responded saw the system as being very positive or useful, and the students had "consistently indicated a positive reaction to the triadic assessment" (MacNaughton & Clyde, 1990, pp. 11-14). The triadic assessment in this example did not mention any issues with power, and it seemed, based on the reactions of the three parties, they were satisfied as the situation allowed them to speak their opinions. All stakeholders involved in the practicum should support the shared responsibility of assessment. This way, the assessment is not only decided by the mentor teacher. This would avoid a situation in which a mentor would give a low grade and negative comments to a pre-service teacher he did not connect with. This biased assessment would then be the only one recorded in a pre-service teacher's practicum file. However, when supervisor, mentor teacher, and pre-service teacher are involved in a triadic assessment, they can all influence the result. Even if a mentor teacher gave a low grade and negative comments, the student's final grade would rest on the supervisor's and pre-service teacher's grades as well, and different opinions and comments from the supervisor and pre-service teacher will also be revealed in the assessment.

Apart from the shared responsibility**,** a clear and specific standard is also critical to the assessment. Without assessment standards, each supervisor and mentor teacher may have his/her

own definition of what consists a good teacher. The supervisor may focus on theoretical elements, such as lesson plans and the use of modern teaching methods in-class, and neglect the pre-service teacher's communication with students, or cooperation with other teachers. Meanwhile, the mentor teacher may pay more attention to the pre-service teacher's practical performance, such as interactions with students, and professional image in class. Therefore, without specific guidance on what a pre-service teachers should accomplish during practicum, their evaluations for pre-service teachers would be different and not comprehensive. What's more, each person has his/her own criteria for what makes a performance "outstanding," "well-done," or "good." For instance, two pre-service teachers could work with two different mentor teachers, one strict and one gentle and mild. Even though these two pre-service teachers are performing at the same level, the may get different results from their mentor teachers because of their different assessment criteria. To solve this problem, a teacher education program in an Australian university set up specific standards for assessment of pre-service teachers before their practicum. The assessment system had six categories including "planning and preparation," "communication and interaction," "teaching for learning," "managing the learning environment," "student evaluation," and "professionalism," measuring students in four levels: "outstanding," "very good," "satisfactory," and "unsatisfactory." Each column contained a detailed explanation and criterion (Brooker et al., 1998, p. 15). With this system, the assessment would be more clear and specific due to the detailed categories and levels, which serve as references for supervisors, mentor teachers, and pre-service teachers.

With the examples above, it is clear that both triadic assessment and the use of assessment standards can make evaluation fairer. The "open communication" in triadic assessment creates "a more responsible role" for each party "in the assessment process," and this kind of

"shared but defined role" can make every member in the practicum have "a positive advance" (MacNaughton & Clyde, 1990, p. 14). As in the triadic assessment in the School of Early Childhood Studies at the University of Melbourne, the three parties are more serious about the assessment when they meet together to share and express their opinions about pre-service teachers' performances during practicum. With clear categories and specific levels listed in the assessment criteria, supervisors and mentor teachers will have detailed elements and uniform standards with which to measure pre-service teachers' performance, while the pre-service teachers themselves can have a better understanding of their improvements and progress during practicum by referring to the specific requirements in the assessment. What's more, by setting the detailed and specific assessment criteria before practicum, supervisors and mentor teachers can have an idea of what kind of guidance to give, and pre-service teachers are able to set goals ahead of time according to the expectations in the standard.

We can conclude from the above examples that, if each person involved in the practicum can "share their perspectives and knowledge during the assessment," it can "provide a fuller and more accurate picture of the development" of pre-service teachers during practicum (MacNaughton & Clyde, 1990, p. 11). As everyone can make his/her own suggestions in the assessment, the results will be more fair and democratic. However, there remains a power issue in this assessment process in terms of how to ensure every party feels comfortable sharing their opinions. Meanwhile, setting up detailed and specific assessment criteria before practicum encourages supervisors and mentor teachers to give more specific instructions to pre-service teachers, while pre-service teachers can have a clearer image of what they should achieve in their professional development. In order for the standard to serve its purpose, the criteria for assessment should be agreed upon before the practicum and be understood by the three parties.

Discussion

The practicum is an indispensable element in the preparation of pre-service teachers for their teaching careers, but there are still some improvements needed to make practicum experiences better. Through practicum, pre-service teachers can develop a deeper understanding of their subject knowledge, get the chance to apply various teaching methods in a real-life classroom setting, learn how to communicate with students and parents, cooperate with other teachers, and become more reflective practitioners for their future teaching careers.

