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The American University in Cairo

Graduate School of Education

The Practicum Experience in the Faculties of Education in Egypt:

A Study on Students' Perceptions of Strengths and Weaknesses in Two Faculties of Education

A Thesis Submitted to the Graduate School of Education

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts in Comparative and International Education

By Laila Adel El-Kerdany

Under the Supervision of Dr. Malak Zaalouk

Professor of Practice and Director of the Middle East Institute for Higher Education

December 2012

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Abstract

The practicum is an important component of teacher preparation where students have the opportunity to practice what they have learnt in university and realize the challenges they will face at school. This study examines the practicum in the Faculties of Education in Egypt, which is conducted in the third and fourth year of the Bachelor of Arts program. Using qualitative methods the study attempts to explore the structure and organization of the practicum in four different Faculties of Education and examines closely the implementation of the practicum in an additional two Faculties of Education. The study interviewed professors from all six Faculties of Education. This was then followed by interviews with the directors of the practicum units, as well as focus groups for students in years three and four were conducted in the examined two Faculties of Education. The findings show that the main strength of the practicum is the experience student teachers acquire in schools and especially in dealing with students. Additional strengths arose with the implementation practices of the program and these are the formation of a strong structure of peer support and the development of critical thinking skills. The practicum exhibited weaknesses in administration, supervision, assessment, links between universities and schools, mentorship or supervision to all those involved and overall insufficient preparation of student teachers. There is a clear need to develop the practicum programs and form strong links between the Faculties of Education, schools, and Ministry of Education to provide student teachers with a beneficial experience.

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The Practicum Experience in the Faculties of Education in Egypt: A Study on Students' Perceptions of Strengths and Weaknesses in Two Faculties of Education

Teachers are the base of the education system of any country and their role is of utmost importance. Teachers affect students' attitudes, beliefs, as well as performance, and so the preparation of teachers is a continuing concern for all countries. According to A. L. Goodwin (2010) teachers' challenges are increasing with globalization and the twenty first century. There are more people re-locating to search for economic opportunity and more disparity due to the rapid growth occurring in certain regions, which causes more diversity among students in classrooms. In addition with the advances of technology and communication there is an increasing access to information (Goodwin, 2010). This has changed the view about knowledge and skills as there are new inventions and changes every day so that teachers need to prepare students be life-long learners and to be prepared for the complexities of life especially with the global economic crisis. All of the above constitute a challenge for teachers to hold the students' interest and stimulate them while integrating and relating information taught to their different experiences and backgrounds. Teachers face the pressure of enhancing student performance and teaching students twenty first century skills, such as critical thinking, reflection, creativity, collaboration and communication. The situation is made even more complex with more accountability outlined and requested of teachers based on student outcomes, standardized testing and performance. According to Smith and Lev-Ari (2005), the current expectations from teacher preparation programs are that they aim to prepare teachers capable of improving student achievement, possessing a high level of subject content knowledge, trained to reflect on their practices, competent in all the technical aspects of teaching such as classroom management techniques, able to plan lessons effectively and deal with diversity and, last but not least,

engaged in continuous professional development. The teacher preparation programs have a challenging mission to prepare teachers for the requirements of their profession.

Teacher preparation programs should teach students not only theory and methodology of teaching, but how to teach in more practical hands on ways. Learning about something does not necessarily mean you will be able to apply it. Thus, the practical component of any teacher preparation is an important part that provides students with the opportunity to practice what they have learnt. However, teaching is a humane act during which teachers' emotions and personality shape the construction of their teaching style and philosophy (Palmer, 2011). Student teachers, as they enter their preparation programs, bring with them their cultural background, beliefs and experience as students in schools. When they are taught courses of theory, methodology and techniques, they have to integrate them with their initial information, and here tensions may arise. Examples are when student teachers have initially been taught using traditional methods and rote memorization and are then faced with teaching critical thinking and creativity, or engaging students and providing an enjoyable learning experience when they were miserable and fearful in school. The practicum is not only important to link the theory taught with the practice, but it provides the experience where students form their own teaching competence. Student teachers have to be given opportunity to apply the skills and techniques they have learnt, to think and reflect on their experience, and to modify their practice until they develop their own style, confidence and philosophy in a structured way. Teachers must be guided during their practical experience to be able to truly benefit. Countless studies have examined the effectiveness of the different structures and practicum experiences in teacher preparation programs (Smith & Lev-Ari, 2005; Goh, Wong, Choy, Tan, 2009; Dikdere, 2009).

In Egypt there are 27 Faculties of Education in different governorates offering students a four-year Bachelor Degree in Education. They also offer a one year teacher preparation diploma for students who already have a Bachelor of Arts (BA) or a Bachelor of Science (BSc) in other fields (The National Center for Educational Research and Development (NCERD), 2008). The Ministry of Education in Egypt has identified as one of its basic principles in designing the strategic plan, to provide quality education and encourage the use of innovative techniques for teaching and learning (Ministry of Education (MOE), 2007). In addition the MOE has stated that it aims to produce learners with skills in critical thinking, creativity and reflection, as well as, having the communication and interpersonal skills needed to meet the challenges of the future (NCERD, 2008). The Faculties of Education in Egypt have to prepare student teachers to meet these requirements. The practicum program is conducted during the third and fourth year, where students are placed once each week in schools and for a full week at the end of each semester. As part of the improvement to the practicum experience a micro-teaching requirement has been added to the second year (NCERD, 2008). In an informal interview with a faculty member at one of the Faculties of Education, the professor mentioned that students became de-motivated when they started the practicum as they faced many challenges. It is the aim of the researcher in this study to find out the design of the practicum program in the Faculties of Education in Egypt, and then to examine how it is being actually implemented in two of the Faculties of Education. Finally the researcher will examine the strengths and weaknesses of the experience as perceived by students in the two Faculties of Education. The research questions for this study are: (a) What is the design and structure of the practicum in the Faculties of Education in Egypt? (b) How is it being implemented in two Faculties of Education? And (c) What are the strengths and weaknesses as perceived by the students of the two Faculties of Education?

Literature Review

The practicum experience of different programs in several countries will be examined. The practicum programs will then be classified according to the leadership of the practicum program, the duration of the practical experience, the structure of the partnership between university and school, and the pedagogical approach of the planned practicum, followed by a discussion of general strengths and weaknesses of practicum programs. Finally each program will be evaluated according to the identified strengths and weaknesses. The criterion for selection of practicum programs is mainly access to detailed information in countries that have undergone reform with a view to examining a variety of practicum programs.

Germany

Students in Germany are admitted in the education programs in universities after doing the “Abitur” examination at the end of their secondary education. The program is divided into two phases, for both elementary and secondary teachers. In the first phase, elementary student teachers cover three subjects over a period of three years, while the secondary student teachers cover two subjects for four years, in addition to educational studies which include psychology, sociology and philosophy for both categories. During that phase at least two or three sessions of practical experience in classes are integrated within the program. At the end of the first phase students have to pass an examination to qualify for the second phase which is called “preparation service”, and which extends over a period of two years during which students are placed in schools and receive a salary (Terhart, 2003). The training institutes (Seminars) together with the schools are responsible for this phase (Halasz, Santiago, Ekholm, Matthews & McKenzie, 2004). Students spend around two thirds of their time in schools in addition to attending lectures or seminars on theory and teaching methods in the training institutes (Maandag, Deinum, Hofman

& Buitnik, 2007). Students are supervised by mentors or experienced teachers, and they learn to assume the full responsibilities of teachers for planning, teaching and other duties. The evaluation of the progress of student teachers during that phase is done by the mentors, seminar teachers, and sometimes the principals of schools (Terhart, 2003). At the end of the phase students have to pass a state examination which includes an oral examination and an assessment of their teaching skills, in addition to a written thesis (Halasz et al., 2004). This examination not only evaluates the practical skills of teachers, but the ability to reflect on their teaching experience as well, after which they qualify to apply for teaching positions in schools (Terhart, 2003).

The practicum in the German teacher preparation program is short during the first phase but is compensated by the school placement during the second phase. According to Halasz et al. (2004) one of the strengths of this program is the extensive experience which student teachers gain in the schools during the second phase. During that phase student teachers learn and practice all the duties of the teacher, as they are actually employed in the school, so it could be considered as a form of apprenticeship. Another strength is the involvement of schools in designing the practical experience for the student teachers, as well as, deciding the content of the first phase state examination. On the other hand this could also be considered as a weakness due to the differences in school types in Germany which could lead to the fragmentation of the different programs, and so there is a need for better integration between programs. One of the main weaknesses of the practicum experience is that the content of the first phase of the program is not aligned with the second phase (Halasz et al., 2004; Terhart, 2003). In addition, during the second phase there are no clear linkages institutionalized between the schools and the training institutes, so the students regard the schools as providing a practical experience which is not

linked to the theory provided at the training sessions in the institutes (Halasz et al., 2004). Thus the German practicum model provides students with a rich practical experience, but is not sufficiently linked to the theoretical part of the program, and needs more consistency and integration.

Singapore

The model for teacher preparation in Singapore is unique as the National Institute of Education is the only organization that provides the initial teacher training programs, and it has a strong partnership with the Ministry of Education and all the schools in the country (Wong & Chuan, 2002). The practicum component in the Bachelor of Arts or Bachelor of Science Education is divided into four parts: School Experience, Teaching Assistantship, Teaching Practice 1, and Teaching Practice 2 (Nanyang Technological University (NTU), 2011). The Singapore academic year for schools is divided into four semesters with a ten days vacation between the first and second semester and between the third and fourth semester. The vacation between the second and third semester and the fourth and first is a month and a month and a half respectively (Ministry of Education, Singapore, 2012). This means that schools are open for most of the summer while the universities have their vacation which allows teachers to do parts of the practicum during that time.

The School Experience consists of two weeks of observation spent in schools with one week in a primary school and the second week in a secondary school during the holiday between year one and two. The Teaching Assistantship is an opportunity for students to spend five weeks during the vacation between year two and three in a school where they are assigned to a Cooperating Teacher and they observe, as well as, assist the teacher in his/her duties. Students reflect on the role of teachers and help the Cooperating Teacher in preparing lesson plans,

conducting classes, and are allowed to do some guided teaching as well. The Teaching Practice 1 is conducted during the summer session between the third and fourth year for the duration of five weeks where students observe their Cooperating Teacher and then start to prepare their lesson plans and resources and teach on their own. The final part of the practicum which is Teaching Practice 2 is conducted during the last semester of the program and for the duration of ten weeks. Students prepare their lessons, teach, and develop their teaching, class management, and assessment skills, in addition to participating in all the duties and activities of teachers in the school (NTU, 2011).

The National Institute of Education (NIE) – school partnership model of the practicum includes a greater role for the schools in initial teacher preparation through a structured mentoring process. A School Coordinating Mentor (SCM) is chosen by the principal usually from the vice-principals or head teachers and he/she is responsible to closely follow up with the cooperating teachers and the student teachers to insure consistency within the school. The SCM works closely with the NIE Supervision Coordinator (NSC) who is responsible for the follow up on student teachers in several schools in a particular district. The presence of a single liaison person in the school and the institute provides a more efficient link between schools and the NIE. The student teacher is assessed for content knowledge by the Coordinating Teacher while the final assessment of the practicum program is done through a Practicum Assessment Panel which is chaired by the school principal and includes the SCM, NSC, and the Coordinating Teacher. Among the practical advantages of the program is that the Ministry of Education decides on the placement of the student teachers in the schools according to needs and shortages so that in most cases teachers are employed in the same schools after completing their degrees. This provides an incentive for schools as well as a sense of ownership in the training of the student teachers

(Wong & Chuan, 2002). A second strength is that the strong involvement of school practitioners in the practicum program helps students through the training process. A third strength that facilitates the link between theory and practice for students at the NIE is a trend to encourage the appointment of practitioners, mainly principals and Ministry of Education officials, as lecturers and full-time staff to increase their involvement in teacher preparation (Deng, 2004). However, one of the weaknesses in this model is that there needs to be a common standard of quality identified between the schools and NIE for the assessment of the student teachers. In addition both the cooperating teachers and the SCM need to be trained on mentoring and their level of competency ensured (Wong & Chuan, 2002).

China

In China there are several paths to become teachers whether through secondary schools, junior teacher colleges, four year teacher colleges, or university programs (Zhu & Han, 2006). The practicum component of two BA programs for teacher education will be examined. The first program is for the preparation of elementary teachers in a public normal university in China, in which the practical component is divided into two parts, field experience and student teaching. The student teacher undergoes the field experience during the second or third year of the program. It consists of sixty hours spent in a school for observation and exposure to the classroom environment. The experience is facilitated by a faculty member in university and supervised by teachers at the school. As for the teaching part, student teachers are placed in schools in the fourth year in the last semester of the program to teach a single subject, as elementary schools in China have subject teachers. The placement is for a full teaching day for six weeks, during which they are assigned a master teacher and a supervisor who is present daily at the school. The concentration of the program is on subject matter knowledge and the student

teaching component comprises only 3% with no practical experience component integrated in any of the general courses (Liu & Qi, 2006). According to S. Guo and L. Pungur (2008), there is a general attitude in China that methodology courses are of less importance, so untrained lecturers can be assigned to teach them. In addition the programs tend to focus on theoretical aspects and do not provide sufficient time for teaching practice which means students lack adequate preparation for teaching (Guo, 2005).

The second BA program is an initial teacher education four year program for English as a Foreign Language in a normal university in Central China. During the second semester of the third year students take an English teaching methodology course that includes eighteen sessions. The first ten are lectures while the remaining eight consist of micro-teaching sessions, where students practice teaching to their peers. The practicum is scheduled for six weeks during the beginning of the fourth year. Groups of students are assigned to a school to practice classroom teaching, perform the duties of a form master, and conduct research on educational issues. A supervisor is assigned to each group to act as a liaison between the cooperating schools and the practicum committee in the university, and his/her responsibilities is to supervise and follow up on student teachers' practicum work including lesson plans, teaching and form master's duties. The responsibilities of the supervisor are in lieu of any teaching commitment and they are responsible for several schools. They visit each student 3 or 4 times, up to a maximum of a week during the practicum period. At the end of the practicum student teachers are required to do their own self assessment to encourage them to reflect on their experience. The performance of students in the practicum is assessed by their cooperating teachers, supervisor and peer students on the three components of the practicum whether, teaching, performing the form master duties, or conducting research (Yan & He, 2010).

Yan and He (2010) conducted a study on students' reflections on the problems they faced during their practicum experience which showed weaknesses in the program in several areas. Student teachers realized that the length of the practicum was not sufficient for the three required components. In addition student teachers found that they were taught new methods for teaching and integrating technology although schools were not equipped and traditional teaching methods worked better with students. The practicum schools were not welcoming to the student teachers as the process required extra work by those involved. Due to the inexperience of student teachers, both cooperating teachers and principals were skeptical of allowing the student teachers to actually teach especially considering the system in China is focused on exam results, so they were afraid of adversely affecting student learning. This meant that student teachers were considered cooperating teachers' assistants and did administrative work and marked homework instead of actually teaching. In addition they were not encouraged to interact with students for fear that they transmit unfavorable ideas. Finally, both cooperating teachers and supervisors were overloaded and lacked mentoring experience and skills which adversely affected the practicum experience and led to a lack of enthusiasm and motivation of student teachers. There seems to be a lack of structure in the practicum component so that the cooperating teachers, principals, and supervisors are not prepared for their role and do not know how to handle the student teachers or what duties to assign. There is a need for a closer partnership relationship between the schools and university to provide a more constructive practicum (Yan & He, 2010).

United Kingdom

In the United Kingdom (UK) the system for teacher preparation is structured by laws and regulations, so that teachers have to acquire the Qualified Teacher Status (QTS) to teach in schools. There are several paths to prepare teachers and these are: Bachelor of Education (BEd), Bachelor of Arts (BA) or Bachelor of Science (BSc) in a specific subject that ends with QTS, a regular BA followed by a Postgraduate Certificate in Education (PGCE), School-Centered Initial Teacher Training (SCITT), and finally the Graduate Teacher Programme (GTP) and the Registered Teacher Programme (RTP) known together as GRTP (Giannakaki, Hobson, & Malderez, 2011). The difference between the RTP and the GTP is that the program for GTP is one year long, and students have already been awarded a bachelor degree in a related field, while the RTP is for two years and student have only completed two years from a BA program (Giannakaki et al., 2011). According to Maandag, Deinum, Hofman, and Buitink (2007), the increased importance of the practicum component of the teacher preparation programs has led universities to develop partnerships with schools in which the school and experienced teachers have participated in the development and implementation of curricula. There are many variations of these partnerships depending on the program offered.

For the BA and BSc, students usually undergo the PGCE certificate in the fourth year (one year program), which includes the practicum component as in the case of University of Leeds (University of Leeds, 2011). The BEd is a four year program and includes school placements which can amount to 25% of the whole program as that of the University of Strathclyde (University of Strathclyde, n.d.). The minimum length of practicum has been regulated by law depending on the length of the program (Maandag et al., 2007). For one year programs the practicum should be at least 18 weeks for primary teachers and 24 weeks for

secondary teachers, as Primary teachers teach more subjects so the methodology component in the program takes more time. As for the four year programs a minimum of 32 weeks training in schools is required for all teachers (Moon, 2003). Student teachers are required to spend their practical experience in at least two schools. Institutions offering teacher programs have a legal obligation to form partnerships and collaborate with schools. These partnerships have involved schools in the development of the programs including student selections and assessment for the QTS. Partnership agreements not only decide the roles of both schools and the involved institution, but specify the duties of school staff in the training programs, as well as the training requirements for these duties (Maandag et al., 2007). Institutions are required to provide training for mentors and prepare them for their duties as well as train them for assessment of student teachers both during and at the end of the program (Moon, 2003). The programs are structured so that both universities and schools are collaborating to provide the practicum program to student teachers, and universities are providing all the required training support.

Both SCITT and GRTP are school-based practicum programs, with GRTP students being employed with contracts whether as qualified or unqualified teachers (Giannakaki et al., 2011). The SCITT model consists of a consortium of schools that voluntarily join together to provide a program for teacher preparation, and they may seek accreditation from a university (Moon, 2003). The schools design, implement, and manage the program with the assistance of the other institutions (Maandag et al, 2007). An example of such a program is offered by Cornwall University where seventeen schools have joined together with a tertiary college (Cornwall SCITT, 2012). SCITT is a one year full time program for students who have relevant Bachelor degrees, in which students are based in one school, but may also have teaching placements in

other schools within the consortium (Giannakaki et al., 2011). Both programs offer students a longer school-based experience than the undergraduate and PGCE degrees.

In a study of student perceptions on the effectiveness of their pre-service experience from different preparation tracks in the UK, the results indicated that overall, students who followed a school-based model whether SCITT or GRTP in addition to the undergraduate programs felt better prepared. This can indicate that the longer the period of school placement the higher the level of preparation for students. Findings have also shown that the relationship with mentors is among the most significant factors affecting the practicum experience, which reflects the importance of a proper selection criteria as well as sufficient training of mentors on their role including providing feedback, discussion, follow-up, and assessment (Giannakaki et al., 2011). In the UK mentoring has been an area of concern and universities provide formal training courses for mentors that can also contribute towards the requirements of a Master's degree (Moon, 2003). Although school-based programs appear to have the advantage of providing more school placement time and thus more opportunity to develop practical skills for teaching, research has indicated several possible weaknesses (Giannakaki et al., 2011). According to the Office for Standards in Education, Children Services and Skills (Ofsted), students that attend the employment-based program tend to have less knowledge of the teaching and learning principles, and teaching strategies, in addition to a smaller probability of following-up with recent research on education than their PGCE counterparts (as cited in Giannakaki et al., 2011). A study by William and Soares, states that the main concern for schools is student learning, so student teacher training may not be given sufficient attention, and universities may teach subjects at a higher level (as cited in Giannakaki et al., 2011). A further concern regarding the school-based programs is that the student teacher in the process of developing a sense of belonging to the

school may feel pressured to accept the norms and culture, without sufficient questioning (Giannakaki et al., 2011). Moreover, restricting teacher preparation to the school-based experience may place considerable pressure on the school mentor who is already loaded with his/her teaching schedules and obligation and may restrict the experience to a supervised practice of techniques. Finally student teachers in school-based programs that are not strongly linked to universities tend to be less able to reflect critically on their teaching and less able to integrate theory to practice (University and College Union, 2011).

