



**TEACHING AND LEARNING  
RESEARCH EXCHANGE**

Professional  
Development on  
Individuals Engaged  
in Pre-Service Teacher  
Education Within a  
Rural Setting

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# Summary

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This research presentation will provide a dynamic description of an evolutionary partnering project that includes the University of Regina, Regina, Saskatchewan from an urban setting and Davison and Miller Elementary Schools, together with a community arts centre from the rural setting of Melville, Saskatchewan. This partnership project and research explores the relationship among and between the members of the alliance that contributes to the values and beliefs about arts and arts education and their contributions to in-service and pre-service teaching and the impact of arts education on all participants of the community.

# Acknowledgements

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# Researchers

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# Research Question

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What are the outcomes of professional development on individuals engaged in pre-service teacher education within a rural context?

# Purpose

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The purpose of this study is to examine the roles of the advisers, school and district administrators, co-operating teachers, and pre-intern students for the professional development of all concerned in a pre-internship experience in a rural setting.

# Objectives

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The objectives of the study were:

- To examine the effectiveness of the professional development experience.
- To clarify and define the roles of pre-intern students, co-operating classroom teachers, school and district administrators, and faculty advisers within the professional development experience.
- To consider the particular areas of expertise that each of the individuals brings to and extends through the professional development experience.
- To determine the viability of transferring the pre-internship experience that presently exists in an urban location near a university to a rural setting.

# Rationale

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The development of a research agenda evolved from the association of the Arts Education program and the elementary schools in Melville. The invitation from the Melville administration to continue and extend our experiences during the fall semesters led to the possibilities of transferring the pre-internship experience from an urban to a rural setting. It would also result in altering the one day per week for a semester to a week block following the traditional practice of having an off-campus residence experience in a rural setting. This serendipitous event provided the opportunity to investigate:

- The efficacy of the professional development experience.
- The specific roles for the professional development experience.
- How professionals identify their own expertise.

This prompted the agencies to organize and create a relevant research project that would be of value to teachers and teacher education.

# Background

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The Arts Education program began in 1982 at the University of Regina. It was a unique offering that was comprised of the study of five arts disciplines that included dance, drama, literature, music and visual arts. The students take all five areas for the first two years of the program and then select a major and minor from those arts areas. During the five years, the students follow courses in the selected major and minor areas together with courses in educational psychology, professional studies, aesthetic education, technology and selected areas in arts, such as sociology, philosophy and anthropology. As well as the traditional requirements for pre-internship and internship, the students also participate in an annual off-campus residential experience (OCRE) in the fall and winter semesters of the fourth year of the program. The primary focus of OCRE was to provide both students and faculty an opportunity to investigate the arts and cultural contexts of both urban and rural communities and their relationships to the formal education system. In redefining the objectives and intent of OCRE, it was transformed to Professional Learning as Community Experience (PLACE), which is more consistent with the philosophy and goals of the Arts Education program.

Traditionally, PLACE (Professional Learning as Community Experience) has provided the pre-service teachers in the fourth year of their five-year Arts Education program with an opportunity to visit and explore a rural community in Saskatchewan. Each year a different location has been selected. On many occasions a graduate of the Arts Education program teaching in a community has provided liaison and introductions to other members in the community. During the three days in the community, the students spend time in elementary and secondary schools, attend community events, visit significant historical and cultural sites, and meet with leaders of the community. The students are asked to consider what their roles as arts educators would be if they were to teach in that community. Following the fall experience, the students are asked to plan and organize a winter experience for PLACE in a centre larger than Regina.

In 2006 a graduate of the Arts Education program invited students and faculty of the program to Melville, specifically to Davison and Miller Elementary Schools. During the three days of our visit, the university pre-service students led arts activities in classrooms, visited community sites, learned about the use of SMART board technology in the classroom and, on the final day, visited and created a mural at Melville Community Works. At the end of our visit, the principal of Davison School invited the Arts Education program to return to Melville the following year (2007) and work with the school and community once again. Therefore, we began discussion and planning for the continuation of the project in 2007. Additionally, professors from the program were successful in attaining research funds for two years to initiate and continue the project “Learning Beyond the Walls: The Fine Arts, Community, Technology, School and University as Collaboration for Learning.”