There are several complicated factors of the practicum that need to be taken into consideration in order to prepare pre-service teachers for their professions. The first is to have an extended practicum length. The teacher education institutions cited in this paper had practicums ranging in length from 360 hours to 660 hours. Among the six examples, the four-year teacher education programs had longer practicum times than the one-year post-baccalaureate program at the University of Toronto. The practicum time is relative to the length of the entire program. In the two examples comparing short vs. long practicum times, a 1.5 to 2 hour-length practicum was found to be insufficient, and a 120-hour long practicum was recommended. And the 45 hours in Crowther and Cannon' (1999) example is only asserted to making pre-service teachers efficacious. However, in that study, the term "efficacious" was not defined. It may mean that pre-service teachers are familiar with the daily routine of teacher's work and have intuitive connections with students, but it cannot indicate that pre-service teachers are well prepared and confident for their future teaching. What's more, both examples showed that a long length of practicum contributes to a strong and prolonged relationship between pre-service teachers and students.

As teaching requires interaction and cooperation between teachers and students, good working relationships can certainly help pre-service teachers to improve their performance in class. Therefore, a longer length of practicum can increase pre-service teachers' confidence and preparedness for their teaching. Even though the total time of practicum varies from one institution to another, all divide the practicum into several different phases. The distribution of the practicum is a common way for pre-service teachers to experience the real teaching environment. Having several phases of practicum enables pre-service teachers to make improvements in later phases targeted on the problems they experienced in earlier phases. What's more, if there is a mismatch between a mentor teacher and pre-service teacher in one phase of practicum, the change of school environment and cooperating staff in subsequent phases of practicum will solve this problem.

The second issue is the articulation of practicum with method courses. The method courses can be combined with practicum in three ways: taking method courses on campus at the same time as pre-service teachers perform their practicum in field schools, conducting lectures or seminars on teaching methods at the field schools, or adopting microteaching as a bridge between theory and reality. Through those articulations, pre-service teachers can try out teaching methods they have learned in class immediately in a real teaching context, and they are able to deal with problems and complexities they face during practicum by consulting method course instructors.

Few studies have been found comparing articulation of method courses with practicum versus completing method courses prior to beginning practicum. This kind of articulation may be a matter of habit; those teacher education institutions that do not integrate method courses with practicum suffer no loss. However, according to my own experience, having method courses be-

fore practicum without articulation resulted in confusion during my practicum. As I did not have access to consistent instructions from my supervisors, my problems and confusions could not be solved in a timely manner. Therefore, in my opinion, the articulation of practicum with method courses is necessary. Nevertheless, campus-based courses and field school-based lectures and seminars can still give instructions to pre-service teachers and help them to link theory with practice if they are applied properly. For example, the campus-based courses could be conducted during the first several practicums, when pre-service teachers only need to go to field schools once a week for a couple of weeks at the beginning of the semester. Therefore, juggling assignments from course work with practicum, would not be too much of a burden on pre-service teachers. Meanwhile, the field-school based courses could be conducted during the last phase of practicum. The implementation of this articulation would require that supervisors not take on too much teaching responsibility in the teacher education institutions at the same time, as they have to ensure weekly visits to the field schools. Microteaching is not as authentic as the other two types of articulation because, in this scenario, pre-service teachers are not able to connect with other schoolteachers and staff. Therefore, it will not be recommended in the second part of this paper.

Comprehensive support from supervisors, mentor teachers, and peers is also critical to the success of practicum for pre-service teachers. By working collaboratively, supervisors and mentor teachers can provide successive help to pre-service teachers and work as role models for them. By working together with peers, pre-service teachers can discover problems in their teaching practice and are able to learn from each other. Therefore, support from all three parties is critical, as each of them can provide help to pre-service teachers from different perspectives. Mentor teachers and field schools should be carefully chosen by the teacher education institutions and a harmonious relationship should be built to provide a good environment for pre-service teachers

during practicum. The second part of this paper will talk about comprehensive support and the specific help each party can provide.

The fourth factor to a good practicum experience is the reflection of pre-service teachers. By keeping a reflective journal, pre-service teachers can have a deeper understanding of the teaching methods they have observed in the model classes given by mentor teachers and their own strengths and weaknesses when they conduct practice teaching. Developing and maintaining a professional portfolio can enable pre-service teachers to look back on the theoretical knowledge they learned on campus. Reflective interviews with supervisors and mentor teachers allow pre-service teachers get direct instructions immediately after teaching, they are convenient and not time-consuming, as the conversation takes place only between two people. Reflective seminars with peers can provide pre-service teachers a chance to learn from one another.