Malta

The Faculty of Education at the University of Malta is the only provider of teacher education in Malta (Bezzina & Camilleri, 2001). It offers a Bachelor of Education (BEd) four year program with a primary and a secondary specialization. In addition the faculty of education offers a one year postgraduate certificate in education (PGCE) for students who have already been awarded a Bachelor degree in a relevant field (Bezzina & Grimmer, 2007). In the BEd program there is a practical component in all four years. For first year students there are weekly classroom observation sessions, followed by tutorials for analysis and reflection, ending with a three week placement in a school. Students are taught how to prepare teaching practice files, which include the lesson plans, self-evaluations and student profiles that they have accumulated during the course. Each year from the second to the fourth, students are placed for a six-week block teaching in schools. During these placements students are required to prepare their “Teaching Practice File” which includes the schemes, detailed lesson plans for that period, self evaluation reports and a class profile describing some characteristics such as ability level, or good points, as well as a student profile for two or three students who are “special” and the proposed plan to deal with their special circumstances (University of Malta, 2012a). These

requirements indicate the required level of involvement student teachers will need to exhibit with the students and classes they teach.

Students throughout the BEd program are required to start developing their professional portfolios, which include artifacts and reflective written assignments for each of the sections, which are; professional knowledge, the teaching and learning process, management skills, and information and communication technology. The portfolio also includes monitoring pupil learning, other professional qualities and community involvements, and professional development (Chetcuti, Murphy & Grima, 2006). The practicum experience at UoM is considered to be of a formative nature during which students develop skills and understanding towards their teaching mission. The evaluation forms for the practicum are organized around the sections of the portfolio so that students will be adding examples of best practices from their teaching experience, in addition to the formal evaluation reports by the examiners from the faculty of education (University of Malta, 2012a). Examples of artifacts for the teaching and learning section are the samples of lesson plans and resources, feedback from the cooperating teacher and head of department, samples of student work, and reflective tasks that can be the reflection on the process of preparation and reflections on the feedback (Chetcuti et al., 2006). Students are encouraged, once assigned to placements, to contact the head of school and the examiner and meet with them to discuss the process. Each student is observed in the classroom a minimum of four times by at least two examiners during each practicum session, and feedback is given after each time. The final assessment is done by the board of examiners based on the visits and the portfolio (University of Malta, 2012a).

The practicum for the PGCE is similar in structure, evaluation and assessment, but the classroom observation period is shorter, and the duration of the school placement is two blocks

of six weeks, one from November to December and the second during February and March (University of Malta, 2012b). For both degrees there are additional practical experiences integrated within the courses as in the case of the course on Managing Classrooms (University of Malta, 2012a; 2012b). The professional development portfolio (PDP) is an important component of the program at UoM and it aims at encouraging students to reflect on their learning and their practical experiences, to become more confident and aware of their strengths, to work on remedying their weaknesses, and to be able to reflect on their growth and development (Chetcuti et al., 2006). In their study, Chetcuti, Buhagiar, and Cardona (2011) found that students after the experience of PDP in UoM have continued to reflect during their first year of teaching, and that it actually became a habit of mind. The findings of the study show that the level of reflection needs to extend beyond the individual and classroom to the school and learning process, that is to a higher level of reflection. A recommendation they gave is that the faculty professors needed to exhibit this higher level of reflection themselves and promote the researcher role of the teacher and encourage action research. Moreover, there are several concerns in the implementation of PDP that the faculty entertained, mainly that the portfolios show the best work, in other words become “show cases” instead of reflecting the formative development of students (Chetcuti et al., 2011). Moreover, the professors themselves had concerns about exhibiting and assessing portfolios that include work both from several courses and graded by several professors (Chetcuti et al., 2006).

One of the problems is that the Faculty of Education offers students courses about gender and inclusion and promotes school-based research, while schools in Malta do not provide opportunities for teachers to practice these techniques, so that there is a gap between how students are prepared and what actually takes place in schools. Moreover the Education Division

concentrates on fulfilling the teacher shortages of schools and not necessarily matching needs with expertise which has led to a lower educational performance (Bezzina & Camilleri, 2001). The Faculty of Education Professional Development Schools Partnership is an initiative piloted to meet these challenges by working to develop mentors and cooperating teachers as well as providing an improved practicum experience for student teachers. Professional Development Schools Partnership provides a closer relationship between university professors and teachers in schools where university professors become more aware of the real setting at schools and work to provide professional development for all participants. The aim is for schools to become centers of inquiry and research with all parties involved (Van Velzen, Bezzina & Lorist, 2009).

Finland

Finland requires both primary and secondary teachers to have a three year BA degree followed by a two year full time MA degree in teaching. The teacher preparation programs are research-based; in them teachers are taught from the beginning research methodologies and skills to conduct practical and theoretical research. Each university has a number of training schools which follow the same curriculum as public schools but are governed by the universities. Teachers at those schools are more experienced and of a higher caliber. They are trained to supervise the student teachers. In addition to the training schools each university has several agreements with other Field Schools for student training (Sahlberg, 2010). Students are encouraged to visit the training schools and familiarize themselves with the curriculum and culture of the school as soon as they start the program. Throughout both programs the integration of educational theory and practice, content knowledge, and pedagogical practice is an ongoing strategy, so that there are practice teaching sessions in almost every course (Kansanen, 2003). There are two types of practice experiences in the program, the first of which takes place

in seminars or small group classrooms where students practice teaching to their peers. The second type, which is the main practicum experience, takes place mostly in the training schools and, for some students, in field schools (Sahlberg, 2010). Student teachers begin by observing students in different grades and different classes, both during lessons and during group interaction, and then they start practicing teaching. The main focus of the program is integrating the theoretical part of the program with the subject didactics and practice, all using a research-based approach. Students are asked to record their work during the practicum in portfolios and to analyze and reflect on their experiences, peer evaluation is also encouraged. In many instances student teachers work in pairs during the practicum to co-teach. Group work is encouraged throughout the program (Kansanen, 2003).

For secondary teaching there are two choices: either students complete a Master's degree in a major subject with one or two minor subjects, and then undertake one academic year for pedagogic studies at the Department of Teaching Education, or directly apply to the Teacher Education Department to become subject teachers. For both tracks the pedagogic studies, which include the practicum, is the same in terms of content and duration, but only differs as to the timing of the courses (Sahlberg, 2010). The practicum for secondary subject teachers at the University of Helsinki will be examined in detail. The teaching practice program for the Secondary Teacher Education Program (STEP) has three components which are: basic practice (7cr.), applied practice (4cr.), and advanced practice (9cr.). The applied practice consists of a course on distance education and web-based learning (University of Helsinki, 2006a).

The basic practice is eight weeks long, in which the first week is for observation and the first guidance sessions with the mentor, either in group or individually. For the remaining seven weeks students practice teaching lessons. Students have five areas of requirements which are:

practice lessons, “school as a community”, analysis and observation of teaching, literature, and reflection. Students are evaluated according to their content knowledge, didactic practices, commitment, and active participation. Students have to teach either 9 lessons that are 75 minutes long or 15 lessons that are 45 minutes long each, and they teach to at least two different grades. They teach successive lessons in order to relate to the pupils and get to know them. They have to present their lesson plans to their mentors well ahead of time to receive feedback before conducting the lesson. Mentors are required to meet with students before and after the practice lessons for guidance and are paid to do so by the University of Helsinki. Mentors can also conduct group guidance sessions for the discussion of common topics (University of Helsinki, 2011b).

The “school as a community” requires students to understand and be familiar with the community within schools, to get to know the different individuals, and to become involved with the duties of teachers other than teaching. Students are expected to work independently and make arrangements to join in activities under the guidance of the mentor for a total of 15 sixty minute lessons of participation. Possible activities that students can join in are: become familiar with the activities of the student union, or different clubs, help to arrange and participate in field trips and events, attend parents meetings, learn to master all the learning technologies such as smart boards, digital cameras, equipment in laboratories, and attend staff and evaluation meetings. It is of course stressed that student teachers are under the professional obligation of secrecy regarding all the information in the school (University of Helsinki, n.d.). This part of the requirements provides students with the obligation to understand the school culture and participate in as many activities as possible.

For analysis and observation of teaching, students are required to observe 36 lessons that are 45 minutes long or 22 lessons that are 75 minutes long in different grades and for various teachers and subject. The purpose of this exercise is to widen the exposure of student teachers to the different teaching techniques, to become familiar with students and to observe other student teachers as well. The literature requirement is that students have to become familiar with the national curriculum and the documents for the school's curriculum and rules. Finally students have reflection assignments to be done during the practicum experience that are assigned by the Department of Education at the university (University of Helsinki, 2011b).

For the advanced practice, the same requirements are assigned, but for a period of nine weeks instead of eight. In addition student teachers are asked to use a variety of teaching methods and incorporate ICT in their lessons. Moreover in the literature component students have to become familiar with the Practice Handbook and the E-Norssi working method (University of Helsinki, 2011a). The E-Norssi network is the teacher portal for Finnish teachers (Kaivola, Karpjoki & Saarikko, 2004). Student teachers are encouraged to evaluate themselves through compiling portfolios and discussing their progress with their supervisors (Kaivola et al., 2004). The practicum is evaluated by both supervisors and university faculty as the requirements involve both. The practicum experience aims to provide students not only with teaching practice, but with all the duties of a teacher and knowledge of all the school community and people involved.

One of the strengths of the practicum program at the University of Helsinki is that the university trains the supervisors at both the training and field schools and offers annual practice sessions (University of Helsinki, 2006b). However in some instances funding for that training may not be available which leads to irregular training. As for the one-year pedagogic studies

program for students who have a Master's degree there are complaints that it is too intensive and that the schedules of the practicum sometimes conflict with university-based lectures. One of the problems the University of Helsinki faces is that it only has two training schools which have become exclusive schools and so are not very representative of regular public schools. On the other hand, the network of field schools provides more exposure for students to see the problems they will face in reality. A major weakness that students have expressed is that the block practical training is not long enough because the actual independent teaching does not exceed 15% of the program while the remaining part is devoted to observation, guidance, participation in the school community, and reflection. Students feel that the actual teaching sessions should increase as they are the basis all the other components are built on. A final comment made by students was that supervisors had the tendency to encourage and give only positive feedback so that student teachers had no indication as to how to improve. In general students expressed that they were well prepared by the program, but that their experience could be made better by attending to those comments (Kaivola et al., 2004).

United States

There are over 1200 teacher colleges and universities in the United States (US), each state having its own programs and certification. Most teachers go through a four-year bachelor program in education, in which certification is part of the program, or complete BA degrees in related disciplines and then a one year certification program (Ingersoll, 2007). Recently many alternative routes have been devised by individual states in order to solve shortages in the supply of teachers by allowing change of choices in mid-career or resumption of work after a period of staying at home (US Department of Education, 2004). Most programs offer a 100 day practice

teaching experience to complete the requirements for certification. The practicum program offered by the Washington College for the BA in Elementary Education will be examined.

Washington College has Professional Development Schools (PDS) partnerships with eleven schools from three public districts (Washington College, n.d.(a)). PDS are partnerships involving one school or a group of schools with an Institute of Higher Education (IHE) in collaboration to provide practical and academic preparation for student teachers as well as continuous professional development for both the schools and the faculty of IHE. The main aim of PDS is to improve the performance of students through research-based practices. In PDS partnerships the IHE faculty are involved with the development and improvement of the school, administration of courses and other professional development opportunities (Grasmick, Johnson & Kirwin, 2004). The practical experience is introduced starting the first year through a clinical field experience one-credit course, where students visit the PDS to observe teachers, as well as gain some experience with special needs students. A similar course is assigned in the second year, and two more during the third year. Practical field experiences are also integrated within methodology courses as in the case of the reading instruction and assessment course where students apply the different methods in classrooms at the PDS (Washington College, n.d. (b)).

The Elementary Teaching Internship takes place during the fourth year where students complete 30-40 days at the assigned PDS during the first semester and attend the remaining methodology courses on campus on particular half days (Bunten & Johnson, 2011). Students develop portfolios of their coursework and practical experience at PDS to include samples of their work to be used as formative assessment (Washington College, n.d. (c)). During the final semester students complete the remaining 60-70 days and present their professional portfolio (Bunten & Johnson, 2011). These portfolios are arranged around the themes of “Essential

Dimensions of Teaching” as indicated by Washington College which include standards of student performance. The standards include ability to demonstrate content knowledge and appropriate teaching techniques, understanding of social, emotional and cognitive development, ability to deal with diversity in needs and background, use of different assessment techniques, ability to manage classrooms, ability to integrate technology, awareness of the ethical and civic aspects of schools, ability to collaborate with parents, teachers and administrators, and, finally, ability to analyze and reflect on the different experiences. At the end of the teaching internship students compile from their portfolio a presentation portfolio that includes an action research project which they present to all school and college faculty members as well as site coordinators and administrators (Washington College, n.d.(c)).

In PDS the role of the Mentor Teacher is identified in detail to the extent of advising the teacher to provide a desk for the intern and to introduce him to students as a co-teacher, to assist student teachers in developing and evaluating lesson plans, to support student teachers through the stages of teaching, and even providing a check list with all the things that have to be done. Interns start by observing the Mentor Teacher then they team up and work together to prepare the lesson plans and teach cooperatively. Next interns are given the chance to teach with the teacher observing them and finally they teach independently and they have the classroom to themselves. The final stage is before they hand back the class, as the mentor teacher starts gradually to re-assume responsibility and the interns then observe again (more critically this time), or go to observe in other classes. Mentor teachers continue to have post observations conferences with the interns throughout the process. The Mentor Teacher Handbook provides guidelines for giving feedback, effective mentoring, post-observation conferences, and rubrics for evaluating lesson plans (Bunten & Johnson, 2011).

Each intern has a college supervisor who works with the Mentor Teacher in guiding and supervising the progress of interns. The college supervisor acts as a liaison between the school and college and is responsible for explaining the teacher education program to the Mentor Teacher and school administrators. In addition, college supervisors observe interns and hold conferences with them and with the Mentor Teacher. The PDS Site-Coordinator is the focal person in the school representing the principal in the organizing of activities. He/she assigns interns to Mentor Teachers, organizes schedules according to college needs, arranges meetings between faculty and Mentor Teachers, and is responsible for any related activity for the PDS. The College PDS Liaison is the same as the site coordinator for the IHE and he/she is responsible for the needs of the school with regards to the PDS partnership. The College PDS Liaison assigns interns to the site coordinator, provides or arranges mentoring training and staff development for school improvement, represents the IHE in school improvement meetings and is present in the school, as well as observes the interns and provides feedback. The PDS Principal is responsible for ensuring and encouraging the collaboration of teachers and staff, and for communicating with the Mentoring Teacher, the college supervisor and the PDS Liaison, the site coordinator and the intern to ensure the proper evaluation of the performance of the intern. The final portfolio is evaluated according to set guidelines and rubrics by all those involved (Bunten & Johnson, 2011).

The main strength is that PDS provides an involved collaboration between schools and colleges to ensure an effective and successful practice teaching experience. IHE provides training and detailed guidance to Mentor Teachers, as well as opportunities for development through attending workshops, co-instructing lectures in IHE, and doing research. In addition PDS partnerships contribute to school improvement by applying best practices and a

commitment to research and the development of teaching techniques. The whole program has structure, standards, guidelines, and forms for all stages. It must be mentioned that even though partnerships can have structure and minimum requirements, relationships in partnerships cannot be “standardized”, and that every partnership between a single or multiple schools and an IHE has its own characteristics and needs (Grasmick et al., 2004). Partnerships take time and effort to build in order to have all parties working together for their mutual benefit.

One of the concerns in implementing PDS partnerships is the required restructuring and resources needed in both schools and IHE. Schools need to allocate space for the faculty and supervisor of the IHE and for all the professional development activities and training involved, as well as adjusting schedules to meet the needs of the different stakeholders. The restructuring of the work load and promotion schemes for staff and faculty is needed to provide time for work on all the requirements of PDS, while promotions are not delayed. In addition, parents may be worried about their children being taught by student teachers on their own and that their own teachers may be absent to administer or attend workshops (Grasmick et al., 2004). Snyder (2005) examines a cases study of a PDS partnership between the Teachers College of Columbia University and two district schools. The study showed the difficulty of building trust between the partners, the challenge of change, and the importance of realizing mutual benefits. There were tensions encountered as the schools’ main concern was the welfare of their students, while the universities were worried about the needs of their interns. In fact, there were instances when schools felt that the main aim of the partnership was student teacher preparation and not school improvement. In addition, there were the personal concerns of the teachers who were worried about leaving their students and classes to student teachers, and did not appreciate guidance from university supervisors. On the other hand once the teachers got involved in research and co-

lecturing they were immersed in their experiences. The study highlighted the role of the principal in one of the schools who was initially very capable and involved in the school, and committed to the partnership and so helped to mediate any problems (Snyder, 2005). It is clear that PDS partnerships offer many prospects of reform for both schools and universities, but that there are many concerns in implementation.

Classification of Different Practicum Experiences

After examining the different practicum programs in the different countries I will classify and analyze some of the common characteristics. Table 1 shows the practicum programs examined classified by type of leadership of the practicum program whether school or university/institute and by employment basis, i.e., whether the student teacher is actually employed or is guaranteed employment upon finishing the program. As previously shown, although the school led programs provide student teachers with a longer practical experience, there are possible weaknesses in terms of consistency of program, links to the theoretical part or depth of the methodology component. Meanwhile the programs that offer employment or possibilities of employment may benefit from the commitment and sense of ownership of the training school, but the students may feel obliged to be less critical and accept the status quo.

Table 1

Practicum Programs Classified by Leadership and Employment Basis

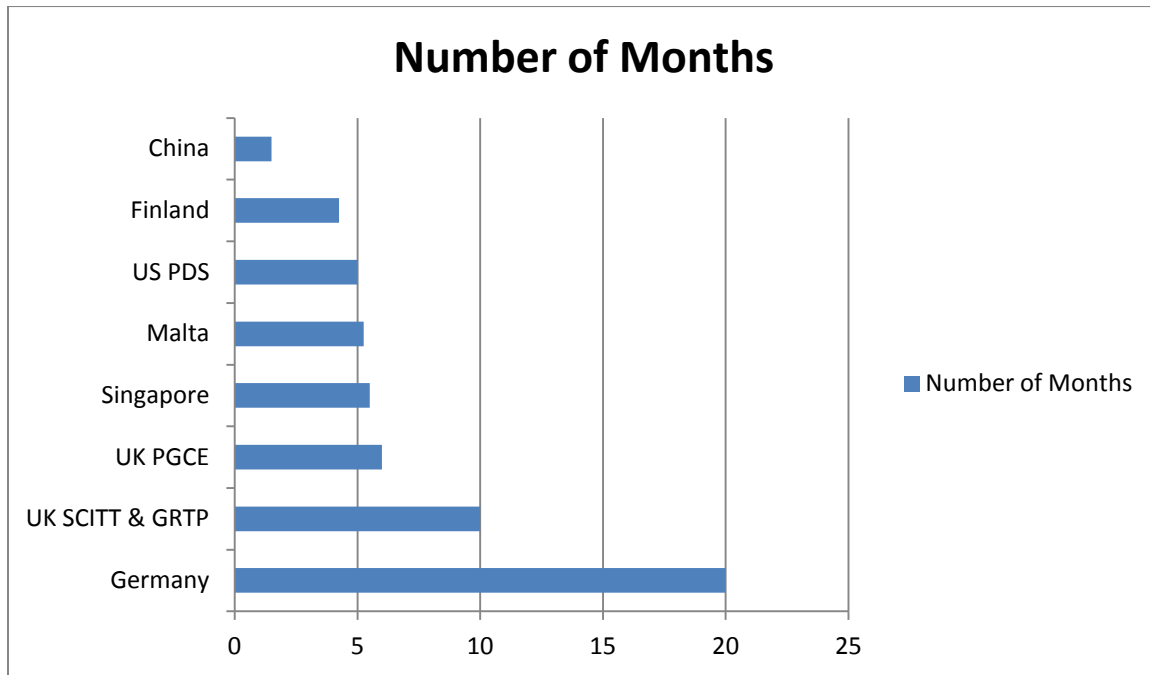
Employment Basis	University Leadership	School Leadership
No Employment Guaranteed	China UK – PGCE Malta Finland US	UK – SCITT
Employed or Employment Guaranteed	Singapore	*Germany UK- GRTP

* For Germany the leadership of the program is between both the school and the institute

Chart 1 shows the different programs classified according to the duration of the practicum. It is important to note that the duration of the practicum is an important characteristic as student teachers feel that they benefit more in longer periods of practicum, but as stated in several of the programs the structure of the program may affect the actual length of the independent teaching experience. Finally, it is not only the duration of the program that is of concern, but the structure and the quality as well.

Chart 1

The Duration of the Practicum Experience in Number of Months for Each Program Examined



This brings up the issue of different partnership structures between universities and schools. Table 2 shows the partnerships classified according to whether the university manages the training school, plans and provides professional development opportunities, involves the schools in designing the practicum program, or has no specified structure of partnership.