After the successful PLACE experiences of 2006, 2007 and 2008, it was decided to extend the experience for the pre-service students to include further teaching experiences. This would include PLACE and Placement. Traditionally, Placement takes place during the fall semester for the pre-service students who work in pairs on one day each week in an elementary school in Regina. In 2009 it was decided to continue with the three-day PLACE followed by five days of Pre-internship Placement in Davison and Miller Elementary Schools. Funds from the Dr. Stirling McDowell Foundation for Research Into Teaching were secured to evaluate “Professional Development for Individuals Engaged in Pre-Service Teacher Education Within a Rural Setting.”

Thus, an alliance was created with Davison and Miller Elementary Schools in Melville and the Arts Education Program, Faculty of Education at the University of Regina to conduct the research study that would explore professional development for university students, faculty advisers, teachers and administrators. During the eight-day residency, university students had the opportunity to work with community leaders and artists and teach in small group and classroom settings. As students in the Arts Education program, they were expected to draw on and reflect upon the Saskatchewan Arts Education curricula as well as implement other areas of the curriculum in their daily interaction and teaching in the project. The university students were supervised by classroom teachers, school administrators and university professors in the professional development process followed in the Faculty of Education.

## Population

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The study included 20 pre-intern students and two faculty members from the University of Regina, Arts Education program in the Faculty of Education. Participants in Melville included 10 teachers and two administrators from Davison and Miller Elementary Schools. A combined population of over 300 children from Grades 1 to 6 participated in the experiences as family groupings. In addition 10 artists and cultural workers from the community organized by two administrators from Melville Community Works were included as part of the PLACE experience.

## Research Methodology

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The research study was directed by the lead investigators including the two school principals and two university professors as well as additional teachers that complemented the research team. More than 300 children from the two elementary schools, 10 cooperating teachers and supporting staff, the two principals, 20 university students, the two professors and a research assistant were part of the study. This study was designed to address the effectiveness of the professional development experience that is the foundation for teacher training particular to the practicum experience in school settings. One of the unique aspects of this study is the focus on pre-internship experiences in arts education in a rural setting. Also in the research, the specific roles of the teachers, university students, advisers and administrators were examined for definition of role through practice and professional growth by experience. Additionally, the study examined the effect of moving the professional development experience from an urban to a rural setting.

Through phenomenological methodology, those involved examined the experience of PLACE and Placement through interviews with each of the participant groups that included children, university students, teachers, artists, administrators and professors as well as through daily written reflections and summary statements. Specific questions were created to elucidate impressions, opinions, preferences and feelings about the experiences and projections about future possibilities. Applying Hycner's model (1999), the reflections were bracketed to identify recurring themes and then delineated into units of meaning relevant to the research question. A research assistant conducted and transcribed the interviews, and the principal investigators reviewed the reflections

for each group to determine possible themes. From there the units of meaning were identified and any redundancies were eliminated. Finally, the research team examined the units of meaning and grouped them into clusters with appropriate identifying titles (see Appendix 2).

## Research Findings

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The research team examined the data from the interviews and daily questions from the perspectives of the children, pre-interns, teachers and artists as identified through the context within PLACE and Placement. Themes were culled from the responses to the daily questions and the interview comments (see Appendix 1). The themes were grouped into units of meaning from which the three dominant clusters of People, Community and Learning were revealed. In this paper we will focus on the three dominant clusters and provide examples of selected units of meaning for a cluster.

In the cluster of People, collaboration was identified as one of the units of meaning, emerging from such themes as caring, helping, sharing, challenges and leadership. From the interviews one of the children, Paul, Grade 5, stated, “Well, it’s fun, too, cause you’re working with a whole bunch of different kids and you can get to know them better, even though some of them you actually know.” Quinton, Grade 3, said that it was “Different than working with ... only yourself.” In response to the question, “What have you learned as a pre-intern?,” Gloria stated, “It’s a huge collaborative effort, and I’ve certainly gained an understanding of how communities band together to make a collaborative effort happen in the interest of education and something good happening.” A teacher, Mrs. C., stated, “Teaching is quite collaborative, or it should be, when it’s ideal. We have that opportunity during PLACE and also during placement [to] see how the classroom can be collaborative, and you can draw on new ideas and work together and perhaps [provide] a much better learning opportunity for students.” An artist, Mrs. H., observed, “And I like the team teaching, when you get a pair of interns or pre-interns and they team-teach. It’s really a benefit to them and to the teacher planning because now you’ve got three brains or four brains coming up with some great ideas. Yeah, the collaboration is amazing.”