In terms of evaluation, reflective journals and professional portfolios are the better choices because these two forms of reflection involve documentation, which enables supervisors and mentor teachers to see the progress pre-service teachers have made during their practicum. However, these methods of reflection are time consuming for pre-service teachers, which may be a burden for them to complete on top of their schoolwork during practicum. Reflective interviews and seminars, on the other hand, are both timely, since they can take place immediately after mentor teachers' model classes and pre-service teachers' practical classes. These immediate reflections can serve to answer pre-service teachers' questions after attending model classes given by supervisors or mentor teachers, or inform them of the good points and shortcomings of their own teaching directly after it takes place. Therefore, pre-service teachers are able to apply what they learn during the reflective interviews and seminars during the practicum in question. Reflective interviews and seminars do not require a lot of time; a 20-minute talk can convey a lot of

information to pre-service teachers. Those forms of reflection are also convenient to conduct as they can happen during class break or lunch time, and the pre-service teachers can have the reflective seminars in their office. Taking the time and workload of pre-service teachers during their practicum into consideration, reflective interviews and seminars are the forms of reflection I suggest as they give pre-service teachers the opportunity to have timely and face-to-face communication with supervisors, mentor teachers, and peers, which allow all parties to express their points of view clearly. Meanwhile, pre-service teachers could take notes during reflective interviews and seminars, which could serve as a reflective journal or a part of a professional portfolio. How to apply those two forms of reflection will be discussed in the second part of this paper.

Finally, assessment is an essential component that cannot be ignored. Assessment helps pre-service teachers to become aware of the gains and progress they make during their practicum and encourages them to reflect on their experience. It is fairer to share the assessment responsibility among the supervisor, mentor teacher, and pre-service teacher so that everyone can have their voice heard. A clear and systematic assessment standard is also important. By setting the assessment standard, pre-service teachers can understand what kind of criteria they should meet and can set goals for themselves; supervisors and mentor teachers can give them more specific instructions according to the standard. The teacher education institutions and field schools' staff, as well as pre-service teachers can work together to set the criteria before the practicum begins, by listing the goals pre-service teachers should achieve, and illustrating the requirements for different levels. However, power relations can sometimes influence the triadic assessment during the practicum, as some parties may feel uncomfortable sharing their true thoughts. In this way, the reality may be opposite to the original intention.

Some problems need further exploration. Even though each teacher education institution

in this paper allocated different amounts of time for practicum, ranging from 360 hours to 660 hours (about 3 to 6 months), they all gave students more than one practicum session. Therefore, in my opinion, the practicum for pre-service teachers should be divided into several phases. This can solve any mismatches between pre-service teachers and mentor teachers, and help pre-service teachers to experience different teaching styles and gain knowledge about various teaching methods. What's more, this arrangement goes along with the articulation of practicum with method courses by having pre-service teachers take campus-based courses for the first several practicum sessions, and field school-based courses during the final phase of practicum. The practicum should last for a long time, at least for one semester (3 months), which would allow pre-service teachers more time to gain practical teaching experiences. What's more, as mentioned earlier regarding Vaal University, some mentor teachers do not trust pre-service teachers and do not give them enough of a chance to teach. It's necessary for teacher education institutions and field schools to reach an agreement about the exact amount of time and classes that pre-service teachers should teach during their practicum.

Another factor to consider is the articulation of method courses and practicum. Pre-service teachers from Vaal University (Kiggundu & Nayimuli, 2009) who had to take campus-based courses during their practicum found this method to be too challenging. However, this problem can be solved by conducting the campus-based courses during the first several practicum sessions at the beginning of each semester, when pre-service teachers aren't burdened with too many assignments. In this way, pre-service teachers are able to balance academic pressure and schoolwork. What is more, since supervisors and mentor teachers share the role of supporting pre-service teachers, there must be an agreement on what kind of responsibility each should take. Apart from this, it cannot be guaranteed that pre-service teachers can apply what have

learned through their reflective processes in the real teaching environment. If all parties play a role in the assessment process, how much weight will each person's opinion be given in coming up with the final result? What about peer evaluation? Will peers' opinions be taken into consideration? All of these questions will be explored in the second half of this paper.

Discussion and Implications for Chinese Normal Universities

As a free-tuition normal education student, I had my practicum in the seventh semester. When I worked as a Chinese teacher in a local primary school after graduation, I did not feel prepared and confident in my profession. My three years of studying theoretical knowledge and two months of practicum were not sufficient for my career, and some problems were revealed during this process.