Table 2

Classification of the Partnerships in the Examined Practicum Programs

University Participates In Management of School	University Plans and Provides PD	Schools Involved In Practicum Design	No Specified Structure
Finland	Finland	Germany	China
	Malta - PDS	Singapore	
	US – PDS	US - PDS	
		UK- PGCE	
		UK- SCITT/GRTP	

When there is participation in management or provision of professional development (PD) the advantage is a greater alignment between the university and school in the practicum experience, so that what is taught in universities is practiced in the training school. The possible weakness will be if the training or the professional development schools reach a higher quality so that they are not representative of other schools so student teachers will not be prepared to deal with the future challenges. As for the involvement of schools in the design of the practicum program it yields more commitment and ownership of the program.

The examined practicum programs are also classified according to whether they seek to produce a reflective practitioner. The criteria for reflection is that the process should emphasize the development of the educator through becoming aware of the educational, social and political environment, relating the theory and pedagogic knowledge to real life situation and deciding on what and how to apply it, and finally the educator constructing his/her own knowledge and understanding which in turn is reflected on his/her practices (Etscheidt, Curran & Sawyer, 2012). Teacher preparation programs should provide sufficient opportunity for student teachers to

develop the qualities to become thoughtful, engaged and reflective teachers. Practicum programs should require students to write journals, attend seminars, conduct action research and compile portfolios. These provide student teachers with opportunities to think about their experiences, reflect upon them, and construct their personal knowledge relating it to their own culture and environment (Yost, Sentner & Forlenza-Bailey, 2000). Table 3 presents the examined programs classified according to the pedagogical approach whether more constructive or prescriptive. Following is a discussion of the extent to which each of the examined programs prepares teachers to be reflective practitioners and to construct their own knowledge as opposed to a more prescriptive approach where student teachers are just required to model the current practices.

Table 3

Classification of Pedagogical Approach in the Examined Practicum Programs

Constructive Approach		Prescriptive Approach
Singapore	Germany*	China
UK- PGCE	UK- SCITT/GRTP*	
Malta		
Finland		
US- PDS		

* Partly constructive/ partly prescriptive approach

In the examined German program, reflection is a main component of the examination, but I cannot determine if it is integrated throughout the whole program. The separation between the university preparation stage and the school placement stage may affect the extent to which teachers are prepared to be reflective practitioners. Student teachers have stated that the practical component in their view is not linked to the theory learnt and this is likely to affect their ability to relate and integrate what they have learnt and to reflect on their practices and construct their

own knowledge. In the case of Singapore NIE, the practicum is divided into four stages along the four years of preparation where students gradually learn and practice all aspects of the educational system. The program integrates well the practice with the theory learnt and encourages reflection. In addition, the four stages of the practicum provide students with the opportunity to acquire experience as well as have time to reflect on it before the following stage. The program exhibits a more constructive approach, but the cooperating teachers need more training in mentoring skills and the assessment requirements are not clearly mentioned. In China the examined programs are focused on content knowledge with a weak pedagogic component and the practicum did not provide opportunity for students to truly practice or reflect on the knowledge they had learnt. The programs exhibit a prescriptive approach to teacher preparation. In the UK, student teachers in the school led programs that were not well linked to universities, suffer from the difficulty of integrating theory and practice as well as being less able to develop reflection skills. The UK PGCE program has thus a more constructivist approach than the SCITT or GRTP. In Malta the BEd provides students with opportunity for practical experiences in school in all four years, while the PGCE provides students with two opportunities of such placements. In both programs reflection is encouraged through the portfolio requirement. The study by Chetcuti, Buhagiar, and Cardona (2011) showed that students have continued reflection after becoming teachers because it became a habit of mind. The program provides sufficient opportunity and encourages teachers to be reflective practitioners. In Finland the program exhibits a constructive approach and has a reflection component as one of the requirements in both the basic and advanced practice. The program provides student teachers the opportunity to become familiar with all the details of the education system. The PDS examined program in the Washington College includes an extensive practicum opportunity and requires

student teachers to reflect and analyze as part of the requirements of the portfolio as well as conduct an action research project. The Mentor Teacher guides student teachers to develop the qualities of a reflective teacher.

The different structures of the practicum programs provide different experiences to students including different strengths and weaknesses. This emphasizes the importance of identifying the strengths and weaknesses of the practicum experience as they affect the overall effectiveness of the program.

Strengths and Weaknesses in the Examined Practicum Program

Tables 4, 5 and 6 show the points of strength or effective characteristics that were identified in several programs classified into three main categories. The categories are the structure of the program, the experience provided to students, and, finally, the evaluation requirements. Of course, if any of the identified effective characteristics are missing, it constitutes a weakness. Table 6 shows some of the other identified characteristics of weakness in the examined practicum programs.

Table 4 shows the effective or positive characteristics that were found in the examined programs with respect to the structure of the program to ensure quality and consistency.

Table 4

The Program Structure of the Examined Practicum Programs

Effective Characteristics

Presence of an effective trained Mentor Teacher

Presence of an involved supervisor from university

Presence of a liaison for the program in school

Presence of a liaison for the program in university

All roles defined with clear guidelines

Availability of partnerships with schools

Involvement of schools in the design of the training program

Integration of practical components within the methodology and theoretical courses

Table 5 shows the positive characteristics of a successful experience for students in the examined practicum programs.

Table 5

The Experience Provided to Students in the Examined Practicum Programs

Effective Characteristics

Provides opportunity for observation of experienced teachers

Provides opportunity of independent teaching

Provides training in all duties of a teacher

Provides opportunities for getting involved with students and participating in school activities

Includes a concurrent seminar or course on teaching methods

Includes placements in more than one school

Promotes collaboration through required work in pairs and groups

Offers job possibilities

Table 6 shows the effective characteristics for the required evaluation of students in the examined practicum programs.

Table 6

Evaluation Requirements of the Examined Practicum Programs

Effective Characteristics

Includes all those involved from both the school and university

Includes self assessment

Includes peer evaluation

Encourages reflection

Requires compilation of a professional portfolio

Includes a research component

Provides clearly defined evaluation standards

Table 7 shows the characteristics that could possibly lead to weaknesses in the examined practicum programs

Table 7
Weaknesses Found in the Examined Practicum Programs

Characteristics that Demonstrate Potential Weaknesses

Non-alignment between the theoretical courses and the practical component

Teaching of techniques, applications or concepts inapplicable in schools

Inconsistency or variation of practicum experience

Unavailability of sufficient links between the schools and universities

Lack of commitment and welcome to the program in schools

Parents' resistance

Student teacher cooperation not aligned with school culture

No structural changes in schools to accommodate the work load of the program

I will proceed to evaluate each of the programs according to the criteria classified, keeping in mind that the evaluation is based on the available information on each practicum program.

The leadership of the program examined in Germany is between both school and training institutes, so the structure requirements of liaisons do not apply, but the schools are very involved in the design of the program. There is some integration of practical experience in the methodology and theory courses in the first phase, but the major weakness is the non-alignment of the first phase theoretical and methodology courses with the practical component. In addition the program is inconsistent due to the differences between schools and suffers from insufficient links with the training institutes. The experience provided to students meets the requirements with the exception of placement being in only one school with no mention of any collaborative

work. As for evaluation the exit requirements do not require compilation of portfolios nor peer evaluation. The program is more of an induction phase.

The practicum program of Singapore meets the requirements of the program structure criteria except for the need of more training for the Cooperating Teacher. In addition, it offers possibilities of employment in the placement schools. As for the experience offered to students, the program does not offer a concurrent course on teaching methods nor necessarily offer placements in more than one school, or promote collaboration. The information available on evaluation requirements does not specify the details with the exception of examination of content knowledge by the Cooperating Teacher, and that it is done by an assessment panel involving all stakeholders. However one of the weaknesses mentioned is that there are no clear standards and guidelines for assessment which indicates that there may be problems in this area. On the whole it seems that there is a need for more attention to training of Cooperating Teachers and to setting guidelines and standards.

The programs examined in China do not meet any of the program structure requirements as the roles and duties of the Mentor Teacher and principal are not identified, and they do not know what to do with the student teachers. The schools felt the practicum is a burden on them and were not in any way committed or welcoming. The experience offered to student does not prepare them sufficiently as they are not trained to teach, but perform minor duties for the teacher, and they are not even encouraged to interact with students. Moreover, the methodology preparation is not aligned with the reality in schools, and they are neither taught techniques nor trained on applications that work in schools. The only positive thing, in my view, is that the requirements for evaluation include self assessment, peer evaluation and a research component,

but there are doubts as to the guidelines and standards of evaluation. There is a need for structure, stronger links, and guidance from the university.

Although the programs examined in the UK do not provide information on the existence of liaisons, it is structured by laws and regulations, and partnership agreements with schools provide details of the duties of staff and their training requirements. The program structure seems comprehensive and the schools in general are involved in the design of the programs. The experience it provides to students meets the requirements with the exception that there is no mention of collaboration and there is only one placement school in the case of SCITT and GRTP programs. The evaluation structure also does not mention any peer evaluation, requirement of a portfolio, or research. There also seems to be problems regarding the support of universities in the theoretical and methodology component for SCITT and GRTP programs, as well as a need for structural changes to accommodate the work load for mentors.

The structure of the practicum in Malta does not include a liaison person in school or university, but the examiners who observe students could be considered in lieu of the university supervisor. In addition schools are not involved in the design of the program. This has led to the problem of students being taught concepts that are inapplicable in schools. Hopefully, this will improve with the PDS initiative. As for the practical experience offered to students, the program meets the requirements especially in being involved with students and identifying their different needs. The evaluation requirement of the program is focused around the professional development portfolio which presents some problems in implementation but is generally effective. However, there is no mention of peer evaluation or collaboration in the program. Moreover, the available information does not give details of clear standards for evaluation. The program is good, but there seems to be a gap in general between the program and the reality in

schools. It is possible that the program is trying to be an agent of change by introducing new concepts while the reform has not yet reached schools.

The program of the University of Helsinki in Finland meets all the requirements of the program structure and an effective practical experience to students, but it does not provide enough opportunity for independent teaching as students have expressed their need to teach more lessons independently. In addition at least one of the placement schools needs to be more representative of the public schools in Finland. The supervisors may also need to be trained on giving more critical feedback. The program especially involves student teachers in the whole community of the school and promotes collaboration. As for evaluation, the program has all the effective requirements, and especially focuses on the research-based practice of teaching. In general it is a well structured program.

The program in Washington College in the US meets the structure criteria and exceeds it in the level of detail and guidance provided for all the roles. As for both the experience provided to students and evaluation, all the requirements are met with the exception of peer evaluation. In addition very detailed rubrics are prepared for the evaluation of the portfolio. The program is structurally very good, but possible problems could arise during the implementation due to the effort needed to build constructive partnerships and the restructuring required in schools to accommodate the needed time and space for such programs.

The Case of Egypt

Faculties of Education in Egypt

Faculties of Education in Egypt offer a four year undergraduate program leading to the Bachelor of Arts Degree. There are three main divisions which are the general specializations, the basic education specializations and the early literacy specialization. The general specializations graduate teachers for the preparatory and secondary stages and include both arts and science specializations. Arts specializations include: Arabic, Foreign Languages, History, Geography, Psychology, and Philosophy and Sociology. Science specializations include: Mathematics, Chemistry, Biology, Physics, as well as Mathematics or Sciences taught in English. The basic specialization graduates teachers for the primary and preparatory stages, but the focus is on the primary stage and includes the following art specializations: Arabic, English, Social Studies, in addition, to the science specializations Mathematics and Science. Students are admitted to the Faculties of Education depending on their scores in the Thanaweya Amma examination (Egyptian end of school examination), in addition to an interview and a skills test conducted by the Faculty of Education. The scores of students in the subjects related to each specialization in the Thanaweya Amma examination determine their acceptance in that specific specialization (Kochok & El Mufty, 2008). However, according to Hassan, the admission criteria is not effective as the capabilities test and interviews are not seriously conducted and do not identify the predisposition or the inclination of students to teach (as cited in Al-Gaweesh, 2002). Haggag states that traditionally the Faculties of Education only attracted students with low scores in Thanaweya Amma until the beginning of the eighties when unemployment had spread to many occupations and the teaching profession started to attract higher achieving students (as cited in Al-Gaweesh, 2002).

The theoretical subjects undergraduate students in Faculties of Education study are divided as follows: 75% content subjects in their respective specialization, 20% pedagogical subjects and 5% cultural subjects. As for the applied subjects they are as follows: the micro teaching course in year two and the practicum in year three and four. The micro teaching course provides an opportunity for students to practice teaching to their peers. The students are divided into groups of 8-10 where each student is asked to present a specific skill or set of teaching skills to the class and is video-taped. The class replays the video and the student is asked to evaluate him/herself and then his/her peers and the professor give their feedback. Table 8 shows the pedagogical studies divided into the different components. It is noticeable that teaching methods has a small share while it is an essential component to provide student teachers with the necessary tools to teach and interact with students. Finally, the Social Foundations of Education component has the smallest share even though it is an important component to build the ideological framework for the profession and introduce students to the different philosophical and educational theories (Koshok & El Mufty, 2008).

Table 8
Division of the Pedagogical Subjects into the Different Components

Type	Percentage
Curriculum Studies	32.65%
Educational Psychology	26.53%
Educational Technology	16.32%
Teaching Methods	14.28%
Social Foundations of Education	10.2%

(Kochok & El Mufty, 2008)

In addition to the Bachelor of Arts degree discussed above, Faculties of Education offer an educational general diploma for students with bachelor degrees from other faculties to qualify

them to teach. The diploma is one year long and includes pedagogical courses as well as a practicum component (Kochok & El Mufty, 2008).

Previous Studies on the Practicum in Egyptian Faculties of Education

In a study on the experience of the practicum on 456 students in Ein Shams and Minia Faculties of Education the findings stated that some practicum supervisors have different views than the university professors, the teaching methods curriculum and the practicum were not interlinked, the subject content courses taught in university are not related to the subject content of school curricula, schools are not equipped with sufficient resources, the practicum duration is too short, and the selection and distribution of students in schools is not suitable. On the other hand, students benefitted from the practicum through the experience acquired by actually teaching, applying different methods, interacting with students, understanding the differences between learners, in addition to recognizing the self discipline, responsibility and building of relations inside the school community (Kochok & El Mufty, 2008).

In another study on the development of a practicum program in view of the performance indicators required for Geography student teachers in Alexandria Faculty of Education, the researcher identified several weaknesses among the findings. These were: that a standardized set of criteria for school and supervisor selection was not available, the duration of the practicum was too short, supervision was insufficient, the financial compensation for supervisors was very low, schools lacked required resources and meeting space for practicum students, the practicum unit was unaware of the problems encountered by students, students were not sufficiently prepared for the requirements of teaching, and subject content courses had no relation to the curricula in schools. One of the sub-findings was that the grades awarded to students for the practicum were inflated compared to the grades awarded in other subjects, for example in the

examined year 61% of students had a grade of Excellent in the practicum while 1.3% of students had a similar grade in teaching methods courses and none in curriculum courses (El-Nahas, 2003).

In a third study on the evaluation of the practicum program involving 240 year three and four students and 20 supervisors from four Faculties of Education in Cairo, the researcher focused on the four main components of the practicum which are the preparation for the practicum, the supervision during the practicum, the evaluation of student teachers and the organization of the practicum. Table 9 shows the findings for the first three components as cumulative percentages of the questions assigned to evaluate each component. For the organization of the practicum 80% of the students in year three indicated that the practicum administration was not aware of the problems they faced. Year three students did not have a consecutive practicum period in three of the four faculties. As for year four, 70 % of the students stated that the administration only sent their names to schools but did not follow up afterwards. All students recommended that the practicum consecutive period should be longer. Some students indicated it should be three weeks, while others said it should be a whole term. Year three and four students stated that the difficulties they faced included the lack of supervision, short duration of the practicum, schools not allowing them to participate in all activities, and the lack of resources in schools (Hamidosh, 1996).

Table 9
Findings of the Study on the Evaluation of the Practicum in Faculties of Education in Cairo

Description	Percentage of Students		
	Agree	Partially Agree	Disagree
<u>Year Three Students:</u>			
Preparation was sufficient	25%	50%	25%
Supervision was sufficient	22.5%	37.5%	40%
Evaluation was comprehensive	22.33%	34.34%	43.33%
<u>Year Four Students:</u>			
Preparation was sufficient	29%	41%	30%
Supervision was sufficient	20%	48%	32%
Evaluation was comprehensive	18%	36%	46%
<u>Supervisors:</u>			
Preparation was sufficient	68.34%	29.66%	2%
Supervision was sufficient	66.25%	29.75%	4%
Evaluation was comprehensive	55%	35%	10%

(Hamidosh, 1996)

Schools in Egypt

In Egypt, the total number of schools is 46,727 out of which 40,809 are public and 5,918 are private. Faculties of Education mainly send students to public schools. The total number of students in public school in the academic year 2011/2012 was 16,178,407, while only 1,590,617 go to private schools (MOE, 2011). There were several attempts for reform, the last being the National Strategic Plan for Pre-University Education Reform from 2007-2012. The focus was on decentralization, quality, school-based reform, accountability, accreditation, and wider community participation (MOE, 2007). With the emerging importance of accreditation, the

National Authority for Quality Assurance and Accreditation of Education (NAQAAE) was established in 2006, reporting directly to the Prime Minister of Egypt, with the objective of quality assurance and accreditation of different educational institutes (National Authority for Quality Assurance and Accreditation of Education (NAQAAE, 2009). The accreditation process mainly revolved around student outcomes, leadership and governance, and partnerships with all those involved in the education process including strengthening community ties, and continuous learning (NAQAAE, 2012b). The NAQAAE has accredited a total of 2678 schools in all governorates (NAQAAE, 2012a).

Research Design and Methodology

Type of Design

This study is an attempt to explore the practicum in Egyptian Universities and the way it is being implemented as described by the university professors and as experienced by the students. The design for the study is descriptive using qualitative methods to find answers to the research questions: What is the design and structure of the practicum in the Faculties of Education in Egypt? How is it being implemented in two Faculties of Education? And What are the strengths and weaknesses as perceived by the students of the two Faculties of Education?

Target Population and Sample Selection

The study is on the practicum experience in the Faculties of Education in Egypt and as there are 27 faculties in the different governorates it was the aim of the researcher to explore a variety of locations within the country. For the first phase of the research, which was to find out the practices of practicum in Egypt, I selected four professors to interview from four Faculties of Education in different locations of the country. For confidentiality purposes they will be referred to throughout the research as University 1, University 2, University 3 and University 4. University 1 and 2 are located in the Southern part of Egypt, while University 3 and 4 are in the Northern part of the country. The sample of the four universities was a convenience sample as it was through personal connections that I could access these professors and interview them.

For phase two and three of the research I selected two universities where an in depth examination of the practicum experience was done through interviewing the Head and Acting Head of the practicum unit in each university. The selection was again on the basis of convenience sampling as it was through the availability of connections to an influential contact person who was able to allow me access to both professors and students in each university. I

also took into consideration that both universities are geographically far apart and in different environments to give me a greater variety for research. For the sake of confidentiality the two universities will remain anonymous and I will refer to them as University X and University Y. University X is located in a large city in the Delta in the North of Egypt, while University Y is located in a large city in the South, in Upper Egypt. The Faculty of Education in University X was established in 1966. The Faculty of Education in University Y was first established in 1957 for males only then became a mixed college in 1966. They are both among the oldest Faculties of Education in Egypt.

For phase two of the study I conducted focus groups for students from the third and fourth year in both Faculties of Education. I conducted each focus group with students of a single specialization as combining specializations was not possible due to the overlapping of schedules, except in the case of one group in each university. The selection of specializations was based on the inclusion of both art and scientific subjects, as well as specializations with high, medium and low density of students. High density specializations were classified as specializations that had more than eighty students, medium density specializations had more than forty and less than eighty students, while low density specializations had less than forty students. The strategy used for selection is the “maximum variation sample”, which is based on a selection of all the variables that could have an effect (Brikci & Green, 2007). The variables taken into account here were both the number of students in the specialization, as well as the nature of the subject whether an art or a science to capture the maximum possible variety of experiences.

Following in table 10 are the specializations that were included in the focus groups of year four students in each university.

Table 10

Year Four Focus Group by Specialization and Density for Both Universities

University	High Density ($80 \leq$ students)	Medium Density ($40 \leq$ students ≤ 80)	Low Density (students ≤ 40)
University X	Arabic Basic Ed. English	History Mathematics Basic Ed.	French Mathematics & Chemistry & Biology in English
University Y	English	Mathematics English Basic Ed.	Biology Geography Mathematics Basic Ed.

Following in table 11 are the specializations that were included in the focus groups for year three students in each university.