In the unit that we identified as Friendship one of the major themes that was addressed was multi-age grouping. Many enjoyed working with the different age groups. A teacher, Mrs. D., explained, “It gave me a chance, because I’m new to the school. I got to work with Grade 1 all the way to Grade 6 and I got to know a lot of the kids that typically I don’t talk to on a regular basis.” Another teacher, Mrs. I., thought that working in multi-age groups was great and that, “The kids really enjoyed being with the students from Davison and eventually those kids will end up together, and I think it’s just a really nice way for those kids to get to know each other on a different level.” The children were varied in their responses. A group of Grade 3 children “liked being with different grades” and they “enjoyed working with kids from the other school because [they] like making friends” and recognized that “they helped us.” A Grade 4 child commented, “On the first day I thought it was kinda fun to be working with kids from Grades 1 to 6. I felt weird when I first saw the kids but when we had to work as a team, it made me feel better. It was hard to be friends to the bigger kids but when I got put in their team we work[ed] together [and] became friends.” Working in multi-age groups encouraged a feeling of confidence and responsibility. For instance a Grade 6 student said, “I felt like I learned a lot and was able to feel more confident because I felt like I could communicate better with people I don’t know and people not my age.

I felt like I gained a lot of responsibility during this activity because I helped take care of the kindergarteners and the Grade 1s and 2s. So it was like a two-in-one! I also made new friends with my PLACE group!"

Themes such as co-operation, risk-taking, exploration, allowing and acceptance emerged from the unit of meaning designated as Trust. In talking about their experience, one of the Grade 2 children mentioned, "Things aren't always what they seem sometimes" and for her this meant that she was trusting in the possibility for learning. A Grade 6 student said, "Let your mind explore whatever you want it to do. Like if you want to do hockey or something, go do it. Just don't leave it and just, yeah I'm gonna do something else and don't do it. Just go for it." Learning according to a university student meant that it was all right to take risks. She commented, "I'm not a big risk-taker and for this week it's good that we're able to do that so, it's just been good in that sense, I guess." Another university student commenting about co-operation said, "I was learning about balance and working with others and when to give and when to take and when to let that course run. I was learning when I can just sit back and observe so I was learning how to balance that out." Others believed, "It's so much about trusting the other people that you're teaching with: whether it's with our classroom teachers or working with everyone else in this group. I've just learned very much to trust them and know that wherever I'm going with a lesson, they'll be right along with me the whole time and wherever they're going, they can trust me to be right along with them, and we have a very good give-and-take relationship (co-operative), yes, and that's been a very good experience. It's very necessary, yes."

The second cluster, Community, was identified through the collection of three units of meaning: Identity, Knowledge and Involvement. One of the artists from the community captures the essence of arts identity within the community when she says,

*I guess I would say that I've learned that other people's perceptions of a small town arts community are not alike. Those that have come from a small town understand that it's not easy to keep an arts community alive with a lack of numbers, but those that have come from a larger community are quite, I guess, open to the fact that there is an arts community in a smaller rural area and that it can be just as vibrant and booming as somewhere urban.*

Knowledge about the community was identified as an important theme. As one teacher said,

*It is very important that PLACE includes artists and community personnel because it showcases the talents of the small community members of Melville. A lot of people, including myself, don't realize the talents of these peoples and unless they are part of this program, their work and influence could be missed. They have so much to share with us!*

Another teacher concurred by saying, "The community artists were an integral part of the experience. The students really learned a lot from [the artist] and I think the interns did as well. She was a fantastic role model for them to look up to." A university student also saw the value of artists contributing to community and stated, "The community artists brought a sense of reality to the week. Seeing the artists in their element allowed the students to see that art is not just a subject in school but something they can take with them through their lives." Community engagement is exemplified in this statement by a teacher who said,