The first problem with my practicum experience was its short length of time and infrequency. My practicum took place at the beginning of my final school year and lasted only for about 2 months, 320 hours (8 hours per day, 5 days per week), and this was my only chance to face a real-life teaching situation before graduation. However, among the six teacher education programs included in this literature review, the shortest length of practicum was 360 hours, the longest was 660 hours, the average length of practicum was about 475 hours, and all of them took place over more than one session. What's more, I found that, compared with shorter practicums, long practicums can help pre-service teachers maintain cooperative and prolonged relationships with their students, which contributes to better interactions and performance in their classes. The practicum time for pre-service teachers in Chinese normal universities is far from sufficient when compared with other teacher education institutions in the world.

The review of practicums in teacher education institutions from other countries concluded that pre-service teachers should have more than one practicum experience, and they should be interwoven throughout the program. Therefore, in my opinion, the practicum should be divided into three sessions because a three-stage practicum allows pre-service teachers to learn step-by-step. These three stages are: observation stage, simulation stage, and block time practice stage. The first practicum session takes place at the beginning of the second school year. As pre-service teachers' theoretical knowledge and teaching skills are limited, having only had one year of studies, the practicum tasks in the first session would be to attend to the model given by mentor teachers, and to observe the daily routine of the school in order to gain an initial impression of being a professional teacher. During the second session, which takes place at the beginning of the third school year, pre-service teachers should be able to teach some practice lessons as they have gained more theoretical knowledge about teaching, and have an understanding of model classes and the daily routine of a school from their previous practicum session. In this preliminary practice of real teaching, they can imitate the model classes they attended in their first practicum. At the final practicum session in the last year of school, pre-service teachers should have a block of time to immerse themselves into the field schools. Through this, they will have the chance to learn tacit knowledge not included in textbooks, such as cooperation with other teachers, communication with parents, and methods of building a professional image. Apart from this, a block time lasting for a whole semester allows pre-service teachers to learn to interpret syllabus, make lesson plans, and help students to review and prepare for exams. The step-by-step practicum is in accordance with pre-service teachers' accumulation of knowledge, and gives them time to digest their practical experiences. The time allocated for first two practicums are 40 hours each; pre-service teachers go to field schools 1 day (8 hours) every week for 5 weeks. The

last block practicum lasts for a whole semester (14 weeks), 560 hours. The total practicum time would be 640 hours.

This three-stage practicum has a lot of advantages. The distribution of the practicum makes the articulation of practicum with method courses possible. During the first and second practicums, pre-service teachers can attend campus-based courses because they only need to go to field schools once every week. Meanwhile, the last practicum can apply the field school-based courses; supervisors are responsible for those courses during their school visits. Through this process, pre-service teachers would be able to make better connections between theory and practice. What's more, it would give pre-service teachers the chance to discover their confusions and problems, and make improvements for the next session. Apart from this, with the long-term interactions with students, pre-service teachers could gain a deeper understanding of students' personalities, and can gain some skills for cooperation with other teachers as well. In this way, the step-by-step mode can help pre-service teachers be more fully prepared for their future professions.

The second problem with teacher education in China, from my experience, is that there was little articulation of practicum with the methods courses. In my experience, the theory courses were mainly taken from semesters one to six, and the seventh and eighth semester were used for practicum and graduation thesis. I did not take any on-campus courses during my practicum and there were no formal lectures given by neither supervisors nor mentor teachers in the field schools. However, according to the examples above, some teacher education institutions apply campus-based courses during practicum, while others have supervisors give field school-based lectures or model lessons to pre-service teachers.

The only articulation of theory with practice in my four years' learning was via micro-teaching. However, when compared with the example of microteaching mentioned in this paper, the microteaching I experienced was not as authentic. In the example, the pre-service teachers taught a full, formal lesson with students who came from their schools as volunteers. What's more, the microteaching was videotaped and carefully analyzed by supervisors and pre-service teachers together. However, my microteaching experience was different. My microteaching sessions were 20 minutes long. During microteaching, peers would act like students to answer pre-service teachers' questions. There was no recording of the class, but the supervisor sat at the back of the classroom and gave comments and feedback to the pre-service teacher immediately after the microteaching session. The supervisor only gave 5 minutes of feedback and instruction to each pre-service teacher. On top of this, pre-service teachers did not have the chance to connect with other teachers and school staff, and they could not communicate with parents. Therefore, microteaching is not recommended; campus-based courses and field school-based courses should be adopted instead.