Table 11

Year Three Focus Group by Specialization and Density for Both Universities

University	High Density ($50 \leq$ students)	Medium Density ($30 \leq$ students ≤ 50)	Low Density (students ≤ 30)*
University X		English	French Social Studies Basic Ed. English Basic Ed.
University Y		Arabic	English Basic Ed. Biology & French

* The limits for the density of students are lower than year four as there are fewer students overall in year three and there are no high density specializations.

In both universities the number of students in year three is less than half the number of students in year four as the current year three students are the outcome of a change in policy regarding the number of years of schooling, where an additional schooling year was added to the primary stage. The total number of students in the third year in Faculty of Education X was 271 and in the fourth year 828 students as reported by the administration. In Faculty of Education X a total of 41 students participated in the six focus groups I conducted for year four students and 30 students participated in the four focus groups for year three students. In the Faculty of Education Y, the total number of students in the third year was 346 and in the fourth year 764 students as

reported by the administration of the university. In Faculty of Education Y a total of 58 students participated in the six focus groups I conducted for students from the fourth year and 30 students participated in the three focus groups for students of the third year. Ninety percent of the students participating in the focus groups were females due to the fact that in both universities the students are predominantly female and that male students were more likely to miss lectures.

Data Collection Procedure

Phase 1.

For the first question: what is the design and structure of the practicum in the Faculties of Education in Egypt? I interviewed professors (key informants) from four Faculties of Education to know the details of the practicum experience. The professors were either professors in the Department of Curriculum and Teaching Methodology which is responsible for the practicum, or were among the supervising professors of the practicum from other departments and were well-informed and involved in the practicum of their universities, hence they were all considered key informants. The interviews followed the “interview guide approach” in which the researcher has a guideline to outline the topics of the interview and the types of questions, but the wording is not specific (Boudah, 2011). The advantage of such an interview approach is that it allows the researcher the opportunity to elaborate on certain topics depending on the outcome of the answers and explore issues that may not have been considered (Boudah, 2011). The interviews took place during the summer and fall of 2012 and focused on the implemented practicum in their respective Faculties of Education. The interview topics are attached in Appendix 1. The interviews gave me an in depth picture of how the practicum is being conducted in Egyptian Universities and the areas of similarities and differences. In addition it gave me an idea of possible areas of strength and weakness in the program.

Phase 2.

For the second and third questions: How is it being actually implemented in two Faculties of Education? And what are the strengths and weaknesses as perceived by the students of the two Faculties of Education? I visited two Faculties of Education in two governorates in Egypt for the duration of four days respectively during the fall semester of 2012. First, I conducted interviews with the Head and Acting Head of the Practicum Office in the two universities. These two interviews followed the same topics, but were more detailed in regarding students' placement in schools, how students are allocated to supervisors, how schools are selected, assessment criteria and problems faced. Secondly, I was given the documents that serve as guidelines to the practicum that I analyzed and compared to the information in the interview. Thirdly, I then conducted focus groups with students in the third and fourth year of each university. The choice of universities was based on possibility of access. The contact person in each Faculty of Education introduced me to professors, who in turn introduced me to students. The choice of students was mainly based on their willingness to participate, as either the professor addressed the students or allowed me to address them to explain the study that I was conducting and ask for volunteers to join the focus groups. The focus groups were conducted between lectures and during the students' free time. At the beginning of each focus group during introductions I quickly sketched a seating plan and assigned students numbers according to their seating place in the circle. I used these numbers in my notes to record the comments made by each student so that during analysis I would be able to follow the conversation as it occurred and analyze the context of the comments. During the first part of the focus group I tried to create rapport with the students by appropriately disclosing information about myself or about experiences of my colleagues at schools to make them feel more comfortable to discuss their own.

The main aim of the focus groups was to understand the practicum experience from the perspective of students. It is important to note here that the third year students had just started the first year of practicum at the beginning of the academic year and so had three to four weeks experience. Meanwhile the fourth year students had finished their first year of practicum during the third year and had started with the beginning of the academic year on the second year of practicum. I guided third year students to discuss the following topics: their first impression of the practicum, what they had experienced so far, what they expected, how they felt, and whether they were well prepared. For fourth year students the topics were: how was their practicum experience in detail, how many times have they taught independently, how was the supervision and guidance, how was their relationship with all those involved (supervisors, principals, teachers, professors and students), what were the activities or duties assigned to them in schools, were they given sufficient guidance before and after, did they prepare their own lesson plans, and the extent to which they were able to observe colleagues and experienced teachers. Additional topics were: how well they felt that the methodology and theoretical courses in university have prepared them for their experience, how they describe peer interaction, what were the details of the evaluation process, have they encountered any problems, do they have suggestions for improvement, has their overall experience been beneficial, and finally do they feel prepared to teach.

Phase 3.

After conducting most of the focus groups I conducted several interviews with professors involved in the practicum in both Faculties of Education, in addition to an interview with a high-level supervisor from the Ministry of Education (MOE) in Governorate X, and an expert teacher and a teacher from schools in Governorate Y to obtain more details and clarification about the

findings. This process served to triangulate the findings from the second phase, as well as increase my understanding of the practicum experience in both faculties.

Ethical Considerations

The study was conducted during the fall semester of 2012. Approval from the Institutional Review Board at the American University in Cairo (AUC) and from the Central Agency for Population Mobilization and Statistics (CAPMAS) was obtained prior to contacting participants. Prior to the interview, I explained to all the key informants the purpose and procedure of the study and I obtained their verbal consent to participate and assured them that they were free to discontinue the interview if they so wished. Permission was obtained from the contact person in each university prior to the visit. The timing of each visit was made at the convenience of each university and it took into consideration that sufficient weeks should have passed from the start of the semester so that students would have been assigned to schools for their practicum. I explained the purpose and procedure of the study to each contact person prior to their introducing me to the different professors who would in turn introduce me to the students. I also explained the same in detail to the professors so that they were assured that there is no possible harm to the students. When I met the students, after introducing myself and stating my affiliation to the AUC educational institution, I explained the purpose of my study and the procedure for conducting focus groups. I stated that participation was totally voluntary and told students the location and timing of the focus group. When a sufficient number of students had volunteered and after introductions, I re-stated that participating was voluntary and that they should feel free to leave the group at any point if they so wish. I then asked them one by one if they would like to continue. After obtaining their oral consent I then proceeded to the discussion. At this point I would like to mention that the students in every focus group thanked

me at the end of the procedure as they had benefited from the discussion and felt relieved after voicing their thoughts and opinion.

Data Management and Analysis Procedure

After each interview and focus group I typed a complete version of the notes taken with all my comments and intuitions by the following day. I included all details and coded the individual responses numerically, so that during analysis I would be able to contextualize the different comments. After finishing all the interviews and focus groups I re-read the notes several times and used a thematic approach to analyze the data. Then I coded the notes in preparation for data findings presentation.

Validity and Limitations

First I will present issues related to internal validity. The choice of focus groups as a method of collecting data in the study enabled me to gain information both from the interaction between myself and the students and from the interaction among the students themselves which provided me with a deeper picture of the different issues. By conducting several focus groups in each university I was able to triangulate the information obtained and to evaluate whether it was a single case situation or a wide spread issue. In addition conducting separate focus groups for each specialization served two purposes; first, that students were more intimate with each other as they had shared experiences, which allowed them to speak more freely and second, that they added to each experience being discussed so that I got a more detailed account. The interviews with the key informants prior to the focus groups gave me the framework or structure for understanding the student experiences. I was aware of many of the problematic issues. The interviews after the focus groups with the professors and lecturers in both universities, as well as the interviews with the MOE official and teachers further confirmed and clarified the findings.

This process also served to triangulate the findings from the second phase, as well as increase my understanding of the practicum experience in both Faculties of Education.

Second, with respect to external validity the findings cannot be generalized to other Faculties of Education. However, the results could be useful in understanding the practicum experience, in comparing it to other teacher preparation programs, and could be considered for future improvement programs.

Data Findings and Discussion of the Practicum in Four Faculties of Education

I will present the findings from the interviews of the professors from the four Faculties of Education. The practicum in Faculties of Education in Egypt should include both once a week practicum where students spend one day every week in school and the consecutive practicum where students spend a whole week or two weeks.

Faculty of Education at University 1

Structure of the practicum.

The practicum is conducted in the third and fourth year where students are placed in schools for one day every week. The total number of students in the Faculty of Education is eight hundred and half of them are in the final two years attending the practicum. The practicum office divides the student teachers in groups of six to eight and places them in schools. Student teachers are assigned to a different school each year. Student teachers are encouraged to be involved in all school activities, such as the morning orientation, preparing charts, organizing any event. The university has a booklet for students that includes instructions on how to prepare lessons and different teaching strategies and has templates for self, peer and supervisor evaluation. Every group of student teachers are assigned to a teacher first to observe and then are allowed to teach one lesson each week by turn. If the group is comprised of three students then each gets an opportunity to teach once every three weeks. If the group is larger each may only get a chance to teach once a month which means around three times a semester. At the end of each visit the internal supervisor meets with the student teachers and each one of them first evaluates himself/herself, then peers provide feedback as well. The schools are generally cooperative but the problem is that there are not enough schools near the faculty to accommodate all students so students do not get enough opportunity to teach independently.

The practicum office then assigns each group to a university professor for supervision. Each professor can supervise up to two groups of student teachers. He/she should visit one of the groups each week so that each group is visited every other week. Supervising professors can be from any department in the Faculty of Education as supervision is voluntary. The university is small and the schools report to the practicum office on a regular basis so professors regularly attend in schools and do their duties. In general the atmosphere is very supportive. The principal assigns student teachers to a teacher in school who becomes the students' internal supervisor. The principal chooses the most experienced teachers in the schools to supervise the student teachers but no training is provided to internal supervisors. The supervising professor meets with the internal supervisor to decide on the training program for his/her student teachers. The university supervisor sets the strategy and then leaves the internal supervisor the freedom of working out the details, while regularly following up on the progress and revising the plan. University professors directly solve any problems with the head teacher of the specified subject or may resort to the principal. The principal is considered as the focal contact person in school and the professor in university, as the office is only responsible for administrative matters. The MOE instructional supervisor is not an active participant in the practicum. The roles of all those involved are clearly defined.

University preparation and support for the practicum.

The preparation for the practicum starts with the micro teaching course in year two where peer teaching takes place. There should be twenty students but in reality there may be up to thirty-five students so each one only has the opportunity to teach once or twice. Constructive criticism is given by both the instructor and peers. Videotaping is not used during the micro teaching as the university does not have the resources. There is a concurrent methodology

course called teaching methods one and two in year three and four respectively. In addition, a few other courses may include practical exercises depending on the subject and professor.

Assessment.

The final grade for the practicum is divided as follows: 60 points by internal supervisor, 20 points by school principal, and 20 points by university supervisor. The professor explained that usually the thirty points given by the internal supervisor are based on the self evaluation done by the student him/herself. Student teachers usually achieve high grades in the practicum.

Challenges.

The Faculty of Education could not offer a consecutive practicum period due to the difficulty of organizing it with the available number of schools. When the practicum office tried to send students to distant schools, the university professors supervising objected as it was difficult for them to supervise. This problem increases with secondary schools as only the first and second year students attend regularly. Another challenge is that neither the internal supervisors nor the university professors are trained in supervision or mentorship.

Faculty of Education at University 2

Structure of the practicum.

The practicum is conducted in the third and fourth year where students are placed in schools for one day every week. The official university requirement is a four hour period, but students are encouraged to stay the whole day. The Faculty of Education has approximately 200 students in year three and four. Secondary student teachers go to different schools each year while for primary and pre-school student teachers it is not necessary to do so, but in most cases they go to different schools. Student teachers go approximately twelve times per term. At the

end of the year students usually miss the last two or three weeks as they are too busy studying and feel that they have practiced enough and so ask to be excused.

The Department of Curriculum and Teaching Methods assumes responsibility for the practicum and assigns a professor from the department to organize it. The assigned professor becomes the liaison of the university for the program and he arranges the placement of student teachers in schools. Student teachers are placed in groups of eight. The principal in each school assigns students to teachers in pairs and they become their internal supervisors. Next, the professor in charge assigns student teachers to university professors for supervision. Each professor can supervise two groups at most on the same day of the week. He can supervise more groups on different days of the week. University professors should go to the school every week to supervise the student teachers, but in reality they do not go except at the beginning to introduce the students to the principal and discuss with the assigned teacher the program and areas of focus and then perhaps visit six times a year (three times each term). The teaching assistants and assistant lecturers from the Department of Curriculum and Teaching Methodology are the ones who visit the schools regularly and supervise the student teachers.

The framework of the practicum is designed by the Faculty of Education and consists of student teachers observing their internal supervisor for two weeks. They are asked to identify the positive practices of that teacher to later model. Then the pairs observe each other for an additional two weeks. Here student teachers are encouraged to evaluate their partners and provide critical feedback. Finally, they are allowed to teach independently. The supervising teachers assign them specific lessons or part of the syllabus to teach. They guide them and supervise the preparation of lesson plans. Some student teachers continue to teach in pairs, while others prefer to have a class on their own which is what most schools encourage. Student

teachers are encouraged to participate in school activities and practice all the duties of the teacher. They sometimes face problems when the MOE instructional supervisors require them to teach using traditional practices and not the innovative methods they have been taught, but they do the requirements for the sake of the MOE instructional supervisors and then follow the guidelines of the university supervisor. Generally, the schools are cooperative with the university. The contact person at the school is mainly the principal, but in some cases there is an assigned teacher as practicum coordinator. The roles of all those involved in the practicum is informally defined as there are no written guidelines.

University preparation and support for the practicum.

The preparation for the practicum starts with the micro teaching course in year two where peer teaching takes place. Videotaping is not used during the micro teaching. There is a concurrent methodology course called teaching methods one and two in year three and four respectively. There are no practical components in any other courses.

Assessment.

The grade of the practicum is divided to 80% by university supervisor and 20% by the school principal. No self evaluation or peer evaluation is taken into consideration.

Challenges.

The university does not have any consecutive practicum period at the end of each year as they do not find the time to do it. Teachers at schools are not trained to guide or mentor student teachers. University professors are not trained for supervision.

The Faculty of Education at University 3

The structure of the practicum.

The practicum is conducted in the third and fourth year where student teachers are placed in schools for one day every week and ending with a fifteen day consecutive placement in schools at the end of each year. The practicum office organizes the schedules and placements of student teachers. The office is managed by a professor from the Curriculum and Teaching Methodology Department. Student teachers are usually placed in different schools each year. They can choose a particular school for their placement, and may even form the group that will go together. Groups are composed of four to eight student teachers. Student teachers are placed in schools closest to their homes. The office is responsible for the administrative component of the practicum. University 3 is one of the largest faculties of education and the total number of students is approximately two thousand in thirty four different teaching specializations.

Student teachers are assigned to university professors from the Department of Curriculum and Teaching Methods to act as supervisors. The department is responsible for the provision of supervision during the practicum program. The total number of student teachers in each specialization is divided among the available faculty. Each professor supervises from five to twenty five student teachers depending on the specialization. If there is a shortage of university professors in some specialization, the MOE instructional supervisor takes on the responsibilities of the supervision. University supervisors should make weekly visits to the schools to supervise the student teachers, or at least every other week. The teaching assistants (TA) and assistant lecturers go regularly every week to schools to supervise the student teachers. The university professor resolves any issues that arise with the head teacher and may appeal to the principal. The university professor is the focal point of contact in the university.

The head teacher in the school assigns each student teacher to a specific teacher at school and prepares a schedule to follow. During the first encounter between the university professor and the assigned teacher, the professor outlines the areas of focus and decides on the plan which will be followed. Depending on the experience level and capabilities of the assigned school teacher the university professor may allow him/her to be totally in charge of the program and only provide occasional guidance. The program is planned so that the group of student teachers starts together and attends lessons to observe the assigned teacher then they are each allowed a quarter of an hour to teach. After that each student teacher is allocated a full lesson to teach independently, but remain responsible to the assigned teacher. The teaching assistants or assistant lecturers are always present with the assigned school teacher to observe the student teachers. Student teachers should be involved in all the tasks and activities of a teacher. There are no written manuals or guidelines, but the roles of those involved in the practicum are defined though not necessarily followed.

Schools generally lack interest and may not give student teachers any opportunity to teach. In some cases they do not allow them to teach but take substitute lessons instead. The school is the main player in shaping the practicum experience for student teachers. They either provide the students with opportunities to practice the full role of a teacher or just let them spend the required time doing trivial tasks. If students complain to their university supervisor, he/she will talk to the teacher to give them more teaching opportunity. In some cases students do not complain and in fact prefer not to go to schools. They may bring gifts to their assigned teachers to get good reports. The interviewed professor estimates that only 30% of the schools that the University cooperates with provide the required practicum experience to students. The continuous practicum at the end of the year is taken more seriously and both students and

supervisors attend regularly. University professors visit student teachers four to five times during these two weeks.

University preparation and support for the practicum.

There is a micro teaching course taken during the second year where students are video-taped teaching their peers. The class size is around 20-25 students and each student teaches once or twice a semester. The equipment may not always be sufficient for all classes so that not all students are videotaped. Students evaluate and critique each other's teaching. Depending on professors practical components may be integrated into theoretical courses.

Assessment.

The final grade is divided in equal proportion between the university supervisor, the school supervisor and the assigned TA or assistant lecturer. They all write reports regularly on the performance of the student teacher and these reports together with the lesson planning copybook are reviewed for the final report at the end of the year. The assigned teaching assistants or assistant lecturers write weekly reports. Student teachers mostly get "excellent" as a grade on the practicum and it is considered as a bonus to their remaining grades especially that most subjects are graded out of 80 points or 100 points, while the practicum is graded out of 200 points. The general premise is that if student teachers are attending then their effort should be rewarded. There are no requirements regarding self and peer evaluation.

Challenges.

No training is given to the supervising teachers in schools apart from the briefing during the first encounter. No training or workshops are conducted on supervision for university professors. The practicum experience provides students with their first encounter of the real

world and there is usually some disappointment as they are taught innovative teaching methods such as cooperative learning and then they are faced with large classrooms (70 students) where such methods cannot be applied.

Recommendations.

The professor estimates that the practicum experience with all its drawbacks provides students with 50 % of the required benefits. The practicum provides student teachers with the opportunity to be in a real classroom, deal with students, gain experience in classroom management and finally, interact with other school teachers, all of which develops and add maturity to the character of student teachers. The practicum experience could be improved by more clarity in defining roles, by encouraging students starting the first year to start their own lesson planning copybook, by better organizing the supervision process in schools, and by increasing the financial compensation given to the supervising team to ensure their commitment.

Faculty of Education at University 4

Structure of the practicum.

The practicum is conducted during the third and fourth year for a full day once a week and a consecutive week at the end of each term. Students are asked to examine the list of schools and to write the top five preferred schools they would like to practice in. The choices of students are mainly based on ease of access to the schools and on their specialization as different schools allow different specializations. Student teachers are assigned to a different school each year and may, upon their request, change the school after one semester. The total number of students in the Faculty of Education is 400-500 students and almost half of them are doing the practicum in either year three or four. Student teachers are assigned to schools in groups. Although there is a

ministerial decree that requires schools to accept practicum students, the Faculty of Education only places students in schools that voluntarily agree to take the student teachers. During the first few weeks student teachers observe teachers, and then they are given a schedule to teach individually. The number of times they are able to teach individually depends on the number of available classrooms in the school and the specialization of the student teachers. In some cases they continue throughout the program in pairs teaching every other week. Students are involved in different school activities and assemblies as they are asked to practice all the responsibilities of teachers.

The Faculty of Education professors decide on the details of the practicum including the topics covered and the material used. The schools are not involved with the preparation of the program but are only responsible for the implementation. The professors from the Curriculum and Teaching Methodology Department are responsible for the practicum. The supervising university professor has an initial meeting at the beginning of each term with the MOE instructional supervisor, as well as with the school administration to communicate the details of the program required by the Faculty of Education. An informal agreement is made detailing the roles and responsibilities of the MOE instructional supervisor and school administration during the practicum. The university professor is officially responsible for the practicum but rarely goes. According to the new regulations professors are allocated transportation allowances for visiting the schools but do not actually receive it except if they write reports detailing the problem that existed and how they were able to solve it. As a result unless there is a serious problem, university supervisors do not go and the student teachers are supervised weekly by the MOE instructional supervisors, as well as the teacher assistants and assistant lecturers of the designated specialization. There is a well defined system in the university whereby the teacher

assistants and assistant lecturers regularly report on the progress of the student teachers in schools to the supervising professors. The focal person in the university is the professor while the MOE instructional supervisor is the responsible person at the school and he is the one who receives the timetable of students.