*The most memorable experience for me was sitting in with the group at the Legion Manor when the students were interviewing a resident about her life when she had been their age. Students then created a "me"*

*quilt about the resident, and to see the knowledge of history being passed on in this meaningful way was very powerful for both the students and the resident.*

A university student stated,

*Involvement for me was realizing how students of all ages and backgrounds can work together in a fun and exciting environment through the arts. This project really proved to me that the arts are so useful in uniting students across all barriers. They were able to expand their thinking and think in new ways with members of the group that they had maybe never met before.*

In the third cluster of Learning, units of meaning were identified as teaching practice, conditions for learning and motivations for learning. The experiences of PLACE and Placement provided reaffirmation of self as a professional educator and a renewal of energy for classroom practice. For example, one of the teachers said, “I think I’ve gained a new perspective of myself as a teacher, as an educator and as a person who wants to share my passion for teaching with others.” It also confirmed the importance of planning, organization, strategies and reflection for the act of teaching. Some teachers noted that providing the optimal condition for pre-internship learning in their classrooms required them “to sit back.” One teacher stated, “I had a hard time not being at the front of the room with them. That was tough for me.” It appeared that all the participants talked about how the experiences provided motivations for learning by commenting that enthusiasm abounded and that there was a willingness to go to places they had never gone before. There was an atmosphere that provided a safe place to take risks. It was inspirational and allowed for imaginations to soar. For instance, one artist, talking about her colleague, stated, “Four years ago [she] wouldn’t have stood in front of pre-interns and talked like that and told them about her art and her life with art. Now, four years later, [she] lead the whole thing and she has just blossomed. It was wonderful to see.” A teacher, in discussing learning in the arts, described, “how kids come alive in those classes.” Another artist commented, “I guess I’ve gained more insight into my own creativity, as well as bringing in the idea of creativity to the kids. With the pre-service interns, I’m just starting to realize what’s out there and how far you can go.” The children captured the essence of learning by making comments: “It gets you to just make up the whole thing and expand your mind,” (Grade 6 participant); “I learned about a whole bunch of new instruments that I didn’t even know existed,” (Grade 6 participant); “That you don’t have to have words to do something,” (Grade 3 participant); and, “We’re doing different things and they’re more different than we’ve ever done before,” (Grade 3 participant). A Grade 6 student said it best when he stated that, “I’m kinda upset because this is the last year [for me] to do PLACE.”

# Conclusions

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All participants had the opportunity to make recommendations for the future of PLACE and Placement in the community of Melville. Most agreed that timing, sequence and professional development responsibilities needed to be readdressed. Pre-intern students, administrators, teachers and professors were in agreement that there needs to be time allocated between the experiences of PLACE and Placement. This will afford all participants adequate time to plan and to develop appropriate resources while maintaining their day-to-day routine.

Additionally, the sequencing of the experiences required adjustments. It was recommended that the planning day remain as the introduction to the project while the week-long Pre-internship Placement should take precedence over PLACE and become the second element of the sequence. By making this change, the pre-interns will have the opportunity to work with a teacher and a specific group of children over a five-day period. This will solidify relationships and planning by all participants before entering into the multi-age group situation of PLACE.

The children recommended that all PLACE activities be extended and that they should happen beyond the school walls and in the community. Children also indicated their belief that all cultural workers were not necessarily artists and, from their perspective, they would like to meet and learn from authentic artists. The pre-interns and the teachers found having the artists as part of the learning experience to be most inspirational. Also, teachers recommended that there should be more time devoted to in-service of those teachers who would serve as co-operating teachers of pre-interns. This would provide clarity of the roles and responsibilities of the teacher, pre-intern, and faculty adviser.

The data from the research study reflected the significance, values and beliefs as demonstrated through the arts, arts education and community events as playing a vital role in the lives of all.

As one Grade 5 student said, "Practically everything is the arts." The overwhelming number of positive comments from all participants about experiences and learning has generated the creation of a more formal partnership allowing for a refining and extension of the association amongst the University of Regina, the Good Spirit School Division and the City of Melville. From this experience and the research, additional possibilities continue to emerge.