Among the three ways mentioned to articulate the practicum with method courses, taking campus-based courses at the same time as practicum, and having school-based lectures and seminars are the best ways to build a bridge between theory and practice. Although both methods have deficiencies, they can be improved by making some adjustments. As there is more than one practicum session, teacher education institutions can arrange for the first several sessions of the practicum to take place in the beginning of the semester, while pre-service teachers take campus-based courses at the same time. In general, there aren't many course assignments at the beginning of the semester, so pre-service teachers should be able to cope with the tasks from their courses and field-schools at the same time. This kind of articulation can match with the distribu-

tion of practicum sessions very well, and the programs that adopt this method all have several sessions of practicum. In the case of field school-based courses, supervisors should not take on too many teaching tasks on campus during practicum, as they are required to make weekly school visits to pre-service teachers. The time for these two responsibilities should be balanced, and the schedule of field school-based courses must be fixed.

As mentioned above, taking campus-based courses is consistent with the distribution of practicum sessions, as the first and second practicum sessions last only for 5 weeks, and pre-service teachers only go to field schools for 1 day per week. The findings and problems they discover can be discussed and solved with their course instructors, and pre-service teachers can apply solutions learned during the following week's practicum. In the example of Vaal University in South Africa, a concern was raised that taking both campus-based courses and practicum at the same time may be a burden for pre-service teachers, as they have to undertake both their course assignments and field school work. However, in my experience, courses at the beginning of the semester do not have many assignments, and pre-service teachers only need to go to field schools once a week for 5 weeks as suggested above. Pre-service teachers would be able to balance their time to undertake these two tasks.

Field school-based lectures and seminars might be given by supervisors during their school visits once per week. The schedule for field school-based courses should be carefully arranged ahead of time. During my practicum, as pre-services teachers had different mentor teachers and taught in different classes, our schedules were not same. Therefore, if a supervisor wants to give courses in field schools, the schedule for the lectures/seminars should be arranged by both field school and mentor teachers. Mentor teachers should arrange schoolwork and teaching practices for pre-service teachers in order to ensure they are available for supervisors' courses.

Through the articulation of practicum with method courses, pre-service teachers are able to make connections between theory and practice, and apply the knowledge they have learned during courses to improve their teaching skills.

The third problem pre-service teachers may face during practicum is insufficient support from supervisors, mentor teachers, and peers. When I did my practicum, all of the pre-service teachers were divided into groups of 8 to 10 members, and faculty were assigned to work as supervisors with those pre-service teachers. Each supervisor was in charge of one group, and they worked together as a cohort. When the pre-service teachers arrived at the field school, each of them was assigned to an in-service teacher, who acted as a mentor teacher. It seemed that, with this set-up, pre-service teachers would receive comprehensive support from supervisors, mentor teachers, and peers. However, this was not the reality.

Since the supervisors still had teaching tasks at the university, they could not spare very much time for pre-service teachers in the field schools. The supervisor who worked with our group visited for one hour every two weeks. At times, when group members were attending model classes given by their mentor teachers or had teaching assignments, they might miss the opportunity to communicate with their supervisor. Each group member only had one or two chances to share their lesson plans and receive instructions from their supervisor. He never lectured us on teaching skills, nor did he demonstrate a model lesson to us. However, in the example of the University of South Florida mentioned in the literature review, the supervisor taught three courses in field schools to pre-service teachers, and spent many hours helping them with their teaching experiences. In addition to this, pre-service teachers at the University of Toronto mentioned that the supervisor's trust and friendliness could serve as an emotional support to help them during their practicum.

In my practicum experience, the instructions given from mentor teachers were insufficient and different for each group member. After attending only three or four of my mentor teacher's model classes, he assigned me to teach almost half of his Chinese classes. However, when I asked him for suggestions on my lesson plans, he always scanned them and told me they were fine, without offering help. His comments on my teaching were minimal and mostly praise, he only occasionally pointed out some small mistakes. More unfortunately, one of our group members only got two chances to teach during the entire practicum. It seemed that her supervisor did not trust in her teaching ability, and only asked her to mark the students' assignments. Unlike the pre-service teachers at the University of Utah who visited each other's classes and gave feedback to their peers, we did not have much communication with our peers during practicum. Although we were sent to the field school as a group and shared one big office, we did not share our teaching experiences or skills; everyone just worked by him or herself. When we had problems with our teaching, we sorted them out by ourselves. It appeared we had a supervisor, mentor teachers, and peers around, but actually, we were alone and depended on ourselves.