University preparation and support for the practicum.

During the first year of their studies student teachers take a course on principles of teaching followed by a micro teaching course during the second year. There are few video cameras at the faculty and they are not used primarily due to the complex procedures for utilization permissions. The micro teaching provides students with feedback from both the faculty and their peers. There is a concurrent methodology course being taught during year three and four to help student teachers through the practicum. In rare cases professors make a personal effort and videotape student teachers during the practicum so that they can watch these videos and discuss or give feedback on them. Practical components may be integrated in theoretical courses depending on the different professors.

Assessment.

The final grade is divided into 80 points given by the MOE instructional supervisor and 20 points given by the school principal. Half the grade is given on the weekly visits, while the other half is on the consecutive week and an average is taken for the final grade. The grade is announced at the end of year. The MOE instructional supervisors are generally generous with grades and easy going. The university professor is required to sign his/her approval on the grades before they are recorded and it is then that the professor may discuss the grade of a particular student and require an explanation or proof to support it. In one instance a professor

asked students to keep portfolios that included self assessment templates, reflection as well as feedback from all their supervisors throughout year three of the practicum.

Challenges.

In general the practicum provides student teachers with the opportunity to experience the reality of schools and to actually teach students. Their primary challenge is classroom management. In addition there is no training conducted for MOE instructional supervisors, but the program is discussed in detail during the initial meeting.

Discussion of Findings from the Four Faculties of Education

The four Faculties of Education share similarities in the university preparation of students for the practicum, in the involvement of school staff in the supervision and guidance of student teachers, and in dividing the assessment between school supervisors and university supervisors. They provide students with experience in two schools and encourage them to be involved in all the activities in school and experience all the duties of a teacher. University 1 and University 4 seem to have more formally structured programs with clear guidelines set by the Faculty of Education. Both University 1 and University 2 are unable to provide their student teachers with a consecutive practicum period due to organizational issues. Table 12 tabulates the characteristics of the four Faculties of Education.

Table 12

Characteristics of the Examined Practicum Programs in the Four Faculties of Education

Characteristic	Univ.1	Univ. 2	Univ. 3	Univ. 4
Micro teaching preparation	√	√	√	√
Offers weekly practicum	√	√	√	√
Offers consecutive practicum			√	√
Concurrent “teaching methods” course	√	√	√	√
University supervision	Regular visits by Professors	A few visits by Professors	Regular visits by TA and Ass. Lecturers	Regular visits by TA and Ass. Lecturers
School supervision involves	Teachers	Teachers	Teachers	MOE Instructional Supervisors
Supervision or mentorship training	None	None	None	None
Assessment	60 Teacher 20 Principal 20 Univ Prof.	80 Univ Prof. 20 Principal	200/3 Univ Prof. 200/3 TA or Ass Lecturer 200/3 Teacher	80 MOE Inst. Sup. 20 Princp.

The following section compares and discusses the characteristics in table 12 to those presented in the programs in the literature review with respect to the duration of the programs, supervision, training of supervisors and assessment. The academic term in the Faculties of Education is approximately fifteen weeks and the duration of the practicum is usually twelve weeks, as a few weeks are wasted in organizing placements in schools in the beginning of the term and in students preparing for exams at the end of term. This means that students practice for 24 days in each of the third and fourth year. This adds to almost ten weeks total of practicum and fourteen weeks total in the case of the additional consecutive period of practicum in

University 3 and 4. The duration of the practicum in these Faculties of Education in Egypt is longer than the programs examined in China, but shorter than all the other programs as is shown previously in Chart 1. It is important to note too that all the examined programs including China have a longer consecutive practicum period which offers more opportunity of practice. In terms of supervision there seemed to be inconsistencies and some, more than others, admitted that there are shortcomings in the performance of university professors. The four Faculties lead the practicum programs and do not involve the schools in the preparation of the program, but involve them in the supervision of student teachers. However, they do not provide any training in supervision to any of those involved in the program. In all of the examined practicum programs in the literature review, universities either provided professional development opportunities for schools or involved them in the design of the program with the exception of China. The advantage of these kinds of partnerships is that they result in a greater alignment between universities and schools, in addition to yielding more commitment and involvement from schools. In examining the assessment of student teachers there is a need for more common standards similar to Singapore. Each of the four Faculties of Education assesses students on the practicum using a different structure. There seems to be a need for more clear standards and guidelines and more structured involvement of all parties.

Data Findings and Discussion of the Detailed Organization of the Practicum in Two Faculties of Education

The findings from the two additional universities that I visited and studied will follow. In this chapter, the details of the structure and organization of the practicum as explained by the Acting Director of the practicum unit of University X and the Director of the practicum unit of University Y will be presented and discussed.

University X in the North

An interview was conducted with the Acting Director of the practicum unit who has been involved in student placement in the practicum for the Faculty of Education X for 32 years.

Structure of the practicum.

According to the new bylaws since 2006 the practicum requirements are a full day every week of the term, ending with a continuous week at the end of term for both year three and year four students. The practicum unit prepares a twelve week schedule for the practicum with the twelfth week being the full week attended in school. Although the semester is fifteen weeks the practicum ends on the twelfth week to allow students to focus on their end of term exams during the remaining weeks. The first two weeks of the practicum are for observation after which student teachers receive their own schedule of classes. Whether student teachers are given classes on their own or share with other students depends completely on the school and the number of classes available. The head teacher is responsible for preparing the schedule for student teachers. The student assumes the role of the teacher on the practicum day and is involved in all activities and responsibilities. The preparation for the practicum starts with micro teaching in the second year. In addition, there are the two concurrent courses that support the

practicum; Methods of Teaching 1 and 2 that are conducted during the third and fourth year respectively.

Organization of practicum.

Students at the end of year two and year three are required to fill out a form with their personal information which includes their home address and to list the five closest schools they would like to go to. The practicum unit then divides students into groups of ten in the same specialization and places them in a neighboring school. The Acting Director said that the ideal number is six or seven, but in high density specializations she cannot maintain that number. A schedule for the different specializations is placed so that they are divided across the week from Sunday to Thursday. She tries not to place all specializations in the same school but divides them among schools so that the total number of students in each school is not too large. There are exceptions to this rule where schools are large enough to be able to cope with the different specializations. When the distribution is done the office sends a letter to the school with the list of names and another letter to the supervisors whether university professors or MOE supervisors.

Supervision.

The practicum unit assigns a supervisor of pedagogy and an academic or subject-matter supervisor. The supervisor of pedagogy is a university professor from the Curriculum and Teaching Methodology Department. Each professor from the department supervises two or three groups and due to the high number of students in specific specialization he/she may supervise students in specializations different from their own. The academic supervisor is either a university professor from the same specialization or an instructional supervisor from the Ministry of Education (MOE). It is optional for university professors to supervise as an academic supervisor. In general the academic university professors supervising the practicum are too few

for the total number of students, for example there are only four professors in Social Studies and three for Arabic. The academic university supervisor is at most given two groups of students on two different days of the week. The shortage in needed supervisors is compensated by instructional supervisors from the MOE. Currently the total number of university professors does not exceed 20 -30, whereas the MOE instructional supervisors may reach 300. The MOE instructional supervisors are chosen according to experience and those who previously had complaints filed against them are excluded. A MOE district supervisor, expert supervisor, or at a minimum a secondary instructional supervisor is assigned to secondary schools. As for preparatory instructional supervisors they are assigned to preparatory or primary schools, and primary instructional supervisors to primary schools. The office can assign someone with a higher level of experience to supervise a lower category, but not vice versa. The practicum unit always places the MOE instructional supervisors in schools in the same district they are responsible for so that they have influence over the school and can facilitate the practicum students' mission. There are 8 districts in that governorate. For the full week practicum at the end of each term students are supervised by the university professors as there are no lectures during that week and the MOE instructional supervisors cannot leave their work so they go once a week as usual.

Selection of schools.

A ministerial decree states that all schools have to cooperate with the Faculty of Education for the practicum. In reality if a school does not wish to host the practicum the faculty does not send students as the chances are they will not be cooperative and will not provide students with the needed experience. Also if there were previous complaints or the conditions of the school are unsuitable then no students are sent. The practicum unit sends students to public,

experimental and even a few private schools. The practicum unit tries its best to find new schools and therefore asks students to write down any schools close to them in order to continuously update their list of available schools. In the case that a good school is reluctant to accept students, the Acting Director finds a suitable high level supervisor from the MOE and sends a group of students under his/her supervision. She is concerned that students get the chance to experience the good schools as they can benefit from them. In her opinion the MOE instructional supervisor is generally more influential in schools than the university professor and is of more help to students.

Assessment.

The grade for the practicum is divided as follows: 40% by the supervisor of pedagogy, 40% by the academic supervisor whether university professor or MOE instructional supervisor and 20% by the principal. The supervisor of pedagogy visits his groups approximately six times a term and he/she looks at the portfolio for assessment. The MOE instructional supervisor or the academic university professor evaluates the student for subject matter. He/she looks at the preparation notebook and continuously guides them to improve. The MOE instructional supervisors are supposed to attend the student teachers' lessons and give them continuous feedback. The academic supervisors should be conducting weekly group discussion meetings after the lessons. The principal is the responsible person in school and in case of any problem he/she is addressed. He/She examines the attendance records and evaluates the students from the administrative point of view. The evaluation is based on attendance, general conduct in school, abidance by school rules and relations with school staff and students. The principal is a key determinant of a successful school administration. Students get high grades in the practicum. Usually a large number of students get excellent. Attendance is very important as the bylaws

state that if a student does not have a 75% attendance record in the practicum he/she is not allowed to attend the university exams and has to repeat the year. Students on a voluntary basis attend each others' classes and peer evaluation takes place, but it is not required in the program.

Guidelines.

The practicum unit is under the technical supervision of the Curriculum and Teaching Methodology Department. There is a guide on the website of the Faculty of Education that outlines the guidelines of the practicum for both supervisors and students. The head of the Curriculum and Teaching Methodology Department and professors have a meeting twice a year with all the MOE instructional supervisors where they explain the guidelines. This meeting also serves to update MOE instructional supervisors on teaching methods and lesson preparation requirements. The Head of the Curriculum and Teaching Methodology Department outlines the role of the MOE instructional supervisor. There is no overlap between the role of supervisor of pedagogy and MOE instructional supervisor. In the case where the supervisor of pedagogy has specific instructions for students, the MOE instructional supervisor responds to his/her directions. The Acting Director explained that in her opinion the MOE instructional supervisors are eager to follow the requirements of university as they would like to continue being asked to supervise for the financial compensation, even though it is little some still seek the release time associated with supervision.

In university both the supervisor of pedagogy and the academic university supervisor are responsible and students go to them if they face any problems. If the problem is not solved they go to the practicum unit. In schools the principal is the responsible person that the university addresses in case there are any problems. There is no contact between the university and those involved in the practicum in schools. No direct training or guidelines are given to principals or

head teachers, the university depends on the MOE instructional supervisor to convey the required information. The instructional supervisor is the link between the school and the university. In the past there used to be a three day workshop for instructional supervisors, but it is now reduced to the meeting at the beginning of every term.

Common problems facing students from the perspective of the acting director.

The most challenging problem facing students is the nature of students in schools these days as many face difficulties in dealing with the students in schools. The Acting Director mentioned that student teachers are not allowed to punish students in any way so in case of behavioral incidents they resort to the head teacher. Other complaints, mostly from female students, are requests to change schools to be with friends as they provide support to each other. The Acting Director added that there are several complaints that there is no place for student teachers to sit, nor to conduct their feedback meetings. Other complaints are from additional requirements placed on them such as student teachers being asked to take substitute lessons the whole day. If problems persist the practicum unit may ask the instructional supervisor to nominate another school in the district and transfers the students to it. She remarked that students are very worried before they start however after the first two weeks they usually feel better. In fact many students in school prefer the practicum students to teach them as they are closer to them in age and get along better with them than their regular teachers. She believes that the practicum prepares students well for teaching.

Challenges for the practicum unit.

The main challenge for the practicum unit is the distribution of students among the schools so that they get the best possible opportunity to teach and to find MOE instructional supervisors who are capable of dealing with the schools and supervising students well. The

Acting Director views the MOE instructional supervisor as a key person who can open school possibilities and let students practice well. Another problem is that in secondary schools there is only regular attendance in the first year and now hopefully in the second year as the Thanaweya Amma certificate exam will once more be only in the third secondary year, so she faces the challenge of finding enough classes with sufficient attendance for student teachers to practice. Finally, The Acting Director expressed her hope for an improvement in the educational system as a whole and the development of schools. She hopes that the class densities can be reduced from the current rate of approximately 80 students for primary, 60 for preparatory and 40 for secondary.

University Y in the South

An interview was conducted with the Director of the practicum unit and the teaching assistant responsible for the placement of undergraduate students in schools. A separate practicum unit was established two years ago before which the practicum program was managed by the Curriculum and Teaching Methodology Department.

Structure of the practicum.

The practicum is conducted during the third and fourth year for a full day once a week. The practicum starts with two weeks observation of the class teacher and then each week all student teachers prepare the lesson but an assigned student teacher delivers it in class. A different student teacher is assigned each week, so that by the end of term each student teacher will have taught twice. This means a student teaches independently four times a year, but he/she attends and prepares the lesson every week and watches his/her colleagues. In addition students have a weekly meeting after the lesson with their internal supervisor during which he/she gives feedback on the lesson taught and on the preparation for all students. So they are gaining

experience even when they are observing their colleagues. Students are officially required to spend four hours every week in school, but they always stay longer. Students are required to perform all the duties and responsibilities of the teacher from the beginning of the day till the end unless the school finishes late at 2 pm, then they are allowed to leave at 1 pm. The Director of the practicum unit estimated that the Faculty of Education has around 1500 students in the practicum between year three and four, while the post graduate diploma students this year had reached 8000 students with an increase of 2000 students over the previous year. The undergraduate students are only placed in one district which is the main city district, whereas the diploma students are placed in the town closest to where they live.

Organization.

Each year the Director of the practicum unit sends out letters to all schools to ask them if they would identify the number of supervisors they can provide and the number of groups they can accommodate for the practicum and to identify the coordinator of the practicum in the school. Some schools refuse to accept practicum students with the excuse that the financial return to supervisors is very low. Next, as soon as the end of year results come out, the ten members of the practicum unit take the lists of all students who have passed second year and third year and they divide them by specialization and gender. The students are then sorted alphabetically and divided into groups of five to eight students and placed in a school according to gender and specialization. Student teachers from the general specializations are placed in preparatory schools in year three and secondary schools in year four. As for the basic education specializations the groups for both years are placed in a primary school. Starting this year the practicum unit does not allow transfers between schools except for medical reasons, as they

discovered that students sometimes ask to move to schools to be with friends or where their parents work so as not to make an effort and get excellent grades.

Supervision.

The practicum unit assigns each group of student teachers two supervisors, a university professor (external supervisor) and an internal supervisor. The practicum unit prefers to use school staff as supervisors rather than MOE instructional supervisors as they are more likely to be present at school. Also the MOE instructional supervisor would sometimes assign his/her duties to a teacher at school as he has authority over him/her, so that the students would end up with a teacher who may not be concerned as the MOE instructional supervisor is the one receiving the financial compensation. The preference is to assign the principal as supervisor if she/he has taught the same subject, then the vice principal, head teacher, and finally an experienced teacher. The criteria goes by rank then by number of years of experience to avoid anyone complaining of injustice and that he/she were not allowed to supervise. If there are not enough supervisors in the school then the unit uses a MOE instructional supervisor. Rarely does a MOE instructional supervisor have more than one group, and if so they would be on different days. The MOE instructional supervisors are eager to supervise practicum, even though the pay is low, because they can take permission not to go to the ministry on the day of the practicum. All the professors in the Curriculum and Teaching Methodology Department participate in the practicum as university supervisors or external supervisors. The shortage in supervising professors is covered by volunteer professors from different departments. Eighty percent of the supervising professors are from the Curriculum and Teaching Methodology Department while the remaining twenty percent are from Social Foundations and Psychology Departments. The university professor is assigned 4- 10 groups. He/she gets compensation for a maximum of four

groups so it is voluntary to supervise more. He/She is officially required to attend every week (16 hrs practicum) but in reality he usually visits students every other week. The university professor is required to present a report to the practicum unit at the end of every month on the attendance of both student teachers and internal supervisors.

Selection of schools.

The Ministry of Education requires all public schools to accept student teachers, but the practicum office does not send students to a school that does not want to participate because in most cases they will not be treated well or benefit from the experience. The university at this time sends student teachers to public and experimental schools but not to private ones. The number of groups placed in each school depends on the size of the school and the total number of classes. Schools may be assigned two to six groups from different specializations. The Director believes that the schools inside the main city district are sufficient especially for Arabic, English and Mathematics specializations. Sending students in their neighboring towns would create difficulty for university supervisors and increase the costs as the university would have to pay a transportation allowance.

Assessment.

The final grade is divided as follows: forty points by the internal supervisor, forty points by the university supervisor, and twenty points by the school principal. The principal gives the grade on attendance, conduct and abiding by school rules. The university supervisor gives the grade on teaching skills and performance. The internal supervisor is the expert in subject matter and related teaching methods. The form for the grade of the internal supervisor is divided as follows: 5 points for the appearance of the student and his personality, 5 points for preparation skills, 20

points for presentation and implementation of the plan, 5 for the design and use of teaching aids, 5 points for follow-up and evaluation skills.

Guidelines.

The Director of the practicum unit has published a book on the guidelines of the practicum that he sells to diploma students and photocopies the parts on the role of the internal supervisor to all new supervisors in schools. He also gives new university supervisors the part on university supervision. He explained that both supervisors should be working together according to the defined roles, and there is no one higher than the other. There is no training for internal supervisors as they are around 400-500 supervisors and they cannot ask them to come to a workshop in university and pay for transportation when they get very little financial compensation. If students have problems they will either refer to the practicum unit or the supervising professor. The focal person in the school is the practicum coordinator or the principal.

Challenges faced by the practicum office.

The consecutive week at the end of the term cannot be organized as the schools are too few to accommodate all specializations for a while week. Student teachers complain that there is no meeting place available for feedback sessions. Student teachers also complain that the internal supervisors require them to prepare a teaching aid each week. In such cases the unit calls the supervisor and explains that they are students and have their studies to attend to. It also constitutes a financial burden on them and the unit may suggest that one student teacher from the group each week prepares a teaching aid. There may be problems between school staff. For example, if the vice principal who is a math teacher did not get a group as there were few math students he may cause problems to other teachers of different specializations who are assigned

groups. Even though the financial compensation is low, some teachers are still keen to supervise and may consider it prestigious to be selected. Also If the MOE instructional supervisor is absent, the school may not let in the student teachers that day.

Highlighting Differences in the Practicum Organization in University X and University Y

Each Faculty of Education has taken a different approach to the practicum. University X has relied to a large degree on the MOE instructional supervisors, while University Y has depended on school staff. University X distributes the placements of the students teachers in schools in all eight districts of the governorate, while University Y places its undergraduate student teachers in only one out of ten districts. University X provides independent teaching opportunities for its student teachers on a weekly basis and has organized a consecutive practicum period at the end of each term. University Y acknowledges that it can only provide four opportunities for independent teaching for its student teachers and does not provide a consecutive practicum period. While University X meets with the MOE instructional supervisors every year to present and discuss the guidelines for the practicum, University Y makes no contact with the internal supervisors.

The Charter of the practicum posted on the website of University X provides useful information for both the professors and students. For professors it outlines the details of the program and gives guidelines on evaluation. It provides templates for supervisors to use during observations. For students it explains the responsibilities and rights during the practicum and states the details of the portfolio required and evaluation criteria, as well as templates for self evaluation. The published Practicum Guide for university Y provides guidelines for all those involved in the practicum, but they tend to be idealistic and theoretical. For instance the university professor role is as follows: participates in the school selection process, discusses and

explains the syllabus to the student teachers, reads every lesson plan before the student teacher teaches it and gives him/her feedback, trains student teachers on asking questions and preparing teaching aids, regularly visits the classes to observe student teachers, and meets with the internal supervisor at the end of each practicum day to discuss the progress of student teachers. It also provides several templates for lesson and unit planning for students. In the following sections I will examine whether these differences affect the experience of students in each program.

Year Three Focus Groups Findings and Discussion

For year three students the findings from the focus group discussions will be presented in the following themes: disappointments, challenges, inability to cope, lack of interest and first good experiences.

University X in the North

Disappointments.