Based on the findings generated by the research process in this 2009 study, it has been determined that it was important to examine the significant role that classroom teachers play as co-operating teachers in the preparation of pre-service teachers in a rural setting. The classroom teachers found the experience of working with pre-service teachers beneficial and rewarding. They made several recommendations that would possibly enhance their supervisory role. They made these suggestions for further research:

- Determine the impact of Placement preceding PLACE.
- Provide at least a week between Placement and PLACE.
- Include a seminar for teachers that would serve to better articulate the procedures and practices for their supervisory role.
- Include the participation of the teachers in the lab each day with university professors and pre-service teachers.

Specifically, the study will address whether the teachers found the preparation in the proposed seminar equipped them for their supervisory role and whether they saw this role as an important component of their professional contribution to education. The study will consider the distinction between the 2009 and 2010 experiences relating to their perceptions and understandings of the co-operating teachers' supervisory role. Additionally, the pre-service teachers and university professors will consider the significance of the professional development process and the intensive week in the schools.

# Appendix 1

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## PLACE AND PLACEMENT INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

### QUESTIONS FOR ARTS EDUCATION STUDENTS

1. What have you gained overall from the experience in the school and community?
2. What did you learn about yourself?
3. What have you learned about teaching in a rural community?
4. What are the benefits to spending time in a rural community?
5. How might this experience influence your future teaching?
6. If there was one word to describe the experience, what would it be?

### QUESTIONS FOR STUDENTS

1. What was your favourite arts activity?
2. What did you learn in this project?
3. Would you like to do some of those activities again?
4. Are there other arts activities that you would like to try?

### QUESTIONS FOR TEACHERS, ADMINISTRATORS AND COMMUNITY LEADERS (ARTISTS)

1. What have you gained from the experience of working with the pre-service teachers?
2. What have you learned about supervising pre-service teachers?
3. What did you learn about yourself?
4. What are the benefits from working with pre-service teachers?
5. How might this experience influence your future teaching?
6. If there was one word to describe the experience, what would it be?

### QUESTIONS FOR EACH OF THE FIVE DAYS OF PRE-INTERNSHIP PLACEMENT

1. What was most memorable about your experience in PLACE?
2. What was the significance of including artists and community personnel as part of learning?
3. Describe your views of working with or within a varied age group of children.
4. Talk about guest teachers or being a guest teacher in your classroom.
5. Would you change anything about the PLACE and Pre-internship experience? If so, what and why?

# Appendix 2

## CLUSTERS OF THEMES

PLACE \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ PLACEMENT

### Response to Interviews/Question of the Day

#### **CLUSTER: PEOPLE**

CHILDREN, PRE-INTERN, TEACHER, ARTIST

Unit of Meaning – COLLABORATION

Themes – caring, trusting, helping, sharing, challenging, leading

Unit of Meaning – FRIENDSHIP

Themes – multi-age groups, helping, sharing, teaching, caring, co-operation, collaboration, potential, different, fun, respect, family, liking/disliking, learn from others, learn about others

Unit of Meaning – TRUST

Themes – change perception, explore, dare, reciprocal, relationships, co-operation, collaboration, risk, nothing to lose, resist intrusion, allow, chance, accept

#### **CLUSTER: COMMUNITY**

CHILDREN, PRE-INTERN, TEACHER, ARTIST

Unit of Meaning – IDENTITY

Themes – population, activity, services

Unit of Meaning – KNOWLEDGE

Themes – culture, events, people

Unit of Meaning – INVOLVEMENT

Themes – introductions, welcoming, collaboration, serving, connectedness

#### **CLUSTER: LEARNING**

CHILDREN, PRE-INTERN, TEACHER, ARTIST

Unit of Meaning – TEACHING PRACTICE

Themes – organization, style, strategies, planning, questioning, feedback

Unit of Meaning – CONDITIONS FOR LEARNING

Themes – supportive, flexible, patient, creative, styles

Unit of Meaning – MOTIVATIONS FOR LEARNING

Themes – enthusiasm, willingness, risk, inspiring, potential, confidence, freedom, imagination, accepting

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