By comparing the examples revealed in the literature review with the practicum experience I had; the support I received from my supervisor, mentor teacher, and peers was not enough. However, comprehensive support is very critical to the success of pre-service teachers. These pre-service teachers gain different perspectives and advices from supervisors, mentor teachers, and peers separately. Simply involving those parties in the practicum does not ensure they will play their roles fully and offer enough help to pre-service teachers; there needs to be some rules and regulations around comprehensive support in order for it to be effective. First, as mentioned in the example from the University of South Florida, it is necessary for supervisors to give field school-based lectures and demonstrate model classes to pre-service teachers regularly, but teach-

er education institutions should not ask supervisors to take on too many teaching commitments on campus during practicum to ensure they have enough time to pay a quality weekly visit to the field schools. What's more, the school-visiting day should be fixed to ensure weekly communication between supervisors and pre-service teachers. At that time, the pre-service teachers might all get together to attend the lectures or seminars given by supervisors, and after that, the supervisors should take time to communicate with every pre-service teacher to solve their problems and give them instructions about lesson plans and teaching skills. However, the exact schedule should be negotiated with field school and mentor teachers, without disturbing the teaching practices of pre-service teachers. The exact time for private communication with each pre-service teacher can be arranged ahead of time, so that they can continue their schoolwork normally without wasting time waiting.

Besides this, Yan and He (2010) suggested that the selection of mentor teachers could be "jointly undertaken" by field schools and universities, "universities could develop criteria about the roles and responsibilities" of mentor teachers and "convey this information directly" to each field school (pp. 68-69). According to my experience, different mentor teachers had their own instruction styles, some of them preferred to give many model lessons to pre-service teachers, while others gave pre-service teachers more practical teaching opportunities. Therefore, it is necessary to have unified and detailed criteria for mentor teachers so they are aware of the support they should provide to pre-service teachers. The criteria can be created by universities, and take suggestions from field schools as well to decide the most useful way for mentor teachers to instruct pre-service teachers. The criteria and regulations should include the number of model classes mentor teachers should perform in order for pre-service teachers to have enough time to understand the basic routines of formal classes, and the exact amount of time pre-service teachers

should teach to ensure they have a sufficient opportunity to practice the teaching skills they have learned on campus. What is more, the regulations should also cover what kind of support and instruction mentor teachers should provide to pre-service teachers, such as preparing lessons together to help pre-service teachers understand the main points of lessons, and discussing the dilemmas and confusions pre-service teachers face during practicum once a week, in order to help them solve any problems in time to implement the solutions during their practicum. Working as a cohort, pre-service teachers could create more opportunities to communicate with each other. The group members could plan lessons together or share their lesson plans with one another. They could also attend each other's classes to learn from their peers and discover one another's shortcomings and strengths in order to provide suggestions.

Through this comprehensive support, pre-service teachers would be able to obtain new teaching skills and discover and solve problems in time to apply these skills and solutions during their practicum. It is just like nurturing seedlings: plants can grow faster and stronger with attentive gardeners.

Apart from this, a serious problem with making pre-service teachers become reflective learners and educators needs attention. In my experience, we were not required to reflect on our performance until the end of our practicum. Each of us was asked to summarize our practicum, in a format similar to a reflective journal. Our supervisors and mentor teachers then wrote comments and feedback for us on our summary; almost all the comments were words of praise. This was the final process of our practicum.

Since reflection is an important method for pre-service teachers to learn and to improve, it is necessary to use it effectively during practicum. Among the four methods of reflection listed in the literature review, reflective interviews and reflective seminars are the two ways I recom-

mend most, because they are the timeliest. Reflective interviews between pre-service teachers and supervisors or mentor teachers usually happen immediately after pre-service teachers' teaching practice, supervisor's lectures, or mentor teachers' model lessons. This enables pre-service teachers to reflect on their practice in a timely manner, as the face-to-face format allows pre-service teachers to ask questions and receive answers from supervisors and mentor teachers immediately. More importantly, having a reflective interview does not take as much time as keeping a reflective journal or professional portfolio. In my classroom experience, there was an assembly or reading time for students every day, in which they listened to a broadcast in the classroom. It usually lasted for 20 to 30 minutes, and teachers could stay in the office at that time. This block of time could be used for a reflective interview; the information and instructions conveyed in a 20-minute conversation would be more than that of a 20-minute written reflection. With this method of reflection, the pre-service teacher can receive immediate feedback rather than waiting several days to receive emails from supervisors or mentor teachers. Reflective seminars can also take place after pre-service teachers visit their peers' classrooms. After attending their peers' classes, pre-service teachers could get together to exchange their ideas about the good points and shortcomings of the classes. This reflective seminar could take place during self-study class at noon, which pre-service teachers are not required to attend, according to my practicum experience. Such conversations can contribute to collaborative reflection and help pre-service teachers learn from each other, adopt new teaching methods, and modify these to suit their own classes. A reflective journal could be incorporated into this reflective practice, as pre-service teachers could take notes during their interviews to keep records of the useful information received. The lesson plans and teaching materials that pre-service teachers have prepared

for practice teaching can be used as professional portfolios, pre-service teachers can reflect by looking back on their notes.