In two of the three focus groups student teachers complained that while the university encouraged them to include teaching aids and activities in their lesson planning, either the conditions in schools with respect to resources were insufficient or the teachers at school would not allow student teachers to use them. In the Social Studies basic education focus group the male student teachers complained that the classrooms were too small to change the seating and have group activities and that there were no data-shows in order to have visual presentations. A student in the English specialization explained that while the school she was in had a computer lab, the teacher told her “You cannot drag the children all the way to the computer lab to show them something.” Most student teachers explained how they were put down by teachers. One student mentioned that when she had prepared a group activity for the students to do the teacher told her “Get over with these stupid things and do the lesson.” Another student teacher said that the teacher told her “Finish these theoretical things of college and teach the lesson.” As the above comments show the way they were discouraged by the teachers was another disappointment. A student teacher further stated that the class teacher told her not to exert all that effort as at this rate of work she would age in six months.

Challenges.

The main challenge mentioned was classroom management. Many of the student teachers had not yet taught independently as they were in the observation phase or still had the class teacher present controlling the class and so they were wondering how they would cope on their own especially with the large class sizes. They were worried both from what they saw in the classes and from what they heard from other student teachers. The Social Studies group discussed how they were worried about having the ability to explain and confidently answer questions especially with the mindset of students today of asking many questions and even being rude to teachers.

The other challenge that was mentioned, which was particular to both the French and English specializations, was the extent to which they could use the foreign language while teaching. Particularly the English specialization in both the general and basic education complained that university professors had told them to speak only in English, but they realized that school students did not understand. In fact several student teachers remarked that students in schools laughed whenever they spoke English. A student teacher said “I still have to learn how much of the lesson can be delivered in English for students to understand and learn.”

Inability to Cope.

Several students mentioned their own inability to cope with students. One mentioned that “I wanted to apply what I learnt in university and remain calm, but I could not and I screamed at the students to keep them quiet.” Many agreed with her that it seems they would lose their voices shouting at student. There were extreme cases of inability to manage the class in the basic education group where a student teacher admitted that during the previous practicum day she was so scared of the students that she held her bag and stood close to the door throughout the entire

class. She said “They are not children, they terrified me and kept threatening me”, and she honestly looked scared. Several of the same group admitted that although they were not convinced of physical punishment and were not allowed to punish students, they had resorted to beating the children as one student teacher said “Nothing else worked, what can we do?” A male student admitted that he had forcefully done so and he said that he did not know what else to do. Another student said that they need to be given some kind of authority over the children so that they are respected.

Lack of interest.

An apparent lack of interest was seen in the French specialization group as they clearly stated that they did not like to be placed in a public school and did not see of what benefit it could be to them. They complained about the number of substitute lessons they were asked to take. They explained that they would either teach in a private school, or else work in translation, so they did not care to learn from the current experience and just wanted the time to pass. In addition, in the English specialization several students admitted that they would not teach anyway so they are just coping with the practicum for grades and to meet the requirements.

Positive experiences.

The four Social Studies female student teachers were placed in an experimental school where they had a university professor and a supervisor from the Ministry of Education both attending weekly until that point in time. They looked and sounded very optimistic as the school was good and had resources that they could use. The supervisors had attended the lesson when one of the students had taught independently and had given both individual and group feedback that was very useful. They were looking forward to the practicum for the rest of the year and saw it as an opportunity to practice what they had learnt in university. Another positive aspect

was the attitude of several students in both the English specialization and the Social Studies showing that they were happy to take substitute lessons as they realize they need a lot of experience in dealing with students and that they are willing to make extra effort to benefit and improve. They said that they benefit from the substitute lessons especially if they are allowed by the principal to explain lessons and that in general it gives them an opportunity to interact with the students and know them more.

University Y in the South

Disappointments.

A group of students from the Arabic specialization were unable to start on their practicum as the practicum unit had not sent the letter with their names to the school. They were delayed for two weeks until the letter was received and they were allowed to enter the school. The three groups complained about different aspects of university preparation. The English basic education group complained that the teaching methods they learn at university are not suitable for the large class sizes they encounter, which range from 40 to 70 students. They are asked to prepare teaching aids and activities, but are unable to use them. They are also not prepared with class management skills and techniques. The Arabic specialization had a similar problem with regards to lesson preparation as in university they were taught to prepare lessons in a different manner and as their school is accredited it follows a more modern method for lesson planning. The Biology specialization explained that syllabi have changed since they were in school and that what they took as secondary students is now being taught in the preparatory stage, and that the scientific subjects taught in their Faculty of Education are not related to the syllabus in schools.

Challenges.

Two of the three groups expressed their fear of teaching a class. A female student teacher said “I was frightened to death of standing in front of the class and I was very tense and nervous when I first taught alone last week.” A male student teacher said “I was worried and scared for my colleague when he was teaching.” Another group of students who were being supervised by the principal of the school mentioned that they were very scared of her as she is very strict and can humiliate teachers, and that it worried them tremendously.

A different challenge student teachers face is that the students at school are inattentive and uninterested. They attributed this mainly to the fact that students take private lessons and in many instances the class teachers teach the lesson the student teachers are required to teach prior to their lesson, so that the students already know the material by heart.

Inability to cope.

None of the students in the three focus groups expressed an inability to cope with the situation. They seemed to have been expecting the difficulties they met and resolved to pass through them and complete the year.

Lack of interest.

The only two students I met in the French specialization explained that they were only concerned with improving their French language acquisition in university and they did not care about any other subjects as they do not intend to work as teachers. They would be seeking any other type of work that requires knowledge of the French language.

Positive experiences.

The group of Arabic specialization students who were placed in an accredited school feel optimistic that they will learn a lot from the school especially that it follows more modern practices. They are also encouraged as they have two Arabic lessons every week and say that they will be each able to teach independently once a month which is more than their colleagues who usually teach independently twice a term. Another group from the same specialization were also looking forward to their practicum experience as they were being supervised by the assistant principal of the school who was very cooperative, encouraging and was already giving them beneficial feedback.

In all three groups students said they were willing to take on substitute lessons to get additional experience dealing with students. In the Biology specialization the only male student expressed his desire to continue graduate studies as he would like to be appointed in university. He said he wants to improve his teaching skills and sees the practicum as an opportunity to teach and gain confidence in dealing with students.

Discussion and Recommendations

By closely examining the findings whether relating to disappointments, challenges or inability to cope I find that the common factor involved is the absence of university preparation. There are two aspects of university lack of preparedness that are apparent in all complaints: first, is clearly students are not prepared and taught all the skills needed for teaching and second, there is an apparent gap between what is taught in universities and what can be applied in schools. In other words student teachers are taught different teaching methods such as cooperative learning and integration of visual displays, but they cannot apply what they have learnt in schools whether due to the limitations of space, resources or time. In addition they may not be sufficiently

prepared in subject matter requirements, lesson planning and classroom management techniques. Universities need to be aware of the conditions in schools and prepare students for the challenges they are going to face and find creative ways to overcome them, rather than focusing only on best practices that are too idealistic to apply. It was worrisome for me to hear from the focus group in University X that had resorted to physical punishment that the solution in their view was that they needed more authority over the children. I wondered if at the current stage of emotional disturbance they were passing through if it was wise to give them any authority and if they would not be likely to abuse it. I understand that they are just giving in to the current school culture, but to what extent does one do so? Where is the line drawn between principles and beliefs and cultural pressure? I think that the university has a transformative role to play and should be very clear on the acceptable pedagogical practices and should provide students with a variety of appropriate measures in dealing with challenging situations in schools.

There also seems to be a need to clarify the roles of the different participants in the practicum and provide training for these roles. Principals, teachers and Ministry of Education supervisors should be trained for their specific roles to provide support and guidance to the student teachers. In addition, for those who feel lack of interest, the administration of the practicum should carefully consider the needs of the different specializations. In the case of the French specialization almost all the students are language school graduates and if they intend to pursue a teaching career they would aim to work in private schools so at least part of their practicum should be in such schools to motivate them to learn. Maybe then they would attempt to transfer the teaching practices they learn in the private schools to the public schools. Currently they look down on the school and have no motivation to learn from the experience.

As for positive experiences it should be the aim of each Faculty of Education to have such practices standardized and not rare individual examples of good practices. In the case of the Social Studies specialization in University X, I was invited to attend part of their teaching methods course before conducting the focus group. The lecturer was explaining to them the five steps of conducting a lesson which were: introduction, presentation, making connections, conclusion and application. She was really efficient and gave them plenty of practical examples for Social Studies and the students were attentive and interactive. There were only twelve students and the teaching assistant was attending too. The students were taking notes and asking questions, and I particularly noticed two girls as they had very neat notes and later joined the focus group. These two girls are among the four who were placed in an experimental school and they were well dressed and obviously from a higher socio-economic group. I recalled then that the Acting Head of the practicum unit had explained that students were placed in schools near their homes and wondered if it was a variable affecting the quality of the school you are placed in.

It is important to note here that most of the students as mentioned want to acquire experience and improve their skills by taking substitute lessons. Most of the year three students in both universities have not had time to internalize the challenges and problems faced and to reflect on them. They can see that the situation in school is nowhere close to the ideals they studied, but have not yet decided how to deal with the situation. They have not decided on their coping strategies. The few who had good first experiences were optimistic and did not want to think of any problems. It was only in the Biology specialization in University Y that it was apparent they were not shocked and seemingly ready for the battle ahead. It was something that had to be done. Finally, the Year three students had only had three to four weeks of practicum

experience at the time this study was conducted and so I will examine in the following section the experience of the year four students and discuss the issues that arise in more detail.

Year Four Focus Groups Findings and Discussion

For year four students the findings from the focus group discussions will be presented in the following themes: supervision, relations with school staff, relations with students, university preparation, assessment, administration, peer support, main benefits, and students' recommendations.

University X in the North

Supervision.

The majority of student teachers who participated in the year four focus groups had MOE instructional supervisors as academic supervisors. I will first present the findings regarding the MOE instructional supervisors. Most of the MOE instructional supervisors meet with the student teachers in schools every week, but they differ in terms of what they do. All the student teachers reported that supervisors go through the lesson plan copybook, give feedback, tell them what to prepare the following time and sign. The MOE instructional supervisors in most cases had group meetings with student teachers when they visited the schools. During these group meetings they gave them advice regarding any problems they faced and gave feedback on any lessons they had attended outlining best practices and others that should be avoided. Approximately half the student teachers said that their supervisors have attended a complete lesson once a term, while the remaining student teachers have complained that either their supervisors only attended five or ten minutes or never attended any of their lessons. Those who do not attend students' lessons usually give the excuse that they prefer to leave student teachers on their own so as not to make them nervous.

There were complaints that in some cases the knowledge of the MOE instructional supervisor was old fashioned and especially in the English specialization supervisors usually

wanted the student teachers to follow the teachers' guide to the word and did not encourage creativity. A student teacher said "I was reading the novel and discussing it with students in class and they were attentive and enjoying it. When the MOE instructional supervisor entered he told me: what are you doing, you should only be doing the activity book for the novel. I asked him to step aside to talk as the students were listening, but he was not convinced and I had to stop. Now the students each week ask me to read the novel and I do not know what to say." Another English specialization student teacher said that her instructional supervisor told her "Do not speak English all the time, speak more Arabic in class." A few student teachers mentioned that the MOE instructional supervisors require a different format for lesson planning. Other students admitted how helpful and friendly their MOE instructional supervisors were and that they could take their advice on both teaching and general life matters. A student teacher from the mathematics specialization admitted how her MOE instructional supervisor gave her valuable advice on how to deal with a student she had in class who suffered from depression as she had recently lost a sister. A few student teachers stated how their supervisors made them work hard and improve their lesson planning skills. A group of student teachers explained how their current MOE instructional supervisor lets them teach a group lesson in addition to their weekly lesson where each time a different student teaches and the other evaluate her and they have a meeting afterwards for discussion.

Secondly I will present the experience of the few student teachers who had a university professor as an academic supervisor. Half of the student teachers only saw their academic university supervisor three times per term. A Chemistry specialization student said "When the professor visits us in school his main concern is to sign the lesson planning copybook and maybe attend five minutes of a lesson." As a group of Mathematics student teachers explained that

when the academic university professor came he would conduct group meetings, ask if they had any problems, and then he would attend one lesson so he did not see all of them teaching throughout the year. There were two exceptions: one was in the French specialization where students regularly met their academic professor supervisor and appreciated that she was more knowledgeable than any of the MOE instructional supervisors that other groups had. They added that she also attended lessons for all of the students more than once per term. The other exception was in the case of the Biology taught in English specialization where there are very few student teachers and they are all placed in one of the few private schools that the practicum unit deals with. This school in particular seems to be the showcase of the Faculty of Education as during my visit it was mentioned to me with pride as a good school for practice on two occasions by different professors, as well as by the Acting Director of the practicum unit. The background on the school is that it is a private school funded by a wealthy businessman and the practicum unit managed to send a few groups of students there for practice. The academic professor supervisor goes regularly every week and attends the students' lessons and has meetings with them. The student teachers admitted that they were being well guided and that they were able to practice well and apply all that they are learning as they have all the needed resources.

Thirdly I will present the findings for the supervisor of pedagogy. Almost half of the students in the focus groups either never saw him/her throughout the year or never had a supervisor of pedagogy assigned to their school. The other students stated that the supervisors of pedagogy visited the schools once every term or at most three times a year. There were two groups of student teachers who said that they used to go to the supervisor of pedagogy in university to ask him for guidance when they faced problems as he did not visit them. There

were four exceptions. One of them was the professor assigned to the above mentioned private school to supervise the Biology taught in English specialization who went every week and attended classes. Another exception was in two groups from the French specialization where the two supervisors of pedagogy came regularly every week and missed very few times. One of the supervisors was a professor I met as she was about to teach the students after the focus group and she seemed very dedicated and was asking the students to get in touch with those who had not yet arrived so that they are not late for class. The other supervisor was a young assistant lecturer whom they described as very active and liked a lot.

The fourth exception was a lecturer whom I was advised to interview by the contact person in University X as one of the supervisors of the practicum. When I met this professor I was impressed by the detailed description of the program he prepares for the student teachers he supervises. I was even more impressed when in one of the focus groups I found two students telling me about the wonderful supervisor of pedagogy they had, and giving the same detailed description I was previously told. They explained how lucky they were and how much they learnt. In the end I asked them the name of the professor and as expected I found out it was the same one I had interviewed. The following is this professor's explanation of how he supervises the student teachers:

1. **School Routine:** Students have to experience the school routine. He asks them to spend the first two weeks observing teachers and going around the school. Generally he encourages them to participate in any activity or volunteer to do a task.
2. **Lesson Preparation:** during the observations he asks them to make a map of the class they are going to teach with all the students recorded in it, and any outstanding characteristics they have noticed or heard about. He then asks them to teach in pairs first to gain confidence. He conducts a discussion session each week where students are asked to reflect and evaluate their performance, and both their peers and himself outline the positive aspects of their teaching and they are encouraged to continue developing them. He then presents the negative aspects that he saw collectively so as not to make anyone feel uncomfortable. He opens the discussion on how to solve these identified problems to

reach a suggested plan. In some cases he may give individual feedback, if the problem is personal and he gave the example of a very tense teacher whom he gave breathing exercises to make her relax and guided her on how to maintain focus and eye contact in class. Students would then teach independently and other students would be encouraged to attend as observers, and the feedback sessions would continue.

3. **Group Activities:** He encourages group work and collaboration so he asks the group as a whole to organize an event or activity in school. Examples are to organize a debate, a lecture, a competition, a broadcasting event, or to make jointly an activity.
4. **Group Portfolio:** It includes the best three lesson plans for each student, a group report on their group work and activities, reflections for each member, readings on teaching methods and other issues they see related (collected by the group), concepts researched (variety of concepts example: democracy, globalization, secular, communist, liberal) and finally an evaluation of the practicum program.

The professor also mentioned that it is not necessary to observe the actual classes every time as his program trains and develops student teachers skills. He explained that he encourages student teachers to interact with students and this is why he asks them to prepare concepts and discuss them with students to increase their awareness and general knowledge. The two student teachers described the experience above and added that he only attended their lessons once a term but that they felt they had learnt and benefitted so much.

These were examples of the problems and best practices that students face in the supervision of the practicum. The problems faced in one area of supervision are in some cases augmented when they coincide with other problems. An example is when a group of student teachers have a MOE instructional supervisor or an academic professor supervisor who rarely goes and the supervisor of pedagogy does not show up so they have no guidance, which was unfortunately the case of some groups. The general complaint was that supervisors in general did not observe many times and rarely in the beginning and so do not see the improvement or progress. In the cases that a supervisor does not attend the full lesson then he/she does not see the different steps (opening, class management, presentation, closure and application), and thus

may not realize areas of weakness that need guidance. In addition when supervisors give advice they never follow up or see if it is being properly done.

In the interview with the high-ranking MOE supervisor she confirmed that student teachers were not sufficiently prepared for the practicum both in terms of subject content and pedagogical practices. She added that the MOE instructional supervisors through their authority in schools are able to provide student teachers with regular classes. She explained that student teachers are taught different ways for lesson planning than what is applied in schools. She said that they have tried to coordinate with the Faculty of Education on certain guidelines for lesson planning, but the Faculty wanted to proceed its own way. She also mentioned that in some cases the supervisor of pedagogy feels superior to the MOE instructional supervisor and likes to find fault with his/her supervision, while he rarely attends. Finally she said that there needs to be more clarification about the role of each supervisor.

Relations with school staff.

In many cases student teachers said that the principal of the school they were placed in welcomed them. Some have expressed their fear of a strict principal while others have appreciated the strictness as it was reflected in better organization in the school and better pupil conduct. They have realized how the principal was the main determinant of the school culture. There were a few instances where student teachers reported that the principal did not welcome them. In one of the cases it was because the practicum unit had not sent the letter with the names of the students so the principal sent them away. Several student teachers from the French specialization complained of both the principal and teachers criticizing their dress. I noticed that two of these student teachers were very pretty and it was apparent to me that they were from a higher socio-economic level and dressed in modern fashion which was probably provocative to

the school staff. In two other instances in the English and Mathematics specializations student teachers had also complained that the principal was not welcoming as the school was a good school and concerned about achieving good results. Both schools saw that practicum students waste time and they did not want to accept them, so they gave them a hard time. One of the student teachers complained that the teacher before her would not go out of the class and would take over a large part or even all her lesson. The other complained that the school would not allow her group meeting space and ordered them around. One of the schools had previously not allowed practicum students and the other sent a letter that term saying that it did not suit its schedules. Finally the principal of the private school was very strict and insisted on very high standards. She would make sure the student teachers were doing everything right and behaving appropriately with the students.

Most teachers welcome the student teachers when it comes to taking their lessons, as they allow them some time off during the practicum day, but of course some are more helpful and supportive than others. Mostly all student teachers take substitute lessons even when the teachers are present but do not feel like taking classes. Most of the student teachers regard substitute lessons as extra practice in dealing with school students and some of them try to teach in these lessons or at least explain anything the students need in their subject of specialization. In the case of the Mathematics basic education group who only had a professor coming twice a term to supervise them, they explained that they sought advice from the class teacher and that she was very supportive and helpful. The student teachers admit that during the past year they benefitted most from the class teacher. Another group of student teachers said that the class teacher would not bother to answer any of their questions, but would tell them to look at her lesson plans instead, which was not always helpful.

Several student teachers complained that teachers would not take them seriously or wanted them to follow the same methodology they do. Student teachers explained that in many instances teachers repeat the lessons they teach or may teach it even in advance. A student teacher said that the teacher did not allow her to give homework and would say addressing the pupils “Children, Ms. D is not to assign you homework.” All the student teachers in the English specialization said that teachers are mostly concerned about finishing the syllabus and they tell them “Just finish the lesson it is not important that children understand.” The teachers also want them to write lists of words on the blackboard for students to copy and are not concerned if they understand or know how to use them. The teachers told them not to play games or role play they say “do not waste time, just finish the lesson”.

A major complaint from the Mathematics and Chemistry specializations was that teachers do not want them to make any effort as they were afraid that school students might find that they understand better from them and may ask to take private lessons with them. This problem is even apparent in the private school where student teachers say that teachers treat them badly especially when they find students liking and appreciating their lessons. Student teachers said that the private lessons in this school are very well paid, so teachers are afraid that they compete with them. Another student teacher from the mathematics specialization said “The class teacher scolds me in front of the class and yesterday she forcefully pulled me back by the arm, and it was all because I had knocked on the door when the bell rang to start my class and she did not want to be interrupted in order to prolong her own class.” The student teacher had gone to her university supervisor to talk to the teacher and she said she was scared of her, “There has to be rules about how teachers treat us.”

Other student teachers have also complained that either teachers “use them” by making excessive demands or put them down. Several student teachers mentioned that when teachers are behind schedule they ask student teachers to cover more material in their lesson to catch up, which is impossible. A few student teachers complained that when they make an activity for the children teachers in many cases keep it to show as part of their work with the class. Student teachers in many instances reported that teachers would try to decrease their enthusiasm. An example was, when they would tell them that once they start to work as teachers they will not be able to take interest in students or have time to talk or explain to them during recess time as they do now. A teacher said “When you become a teacher you will not want to see students outside class.” In short teachers would tell them that they will not enjoy teaching when they are teachers. Student teachers in many instances and in different focus groups have stated that they do not want to be like the teachers they see today. They want to do things right, be closer to students, guide them in their choices, and to become agents of change.

Relations with students.

Before the practicum starts the biggest fear of student teachers is dealing with students, and most agreed that the main benefit of the practicum is the experience gained in dealing with students. The fear of being unable to manage a class, of students nowadays having access to all kinds of information and asking difficult questions, taking private lessons, of students unmotivated or not eager to learn, and of the close age gap in the case of preparatory and secondary students, are examples of issues student teachers face. Student teachers have had to prepare their lessons thoroughly and in some cases seek outside sources to be ready for their students. Most students say that they realized that class teachers themselves may not be respected by students or able to gain control. A student said “Students exceed the limits with the

class teacher, it's normal, not only with us.” They realized that many students are disobedient, disrespectful and not motivated to learn. In many instances practicum student teachers have lost their voices screaming to keep students quiet or they have just gotten used to the noise levels in class and managed to continue teaching. Only one group of student teachers that taught in a primary school admitted that they beat the students and said that the students do not care, in fact they ask to be beaten again as it did not hurt. Most of the groups in preparatory and secondary schools said that in cases of disobedience they give students a verbal reprimand, and if it does not work they resort to head teachers. They stated that especially girls do not like to be humiliated in front of their colleagues.

Some student teachers found the close age difference an advantage in understanding students and having a closer relationship. The French specialization said that they heard from the current year three practicum students placed in the same school that the school students are asking about them. Other practicum students were made uncomfortable by the personal questions of school students regarding their dress, veil or personal status. A few practicum students were intimidated by school students who told them they were too short and young to teach them. One student teacher said “A group of students asked me how old I was and I replied 20 years old so one of them said and I am 17 so who said you could teach me?” Another group explained how in the event of one of the school students getting engaged she would keep waving her hand with the ring in the air to mock them.

Student teachers realized some of the challenges they will face as teachers. The Arabic specialization practicum student teachers had children in the fifth grade who could not read and write. The Mathematics specialization student teachers had to start with the explanation of basic mathematical concepts for students to be able to understand the syllabus. The French

specialization practicum student teachers spend full lessons working on pronunciation with preparatory and secondary students. The Arabic specialization student teachers were placed in a school in a poor area that had two shifts per day and so did not have a scheduled time for break. The school students were allowed to eat the last ten minutes every double lesson and street vendors would go into the classes and sell their goods in the middle of the lesson.

University preparation.

I will first present the findings with respect to subject matter preparation. Student teachers from both the French and English specializations said that the university courses increase their language acquisition skills and that they become more proficient. In addition, the English specialization student teachers stated that in many cases they enjoy and relate to the novels they are assigned, and they gave the example of “The Prime of Miss Brodie”. Both the Chemistry and general Mathematics specialization student teachers explained that the university courses increase their knowledge, but that they are recent Thanaweya Amma graduates and thus familiar with the subject matter being taught in Preparatory and secondary schools and have studied it well for their own exams. On the other hand, the Mathematics basic education specialization student teachers complained that the Mathematics university curriculum contains advanced topics that they will never teach in school as they teach the primary stage, while instead they could have taken the topics they teach in more depth. The Arabic basic education student teachers complained as well that they do not get enough grammar preparation which they need as primary teachers while they get many poetry courses from the old to the contemporary which relate very little to the syllabus.

Second, in terms of pedagogical courses they generally complained that the university did not give them enough preparation. The Chemistry and Mathematics specializations stated that

whereas they know the subject matter they need to know different methods to teach it. One of the focus groups asked to have a course to provide support to students during the practicum. As they later had the “teaching methods 2” course, I asked if that was not the purpose of that course and they said that they need advice on the problems they faced in reality not theoretical methods they cannot apply. A student teacher from another focus group also said that the methodology courses were too theoretical and did not contain applied components and he added that sometimes the professor would just cover some issues briefly and end the lecture. Most student teachers agree that in the methodology courses they just learn everything by heart to pass the exam. In addition many of the methods they learn cannot be applied due to the current condition of schools. In fact, “The professors themselves do not practice what they preach,” and the students gave the example of how professors tell them they have to know students by name and interact with them, encourage discussion while they do not do any of this. Only one student teacher who had been assigned to a class of twenty five students in school admitted that she was able to practice some of the teaching methods she had been taught in university.

Another complaint from several focus groups was regarding the educational psychology courses. They stated that they were too theoretical and lacked applied parts. Also that the courses gave them detailed knowledge of complicated psychological illnesses, e.g., nervous breakdown, while there was no practical discussion of the problems they face on a daily basis, hence they do not know how to deal with primary children or issues such as shy children. Moreover both basic education specializations stated that they were not prepared for inclusion in their primary classes. They had no idea how to include the disabled and the other students kept warning them that if they ask them anything they will roll on the floor or scream. Student

teachers felt that they needed more practical knowledge related to the problems that actually confront them.

Assessment.

All the student teachers agreed that attendance was the most important factor in their assessment, followed by the lesson planning copybooks and the portfolio. They all prepared the lesson planning copybooks for their supervisors to sign and in many cases give them feedback and guidance. They all prepared the portfolios throughout the year with the exception of two student teachers who had not been told how by their supervisors until the last week of the year, and so had to prepare whatever they could manage. These two student teachers had been mostly left to the class teacher throughout the year and she reported her evaluation of them to the principal, MOE instructional supervisor and supervisor of pedagogy. Some of the student teachers who did not have a supervisor of pedagogy had an oral exam consisting of a couple of questions for that part of the grade. In some cases where the assigned professor of pedagogy did not regularly attend, he/she would look at the portfolios and/or ask the MOE instructional supervisor. A group of student teachers, who had not had a single visit from their supervisor of pedagogy, said that he only looked at two portfolios as a sample of the work of students and just asked the MOE instructional supervisor. Another group said that no one looked at their portfolios. Many student teachers complained that they were required by their MOE instructional supervisors to prepare a teaching aid every week, which in most cases they could not use and would just put in their portfolio. The student teachers said that they spent a large portion of their time preparing things that looked good to add to the portfolio to make it large and impressive, but not necessarily applicable. A student teacher said “Portfolios are a waste of

time.” They could have instead dedicated their time and effort to more beneficial preparation for students.

Administration.

The administration of the practicum in Faculty of Education X has obviously made an effort in the placement of student teachers in school and the division of specializations as almost all the students had a class to teach independently every week. A few student teachers had even two classes to teach every week. The exceptions included student teachers from specializations that have fewer lessons in the school’s weekly schedule, such as in the case of History where students in secondary were assigned in twos and threes to the same class, and French where a group of student teachers had no classes to teach as there were only two French lessons in the whole school. In addition two student teachers complained that the list of names had not arrived at the school but that it was sent the following week.

Peer support.

All the student teachers attended each other’s lessons when they were free and they provided peer support and coaching to each other. The less they had guidance and were left on their own the more they helped one another. Many admitted that they depend on this informal peer evaluation and advice. One student said that “I asked my colleague to come and evaluate my performance before the MOE instructional supervisor attends my class.” Another student teacher said that she learnt the most from peer discussions and sharing of experiences. Others said that they had learnt from the positive practices of their peers and avoided the mistakes others made. One group specifically who had little supervision admitted that they had become closer to each other and had formed their own channels of help. They all agreed that peer support was a

major factor in their experience. This was also apparent to me as I watched the interaction between the students particularly those who were placed in the same school.

Main benefits.

The main benefit was the experience gained in interacting with students and especially in dealing with different kinds of students. Student teachers have learnt how to explain the subject they taught in a variety of ways. They also found out to what extent they can apply what they have learnt in the theoretical courses. They have also become more familiar with the school curriculum. They have become more confident in conducting classes and gained experience in classroom management. Many student teachers have described how they do their best to explain to students and are very happy when students appreciate that. Most importantly they have experienced the school culture and realized the reality they will face as teachers.

Recommendations by students.

Many student teachers feel that the university studies, school requirements, student needs, MOE instructional supervisors requirements are all different circles that are not interrelated. They are learning things in universities that schools will not allow them to apply, and student teachers get different instructions from the MOE instructional supervisors, and believe that the students need more than what they are getting. All student teachers stated that one lesson per week is too little for them to practice. Many student teachers said that the lesson was too short and schools should change the schedule and make it longer as they can never finish on time. All students complained that the full week at the end of the term is not beneficial as many school students are absent studying for exams and some suggested it should be done in the middle of the term. A few suggested spending a summer in school but realized that the school calendar would have to be changed. Others suggested starting the practicum from the second year. Some

realized that they need better supervision as well, not just a longer period of time. They need to be guided, given feedback with a close follow-up on progress. The French specialization stated that the practicum would be more useful in private schools.

Other suggestions tackled different aspects of the education system. Many student teachers stressed the importance of an effective leadership of the school and that teachers should be role models. A few mentioned how school principals and teachers should treat them well. Some student teachers suggested they should have more authority and be allowed to put part of the grade on the year's work. One of the focus groups suggested that the current examination system has to change so that students do not just learn for the exam and teachers can teach properly. Several groups thought that the curricula needed to be modified to relate more to student's life and allow for more innovative teaching methods. The Arabic specialization complained that the current curriculum introduces advanced concepts in grammar before students have mastered reading and writing, but they said that the new Year One curriculum introduced this year is very good and inspires hope.

University Y in the South

Supervision and relations with school staff.

I will first present the findings with regard to supervision. All the student teachers who participated in the year four focus groups had been supervised the year before by school staff including principals, vice principals, head teachers and teachers. None of them were supervised by MOE instructional supervisors in year three. Five of the student teachers who attended the focus groups were among two groups assigned to two MOE instructional supervisors. All five student teachers stated that the MOE instructional supervisors attended regularly so far and had feedback group meetings after the lessons. One of the groups particularly said that their MOE

instructional supervisor taught them how to prepare lessons as they had not been taught the previous year. As for university professors none of the students who participated in the year four focus groups had had a single visit throughout the past year by any of the university supervisors. This year, two groups of students reported that a university professor had visited them in school, attended lessons and had given them feedback. The remaining groups knew about these visits and were worried about the comments of the professors when they would visit them.

In the following section I will present the findings on the school staff as supervisors and their relations with student teachers as they were the only supervisors identified by the student teachers who participated in the year four focus groups. More than half the student teachers were supervised by head teachers and teachers, while the remaining students were supervised by principals and vice principals. Whatever the rank of the supervisor, student teachers had an equal chance of getting a good supervisor, in other words half the supervisors whether teachers, principals or others provided good guidance and regularly attended the lessons. The other half would leave the student teachers on their own and at the most, attend five or ten minutes of a lesson. The good supervisors went through the lesson planning copybooks and commented on all details, gave advice on how to teach different parts of the syllabus and generally encouraged the student teachers. A few student teachers admitted that their supervising teachers were excellent in explaining lessons and managing the class. The only additional advantage of having a good principal supervisor is that it ensured the teachers in the school were all cooperative and helpful to the student teachers.

There was a variety of supervisors. Many were traditional and required student teachers to follow the “teacher’s guide” and only lecture to students. They would not allow the student teachers to apply any of the methods they learnt in university. In fact one of the teacher

supervisors required her student teachers to photocopy her lesson plans and to follow them instead of making their own. A student teacher complained that the principal of the school was inflexible and would not allow non-traditional practices; she said “I wanted to give the Mathematics lesson in the playground as I wanted students to move and change settings to increase their concentration, but the principal refused.” Another student teacher had prepared with great effort a power point presentation to explain a geometry lesson. She believed that drawing the shapes in class on the board wastes time, but the teacher absolutely refused to let her use the data show as she was afraid of computer viruses for which she would be responsible. The student teacher said “They made me hate teaching that day, I regretted the effort I spent to prepare the presentation.” So even when schools have the resources they may not let students use them. Other supervisors would require student teachers to prepare a teaching aid for every lesson they prepare even if they were not actually assigned to teach that lesson. However, student teachers commented that the actual teachers do not prepare teaching aids every lesson and that they do not use them due to time constraints.

Some teacher supervisors would not take the student teachers seriously and might put them in awkward situations. Many student teachers stated that teachers explain the lesson assigned the previous day or the following lesson. A group of student teachers said “Last year our supervising teacher never attended the lessons. This year she regularly attends but she keeps interrupting us all the time. For example to ask the children to bring out the homework, or suddenly comment on something one said, and we have to start the lesson all over again and attract the attention of students. Honestly we cannot decide which supervising teacher we prefer.” Another group of student teachers from the English specialization were placed this year in an experimental school under the supervision of the head teacher, but they were not allowed to

teach any lesson. The supervisor told them to prepare the lessons and imagine they are teaching them. The school did not even want the student teachers to interact with students for fear they may say something inappropriate. The students in that school also looked down on them as they were supposed to teach basic English classes whereas the students also took advanced English classes. The student teachers had just learnt that that school had officially apologized from continuing to receive practicum students, as the return both financially and in terms of benefit was too low. A student teacher also mentioned that she currently faces a problem as she had scolded a boy in her class who turned out to be the son of one of the teachers in school, so the teacher scolded her and told her not to enter the class again except after she apologizes to her son. She refused to apologize and did not know what to do or who to refer to.

Many student teachers took substitute lessons willingly even when the original teachers were present but just needed a break. They explained that it was the principal of the school that decided on the protocol for the substitute lessons whether the student teacher explained and conducted a normal lesson or just kept the students quiet. In both cases, student teachers viewed substitute lessons as additional practice in dealing with students. Most student teachers viewed the principal as the main determinant of quality in the school. Student teachers in some cases do not approve of the practices of their supervisors as in one case students were using their mobile phones in class and the sound of texting and talking was heard, but the teacher said “Mobile phones are the property of students and they are free to do whatever they like with them.” In a few other cases student teachers complain that teachers project their own frustration on their class and publicly humiliate students and keep telling them “You should not continue secondary school as you are not fit to do so.”

Two groups of students placed in accredited schools were having a good experience this year. The first group, from the Geography specialization, explained that their supervising teacher was outstanding. He was young and eager to research and use modern teaching techniques. He would allow them to apply anything new they learnt in university and asked them to continuously be creative and research for different activities. He made his own lesson planning template and shared it with them. He also continuously urges them to increase their subject matter knowledge and investigate ways to relate it to their students' lives. The student teachers also mentioned that the principal of that school is very encouraging and supportive of change. The second group was from the Mathematics specialization, and was placed under the supervision of the head teacher in a class of high achieving students. They explained that the class has twenty five students and that both the head teacher and the class teacher attend their lessons. One of the student teachers had taught the previous week and said that although she was nervous she was happy as she was given very beneficial feedback from both teachers. The supervisor held a group meeting with them after each lesson and gave them very useful feedback and guidance, and also followed up on their progress. In short the student teachers looked forward to having a good year.

In the interview with the expert teacher and teacher from schools in the governorate of university Y they both said that student teachers are sent to schools with no supervision from the university and the teachers try their best to train them. The problem, one of them mentioned, is that teachers are not trained for supervision and that sometimes with years of experience in our system of education teachers pick up bad habits, which then get transferred to the student teachers. The other teacher added that the student teachers are mostly motivated and eager to learn, but unfortunately there is no structure for their guidance and supervision.

Relation with students.

All student teachers admitted that their greatest fear was facing students in classrooms and whether they would be able to explain, answer questions and manage the class. They agreed that teachers were no longer respected and many of them saw that attention should first be given to teaching students how to behave. Some of the student teachers faced more challenging school conditions than others. One of the groups was placed in a school located in a popular district and the student teachers explained how they had to waste time every lesson to find seating for the students as many chairs were broken. In the same school, teachers walked around with sticks and beat the children all the time. In fact, as a student teacher said “The students welcomed us every week as if we were tourists. They were relatively obedient with us and we only had to threaten to send them to a teacher.” Another group of student teachers were placed in a school with very small classrooms to the extent that some of the students had to stay outside class as they could not fit in. Most student teachers have been able to overcome behavioral problems by threatening students to send them to teachers they fear, but a few admitted punishing students by making them stand outside the class in the sun. Many student teachers said they had formed friendly relations with students, as the latter regard them as more humane, understanding and patient than their own teachers.

One of the main complaints was that students take private lessons starting first primary and so lose interest in the lessons at school. Another complaint from the English and English basic education specializations was that students did not understand English and so student teachers had to get used to explaining in Arabic as well. In addition some student teachers complained that students are not sufficiently prepared in the primary years for the level of subjects taught in the secondary years. Many of them attributed this weakness to the fact that

graduates from different faculties such as commerce, law and engineering are appointed to teach after just taking the one-year educational diploma. In their view this resulted in increasing the number of unqualified teachers.

University preparation.

All student teachers said that they would like schools and university to be interrelated. Student teachers felt that there should be a link between what they learn in university and what they are expected to do in schools. Several of the supervisors in the practicum tell them to set aside what they have learnt in university. Many student teachers stated that even the structure of the lesson plan required in school is different from what they have been taught. With respect to subject matter preparation some specializations found the university courses beneficial, while others found a very small number of courses useful. The Biology and Geology specialization said that the scientific subjects have increased their understanding of the school syllabus and one student added that “They made us understand what we took in school.” Both the English and English basic education specializations agreed that only the phonetics courses were useful, as for the poetry, criticism, and discourse analysis they only memorize for the exam and do not even read the novel assigned but just study the themes. The Geography specialization explained that this year at school they were required to teach economics and they had neither taken it when they were in secondary nor were prepared for it in university. They also find the new syllabi in school difficult and they feel that they need to enhance their knowledge both in terms of subject matter and general knowledge. The Mathematics basic education specialization complained that the Mathematics courses exceeded the requirements of the preparatory stage and that they also take subjects such as Physics and Chemistry with applied components that may be of little use. The Mathematics specialization student teachers stated that the university courses consist of just

learning everything by heart and pouring it out in the exam paper to the extent that they even memorize Mathematics problems as they are so complicated. They added that the school syllabus has become very complicated too, so one of the student teachers said “When I graduate I will get all the external books to solve and study well to be able to teach.”

As for pedagogical preparation many student teachers stated that the micro teaching course in the second year was very useful in giving them a chance to teach in front of their colleagues. The Geography specialization especially explained that they benefitted very much, as being few in number they each got to teach three times. However, all student teachers agreed that the pedagogical courses are too theoretical and have very little applied components. The Mathematics basic education admitted that the most beneficial course was the practical component of the teaching methodology course, but also said that they learn methods of teaching that they cannot apply as schools lack resources. The mathematics and the biology and geology specializations complained that they are frequently asked to prepare power-point presentations, whereas most schools lack the resources for data show. The Biology and Geology specialization added that they could not even conduct experiments in schools as laboratories do not even have running water. Student teachers also complained that the courses do not address the problems they face in schools. For example they are not prepared to deal with secondary students. They added that in most courses they are required to learn by heart for the examination, so they do not retain or relate to what they are learning, and that professors are mostly concerned about “quantity and not quality”. They complained that they do not understand how to apply the things they are learning. The Mathematics specialization added that they need to practice teaching the different concepts and not only listen to professors lecturing. In addition most student teachers stated that the professors do not apply what they teach as they do not interact with students or

encourage discussions, sometimes not even saying good morning. The educational psychology courses are also too theoretical and do not explain how to deal with the problems they face in school. One of the groups suggested that they have case studies and role play in the psychology courses.

Assessment.

All the student teachers of fourth year who participated in the focus groups had gotten a grade of “Excellent” in the practicum for the previous year with the exception of five student teachers who got “Very Good”. They explained that they all get a grade of ”Excellent”, with very few grades of “Very Good” and that the grade depends mainly on the lesson planning copybook and on attendance. When one of the student teachers asked how the university professor had given him a grade when he had not visited once the school, the practicum unit explained that the grade of the head teacher supervisor was inflated. The stories of the student teachers who had received a grade of “Very Good” were interesting. One of them was the top student in her specialization and her supervisor, the vice principal, had told her after attending her lesson that she had not seen such a comprehensive yet simple explanation for a long time. She was thus very surprised to receive the grade of “Very Good” as it would affect her overall final standing. Another three student teachers were together in a group supervised by a head teacher who never attended their lesson but looked at their lesson planning copybooks and told them throughout the year not to worry as they would get “Excellent” then they somehow ended with “Very Good”. It seems there are inconsistencies that are not easily understood.

Administration.