The final concern regarding practicum is the process and standard of assessment. At the end of my practicum, our supervisors and mentor teachers gave us a final assessment. We could receive one of four grades: outstanding, very good, satisfactory, and unsatisfactory. Most of us were rated very good, and one group member was rated outstanding. However, the criterion for these four levels was not clear to us, and we did not know the elements our supervisor and mentor teacher used in their evaluations. The comments they gave were general and mostly praise. Therefore, I had little idea of the strengths and weaknesses of my teaching performance, and the reason I was rated "very good" according to their assessment was not clear. We were not provided with the opportunity for self-assessment in order to have our opinions heard.

In order to ensure a fair assessment, it is necessary to hear from every stakeholder. Supervisors can assess pre-service teachers based on their performance in school-based lectures, reflective interviews, and lesson preparations. Mentor teachers can evaluate by observing pre-service teachers' practice teaching, communication skills, and their relationships with students. Pre-service teachers can also measure their own performance and progress during the practicum.

A clear standard is also necessary. At the end of my practicum, my teaching practice was assessed as being "very good." However, when I began work as an in-service teacher, I felt unprepared for the job. One reason for the contrast between "very good" and "unprepared" may be the lack of detailed and specific standards in the assessment process during practicum. The supervisor and mentor teacher evaluated me according to my teaching performance in class, my completion of schoolwork, and my positive and energetic attitude towards teaching. But being a prepared teacher requires much more than this, such as an understanding of syllabus, preparation

of teaching resources, communication with students, relationships with other teachers and parents, tacit knowledge, etc. All of these factors should be involved in the assessment of whether or not a teacher is prepared for his/her job. The gap between these two standards makes a "very good" pre-service teacher "unprepared" for her teaching profession. Therefore, it is necessary to have a clear and specific standard regarding important abilities pre-service teachers should master throughout their practicum. As in the example (Brooker et al., 1998) mentioned in Part 1 of this project, the criteria for assessment can contain several categories including lesson planning, communication, teaching performance, student evaluation, professionalism, and so on. Each category can have four levels for rating, and the criteria should explain the performance according to the four levels separately. With this standard, the three parties can reach an agreement about the goals they should achieve before the practicum, and avoid inconsistent feedback. The pre-service teachers could have a clear idea about what they should do and pay attention to during their practicum, and they can make efforts toward achieving the targeted goals. In addition to this, supervisors and mentor teachers would be able to give more specific instructions to pre-service teachers according to the standard. Therefore, it's necessary to set the assessment criteria before practicum and ensure these criteria be well explained to all three parties.

By having every stakeholder involved in the assessment process, and creating a clear and specific standard, the assessment of practicum can be more fair and effective. It also helps pre-service teachers to set goals, as they can understand what aspects they should pay attention to according to the standard, and define which level of rating they would like to achieve. This also prompts supervisors and mentor teachers on how to instruct pre-service teachers, the theoretical knowledge and practical skills they should pass on to pre-service teachers, and the uniform criteria with which to measure them.

Conclusion

The purpose of practicum is to integrate theory and practice, and give pre-service teachers exposure to the experiences of real-world teaching (Kiggundu & Nayimuli, 2009; Manzar-Abbas & Lu, 2013a). There are five key factors that have great influence on the practicum, which can make pre-service teachers more prepared for their future professions: the proper length and distribution of practicum; the articulation of practicum with method courses; the comprehensive support from supervisors, mentor teachers, and peers; timely and effective reflection; and clear and fair assessment. This project underscores the need to make some adjustments to the practicum experience in Chinese normal universities. The practicum should be divided into three stages, which last for 40, 40, and 560 hours respectively. This three-stage practicum allows pre-service teachers more time to become familiar with real-world teaching step-by-step. Campus-based courses are held along with practicum for the first two stages, and field school-based lectures are held during the last stage of practicum, thus enabling pre-service teachers to link theory with practice. The weekly schools visits, consisting of lectures and talks by supervisors, the help with lesson preparation and model classes provided by mentor teachers, and the regular class visits and teaching experience sharing with peers can give pre-service teachers comprehensive support. What's more, reflective interviews and seminars help pre-service teachers to discover the strong and weak points of their teaching in a timely manner, and help them to foster a reflective practice in their profession. Finally, every stakeholder should be involved in the assessment process in order to ensure fairness. At the same time, clear and specific assessment criteria helps pre-service teachers to set goals for their practicum, and provides standards to supervisors and

mentor teachers for their instruction.

With the implementation of these suggestions for improvement to practicums, pre-service teachers will be better prepared for their future profession. However, some other policies should be revised with regards to practicums for Chinese normal universities. First, the amount of required public courses (the courses which must be taken by all pre-service teachers regardless of their major, such as Advanced Mathematics, Physical Education, Basic Principles of Marxism, and so on) should be reduced in order to enable an extended practicum. Usually, pre-service teachers are required to take about 30 public courses during their four years of study. The total time these courses take up is 630 hours. (Each course lasts for a 14-week long semester, once a week for 1.5 hours.) In my experience, the practicum for pre-service teachers was 320 hours in length, while 640 hours is the suggested length of practicum. Reducing the number of required public courses can free up time for a longer practicum. With the coordination of practicum with method courses, and supervisors' weekly visits and lectures in field schools, it would be beneficial for normal universities to hire more instructors to make up for the teaching time lost by supervisors during practicum. However, it would be difficult for normal universities to significantly increase their number of employees in a short time. Therefore, field school-based courses and weekly visits from supervisors cannot be ensured. The third thing is that mentor teachers in the field schools have to face academic pressures, especially the College Entrance Examination. They may find a longer practicum in field schools to be a burden, as they would have less time to instruct the pre-service teachers. What's more, mentor teachers may not trust pre-service teachers due to their lack of experience, and may feel that if they allow pre-service teachers to teach too many lessons in their place, the learning outcomes and academic performance of their students will be negatively affected. Finally, if mentor teachers have insufficient time to instruct pre-

service teachers, they may not conduct reflective interviews, and therefore the reflective practice and resulting improvement of pre-service teachers will be insufficient. All these realistic problems need more in-depth study and should be solved to create better environments for pre-service teachers' practicum.

Limitations of this study should be acknowledged. Limited by the scope of published research, especially the deficiency in Chinese research, the analysis and suggestions for improvement to practicums for Chinese normal universities is not comprehensive. Due to cultural differences, beneficial methods and suggestions from teacher education institutions of other countries may not produce the same effect in Chinese normal universities. Therefore, some adjustments should be made during the practicum in order for the recommendations to adapt. What's more, the information about practicums in Chinese normal universities provided for this paper was only my personal experience, which took place 8 years ago. The reality of the practicum in Chinese normal universities now may not be the same, and different universities may apply their own distinct policies to enhance the learning outcomes of pre-service teachers during their practicums. Also, there are some other factors that are very important to the success of a practicum, such as the partnership between universities and field schools, the necessity of having practicums targeted to different grade levels, the importance of modern technology in practicum, and so on. Those questions require further research.

With a good education, pre-service teachers will be prepared for their future teaching. After three practicum sessions, lasting 640 hours in total, pre-service teachers can acquire more teaching skills, and have better communication with students. What's more, as the last practicum takes place over a full semester, pre-service teachers are able to understand the basic routine of teachers' work comprehensively, and gain some tacit knowledge. The long practicum also gives

them opportunities to cooperate with other school teachers and staff, and to communicate with students' parents. On top of this, campus-based courses and field-school based lectures allow pre-service teachers to link theory with practice; they can test the operability of their book knowledge immediately and solve their problems and dilemmas with the help of their supervisors in a timely manner. Meanwhile, through their supervisors, mentor teachers, and peers, pre-service teachers can learn various things, such as theoretical knowledge, real teaching experiences, and problems and confusions faced by novices. In addition, reflective interviews and seminars can provide pre-service teachers with new ideas about teaching skills, and make up for their deficiencies. Finally, triadic assessment and clear and specific standards allow supervisors and mentor teachers to provide more specific instructions to pre-service teachers according to the criteria, and pre-service teachers are able to set their goals with reference to the standards of different levels. With those recommendations in the paper, pre-service teachers can improve their teaching performances, maintain a good relationship with students, and will develop a reflective teaching practice, which can better prepare them for their future professions.

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