The administration of the practicum organizes the groups so that each student teacher has the opportunity to teach independently twice a term and this was confirmed by the student

teachers in the focus groups with few exceptions. There was an instance when a group of English specialization student teachers were left with no lesson to attend in the middle of the year, as the teacher whose lesson they attended had left school and was replaced by a part-timer and the schedule changed so that there were no English lessons on the practicum day. They reported it to the practicum unit but no action was taken. Another complaint came from the basic education specialization, where many student teachers complained that they were placed in the same primary stage in both years, that is, either in the year one to three or the year four to six. Two student teachers particularly complained that they were placed both years in the same school with the same supervising head teacher and teaching the same grade level. Another group of student teachers complained that their practicum day was on a Sunday and as their supervisor was Christian he was allowed to come in late so he regularly missed their lessons and only attended their teaching once. Many student teachers complained that there was no support from university so that if they face problems they do not know who to consult. Several student teachers complained that they were placed in distant schools and that they would prefer being placed in schools in their home towns.

Main benefits and peer support.

The main benefit for the student teachers was the actual experience of dealing with students in school. The student teachers admit that their main fear was standing in front of a class face to face with students. They were used to teaching private lessons to relatives and children in their villages, but these were small groups of students. Dealing with the whole class was a new experience. A few of the student teachers mentioned that the private lessons help pay for their expenses during university. They had fears about being asked questions to which they had no answers, and about students being disobedient or uninterested in learning. Through the

practicum they gained experience in dealing with students of different levels and capabilities. They also acquired knowledge of what questions to expect and became more confident in teaching. They overcame their fears and worries. Both Mathematics and Mathematics basic education student teachers stated that they acquired experience in teaching and learnt different ways of explaining concepts. Generally student teachers have become familiar with the current syllabi. The student teachers also gained experience in classroom management and dealing with disobedience. Several groups explained how they cooperate in the management of a class, so while one of them is explaining another one may be screaming at students to keep the class quiet. A student teacher explained “We spread ourselves around the class when one of us is explaining and especially make sure that we stand next to trouble makers to control the class. Then if a student does not understand we explain to him/her on a one to one basis.” The student teachers also admit that they regularly give advice to each other. The structure of the practicum in university Y assigns a group of six to eight student teachers to the same class so they form their own support network to manage the challenges they face. It was apparent during the focus groups how close the student teachers have become and it was more apparent in specializations with smaller numbers. One of the focus groups admitted that they have become close and support each other through their problems and that it has been a journey of self learning. Several student teachers admitted that they were worried when later they would become teachers and are on their own. Others said that they did gain some experience and when they are teachers they will have authority over the children so they could punish them and reduce their marks which they thought would help.

Recommendations by students.

Several groups mentioned that the society as a whole must work to regain the respect teachers. Student teachers explained that the media whether in movies or television serials often portray the teacher as being disrespected by his/her students and thus encourage students to do the same. Also generally the language and words used in new songs encourage children to be insolent. Teachers as well have a role to play as they have to become role models for children. Student teachers requested that teachers should become role models for them as well and be trained and updated on modern teaching methods and on supervision as the quality of supervision provided during the practicum is vital.

Student teachers stated that they need more preparation in university. For example they need to learn about assessment and how to set exams, to learn and practice time management techniques as they face difficulty in finishing all the elements of the lesson within the required time and to practice different teaching methods that are applicable in schools. In addition practicum students stated that they need the university professors to be more involved in their guidance and supervision during the practicum and not to be concerned only with grades.

Other suggested improvements included improving schools and syllabi that have become in their opinion more difficult and too full. In addition practicum students placed in accredited schools have seen a marked difference compared to other schools and have found their practicum experience valuable. Classes need to be smaller and schools need to have supplies for resources. In addition both the spread of private lessons and the teaching have to be addressed in education policy.

Many student teachers said that they would prefer having the practicum as one term where they do not have any university courses as they would have more time to practice in

schools and also because it is very difficult to combine between the once a week practicum and the university courses. One of the groups even suggested having a fifth year as practicum similar to medical students. They stated that the current structure of the practicum allows them only twice a term to teach and that it is definitely not enough. They would like to have more classes to practice in. Some student teachers added that they would like to practice in schools in their home towns. In addition, the basic education specializations requested that they acquire experience with both the lower and upper primary stage during the two years. The basic education specialization also suggested that when they graduate they should be placed in schools teaching first primary and allowed to use modern techniques and then move up with students so that the students are properly educated. Student teachers said that they need encouragement as they are enthusiastic and want to be different and to be good teachers, but they are afraid that others before them have said the same and that they will fall into the same mold of the existing teachers if the system does not support change.

They all mentioned that the Diploma has to be cancelled. The student teachers said that after four years of studying pedagogical courses they are equated with students from commerce and law who took the diploma. In addition, the diploma students overcrowd the schools for the practicum and take the employment opportunities in schools.

Discussion and Recommendations

There is a clear strength in the practicum program in both universities; mainly the experience practicum students acquire in schools and in dealing with students. The main aim of the program in both universities is for practicum students to face reality. Additional strengths arose with the implementation practices of the program and these are the formation of a strong structure of peer support and the development of critical thinking skills. Following the

discussion of these strengths I will discuss the main weaknesses of both programs in the areas of administration, the relation between the university and schools (including university preparation and supervision) and assessment.

Realization and experience.

The practicum for students in both universities was a time of realization of the reality they will face as teachers in schools. The reality manifested itself in three ways: the school culture and resources, status of the teacher, and characteristics of students nowadays. During the practicum they started realizing the gap existing between what they learnt and the skills they needed, in order to deal with the challenges they would face in the real world. To a large extent practicum students knew these challenges existed, but this did not decrease the difficulty of dealing with them. Many of the problems practicum students faced in this study were similar to those faced in other countries. The need to increase the interconnection between teacher education in universities and practices in schools was discussed in varying degrees in the programs in Germany and Malta as previously presented in the literature review. In addition principals that guard their schools and are afraid to risk their students' grades due to the practices of inexperienced student teachers is similarly described in the study on China's student teachers, where they were not even allowed to interact with students for fear of transmitting unfavorable ideas. As previously discussed in the literature review, teachers in China are also overloaded and lacked mentoring skills, and student teachers could only use traditional teaching methods as schools lacked equipment. In terms of classroom management challenges, in a study done in Turkey on students' perceived weaknesses in a teacher education program, the teaching area that was identified as requiring the most improvement was classroom management. Classroom management in that study included management skills, dealing with problematic children and

time management (Dikdere, 2009). In contrast, in a study done in the largest teacher education institution in Israel the results showed that the practicum was the most valued component of studies in acquiring class management skills and being able to deal with unexpected problems (Smith & Lev-Ari, 2005). Moreover in the above mentioned study in Turkey the second perceived area of weakness was in teaching procedures and this included classroom language, board usage and teaching effectively (Dikdere, 2009). These coincide with the problem that faced the English and French specializations in both universities regarding the appropriate extent of foreign language use in the classroom. Student teachers in both universities faced these challenges and in many cases did not have formal guidance and support, which led to the formation of a strong structure of peer support.

Peer support.

The student teachers in both universities naturally created a structure of peer support where they provided guidance and support for each other around the challenges they faced. Student teachers gave each other advice and emotional support throughout the practicum. In university Y student teachers even helped each other in teaching and classroom management. The student teachers shared together the experience of the practicum with its difficulties and helped each other throughout the journey. In many programs across the world, peer support is encouraged and has a structured form as in the case of the University of South Florida where a “peer coaching practicum” was introduced with student teachers trained for peer coaching and the results showed that the student teachers found the peer coaching very beneficial as the teacher supervisors were often overloaded with work or did not bother to comment in detail. The constructive criticism of peers was very appreciated (Wynn & Kromrey, 1999). In another study in Australia of student teachers who were placed in groups in the same school and attended

regular workshops together, the results showed that peer support was highly valued and that it was also a main factor affecting the development of resilience (Le Cornu, 2008). Moreover in a study by Starkey and Rawlins (2011) on practicum students in New Zealand, the findings showed that the most useful type of peer contact was the informal face to face peer contact. Peer support is thus a strength to the programs in both universities Y and X, and should be developed by providing peer coaching training prior to the practicum to encourage student teachers to communicate through both formal and informal channels. An added recommendation would be to introduce programs such as Critical Friends where students learn to share their experiences and provide constructive criticism (Starkey & Rawlins, 2011).

Critical thinking.

One of the unintended benefits that practicum students have also acquired is critical thinking skills. This was apparent in the focus groups when students criticized current teaching practices. In university Y, practicum students did not approve of teachers humiliating students, not using pedagogical practices in dealing with behavioral problems, and their following of traditional teaching techniques. Student teachers clearly did not want to be like the current teachers as they were aware of the widespread mistakes, and they were afraid to fall in the same trap and acquire the same habits, especially as they could not see that the educational system was changing. In university X student teachers identified how teachers were de-motivating them and making as little effort as possible. The student teachers were able to see how the teacher's practices were not student centered and that the latter wanted them to conform to their practices. Practicum students saw that they had the choice of either giving in or being different and they knew that it was not going to be easy. The increased level of maturity from year three to four was noticeable. In the study by Smith and Lev-Ari (2005) findings showed that the practicum

was the component of the studies that most contributed to students' confidence to criticize the educational system, that is more than the practical pedagogy, general education courses, subject matter courses and even out of courses teaching experience. Similarly the practicum students in both universities were critical of the educational system and stated they wanted to make a difference. In university X students clearly wanted to be agents of change and not wait for change to happen on its own. I could attribute the difference between both groups of students to the fact that university X was located in a city that had throughout history been multi-cultural and that students and professors too, as a result were more exposed than in university Y which is in a more provincial city and definitely more conservative. In the English specialization the students were assigned to novels like "The Prime of Miss Brodie" where a teacher opposed an existing school culture on her own and made a difference, which seemed to have influenced their thinking. However, students in other specializations had expressed the same feelings too. Another factor perhaps is that University X is located in one of the cities that had a leading role during the revolution of January 2011 and that it was particularly the youth that had ignited the revolution. It was this same feeling of wanting to make a difference and the belief that you can make change that students in university X had.

Administration.

The weakness in the administration is a major characteristic that I will discuss separately for each of the two universities. In university X, the administration succeeded in providing opportunities for nearly all students to teach on a weekly basis. The weakness in the administration of the program that I identified was that as the students are placed in schools depending on their home address, it meant that practicum students who lived in higher income neighborhoods had a higher probability of being placed in better schools and those who lived in

poorer areas were mostly placed in schools of a more inferior quality. I noticed that students who appeared to be from a higher income group were those who were placed in experimental schools and good public schools. It was particularly noticeable in the Arabic basic specialization where five of the students went to the same school and they described how the conditions in the school were difficult, and one of them remarked that “University professors only go to good neighborhoods.” They of course had no supervision from the university and the MOE instructional supervisor used to go regularly but rarely gave them feedback. She only signed the lesson planning copybook and told them what to prepare next. I realized then that the better the location of your home, the higher the probability of being placed in a good school, and the more likely you will be of getting regular supervision. This needs to be modified as it causes a perpetuation of the class structure and is unfair to practicum students living in more popular less privileged districts.

The administration of university Y places practicum students in schools so that each student is able to teach independently twice a term, which is far too little for them to acquire sufficient experience. The practicum unit places undergraduate practicum students only in school in the main district. Governorate Y has ten educational districts but only diploma students are allowed to be placed in all districts. By contrast University X has fewer public schools in the governorate as a whole but places student teachers in all eight districts. The main district in governorate Y has 136 out of a total of 778 primary schools, 68 out of 415 preparatory school and 19 out of 90 secondary schools (MOE, 2011). Thus University Y is restricting the opportunity of student teachers to practice and teach independently more frequently by placing them in only one district, with the excuse that supervision for university professors in more districts will be more difficult to manage and more costly. In addition, the increasing numbers of

Diploma students reaching 8000 students this year who are all required to attend one term practicum in schools, cause more limitations in placements. Undergraduate practicum students should be placed in all districts to increase their opportunity of more independent teaching and to experience schools in towns and villages as well. In addition attention should be given to providing basic education students with experiences in both lower and upper primary stages. The Head of the Department of Curriculum and Teaching Methodology criticized the practicum unit and said that there was inefficiency in planning as smaller groups of students can be placed in more schools. In another interview, one of the experienced professors in University Y confirmed that the practicum has two major problems; the first being the large number of students and the small number of classes allocated to practicum in schools, and the second problem being the supervision of the practicum which we will discuss in the following section. The practicum unit should work on a better distribution of students, and the Faculty of Education should identify its priorities and perhaps place a ceiling on the number of Diploma students accepted.

University to School Connection.

The major weakness in both universities is that the practicum program does not meet any of the identified characteristics for an effective program and has all the weaknesses outlined in the literature review. There is non-alignment between the theoretical courses and the practicum and there are not sufficient links between the schools and the universities, such as establishing training workshops for supervisors or clear outlined standards for guidance. Students are not well prepared in the university and then go to face the schools with supervisors that are not trained and may not even be interested or motivated. In many cases students are taught techniques and concepts that cannot be applied in schools. School staff is obviously overloaded and not given release time for the practicum duties and in many cases the prevailing culture is

that of the novice practitioner being a burden and causing problems so it may be better to keep the student teachers away. There are many similarities between these weaknesses and those identified in China in the study by Yan and He (2010) on the initial teacher preparation BA program, where student teachers complained that they were taught new teaching methods and integrating technology, although the schools were not equipped and that they found students used to traditional teaching methods. In addition the schools regarded student teachers as a burden as the teachers themselves were overloaded and lacked any mentoring training or skills. According to Guo (2005), the teacher preparation programs in China tend to focus on theoretical knowledge and do not provide sufficient teaching practice for students. Guo and Pungar (2008) added that methodology courses in teacher preparation programs are considered less important than subject matter courses and may be thus taught by less qualified instructors.

There are a few identified examples of good practices but these are individual efforts and not standardized experiences, so generally the experience is diverse for different students. Several of the identified good practices were in the lower density specializations, which can be attributed to the closer relationship they have with professors possibly resulting in more interest and dedication. One of the possible reasons for the existing separation between schools and Faculties of Education might be that current university professors were never school teachers and have not faced the challenges in schools. Dr. Said Ismail Aly a retired Social Foundation professor and an expert in education explained in an interview, that in the past MA students were required to teach in public schools for two years as a requirement for admission to the program. He added that unfortunately university professors do not take the opportunity to visit schools during the supervision of the practicum, but they leave the supervision to their teaching assistants and MOE instructional supervisors. He stated that the knowledge the students learn in the faculties of

education is either obsolete or inapplicable which is the reason why MOE instructional supervisors advise them to put it aside (Salah El Din, 2012).

From the findings in both universities there is a clear need to reevaluate the content of the university courses in both subject matter and pedagogical studies. Subject matter courses have to be aligned with the curriculum taught in schools. Pedagogical courses have to change from the theoretical structure and provide student teachers with an understanding of the challenges they will actually face and opportunities or discussions of possible applications. The methodology courses concurrent to the practicum have to address the problems student teachers face and provide support throughout the practicum. The university professors have to visit the schools and relate their teaching to the real situation in schools.

Supervision has to be taken more seriously. The universities have to decide on clear guidelines and targets and train supervisors including teachers, principals, MOE instructional supervisors and university professors on mentorship practices. The roles have to be clearly identified and formally communicated to all parties involved. Finally the duration of the practicum has to increase and provide students with a longer consecutive period in schools within the school year. The selected period for conducting the consecutive practicum also needs to change and not be at the end of term.

Assessment.

The assessment criteria in both universities are neither clear nor standardized. For University Y the grade mainly depends on attendance, the planning notebook and the personal judgment of the school supervisor. University X has made an effort in introducing the student portfolio as part of the assessment requirements, but students complained that as in the case of Malta, portfolios became “show cases” instead of reflecting the actual development or work

implemented of students (Chetcuti et al, 2011).. In both universities student teachers are mainly given an “Excellent” grade to encourage them. Two professors interviewed in University X admitted that there are no standards for assessing students in the practicum. One of them explained that he personally gives the grade based on the following: first on attendance, because if you do not attend you have no chance of progress, second on improvement so he visits the student in the beginning of the practicum and gives him/her feedback then he evaluates the progress attained, third on extra school activities including posters or competitions organized, and finally on the portfolio. The other professor said that he evaluated students based on the attendance record, portfolio, class teaching, substitute lessons taken and on the activities implemented. There are commonalities in their standards, but they were among the supervising professors who actually visit student teachers in schools. Clearly the identified effective characteristics for evaluation in the literature review were not applied in either University and it is recommended that they should be included. These characteristics were to include all the parties involved in both the school and university, to include components of self evaluation, peer evaluation, to encourage reflection, include compiling a professional portfolio and a research component. These characteristics were outlined to encourage the student to develop reflection and critical thinking skills and be involved in the learning process and improvement, not just get a final grade. Finally there has to be clearly defined evaluation standards.

Conclusion

The practicum should be a golden opportunity where Faculties of Education, schools, the MOE, university professors, teachers and MOE instructional supervisors can meet to exchange knowledge and experience about different aspect of the education system. It is an opportunity for the knowledge and research of the university professors to be applied in schools and for teachers to provide their experienced feedback to develop it. University professors should become aware of the conditions in schools to align their teaching in university and prepare their students for the challenges they will face. Teachers should be able to seek the assistance of the university professors in finding solutions to the problems they face. This collaboration should be further enhanced with the interaction of the MOE supervisors who themselves benefit from it and may transfer their knowledge to develop ministerial guidelines and bylaws. All parties involved have a common goal to educate the children and youth of the country, but they are at different stages and perspectives of their journey. They should be encouraged to form professional learning communities where they share their knowledge and learn from each other. Partnerships should be encouraged between faculties of education and schools similar to those in Singapore where schools are involved in the design of the practicum program and the NIE encourages principals and MOE officials to be appointed as lecturers to increase their involvement in teacher preparation (Deng, 2004).

The study has shown clear weaknesses in both universities in all areas necessary for an effective practicum experience. Even though the structure for University X is apparently better and provided student teaches with more opportunities for independent teaching, had clearer guidelines and introduced portfolios to students for evaluation, with regards to student experience the difference between the two universities is not vast. Student teachers in University

X had more experience but without sufficient guidance and preparation, so they did not benefit so much more than University Y. There is a clear need for preparing student teachers adequately in both subject matter requirements and pedagogic practices, keeping in mind the alignment between universities and schools. In addition all supervisors involved in the practicum should be trained on mentorship practices, and encouraged to become effective coaches to student teachers during the practicum. Faculties of Education should be required to specify the role of the school staff involved in the practicum program and provide sufficient training as is the case in the UK. According to Maandag et al. (2007) universities have a legal obligation to do so in the UK.

The current situation of the practicum shows there is no cooperation between the different parties, the university professors are living in their own “tower”, not fully aware or concerned about current school conditions and are teaching students what they think is a good preparation for a teaching career. The teachers in schools want the student teachers to model their practices and try to discourage them from attempting to be creative, innovative or hard working as the teachers do not want to change themselves and do not want the students in school to see the difference. In this way both university professors and teachers are maintaining the status quo. Even when the high-ranking supervisor from the MOE attempted to bridge one of the gaps between university preparation and school practices and asked the university to prepare student teachers on the same lesson planning strategy, the university ignored the request. However student teachers are being taught innovative teaching methods and student centered approaches by professors who themselves do not model them. When student teachers are placed in schools for the practicum they realize that they are on their own with very little guidance, insufficiently prepared, and thus must seek their own channels of support. The student teachers are able to be more critical as they are not yet “inside the system” and are close in age to students

and have more patience and understanding. They realize they do not want to be a replica of the teacher models they encounter, but to what extent will they be able to resist the current school culture?

The informal structures of peer support and the critical thinking skills developed are both positive aspects that should be further strengthened. The Faculties of Education should support the motivation of the student teachers and the collaborative structures they formed so as to assist them to become agents of change. Student teachers should be encouraged and given the opportunity to work together on finding solutions to particular challenges they encounter in schools. With their critical outlook, motivation to do something better and peer support structures, they may help to introduce and develop a much needed reform movement in schools.

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Appendix

Appendix 1

Interview Topics for Professors from Faculties of Education

- What is the structure of the practicum? (# of times and length)
- How are students supervised?
- What actually happens?
- Are roles defined?
- Are students placed in more than one school?
- Are schools involved in preparation of the program?
- Who is the liaison in school and in university?
- Are teachers in schools trained for mentoring?
- Are University professors trained?
- Are students involved in different school activities?
- Do they remain as a group throughout the practicum or teach in pairs? Does it promote collaboration?
- Is there a concurrent methodology course?
- Are practical components integrated in other courses?
- How are students evaluated? Does evaluation include reflection, self and peer evaluation? Is there a research component or portfolio? Are there clear standards?