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When is a Reorganization of Practicum in Initial Teacher Education Implemented? Administrator Perspectives

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When is a Reorganization of Practicum in Initial Teacher Education Implemented? Administrator Perspectives

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I. Introduction

The initiative in 2014 from the Swedish government concerning re-organization of practicum in Initial Teacher Education (hereafter abbreviated ITE) can be viewed as part of a more extensive ambition to reform the Swedish education system. In 2010 a new Education Act (SFS 2010:800) was enacted, and in 2011 a revised curriculum for preschool (SKOLSFS 1998:16/2011:69) and new curricula for compulsory school (SKOLSFS 2010:37) and upper secondary school (SKOLSFS 2011:144) were launched. A re-designed ITE was already proposed by a special investigator of the teacher program in 2008 (SOU 2008:109) and resulted in a government proposition for a new teacher program (Prop. 2009). In the proposition the suggested changes for practicums were only partly realized; the most important was a reduction of practice time to 30 ECTS (one semester) carried out in courses during the program. Earlier practicums could be integrated in other courses.

Along with the 2014 governmental initiative was a possibility for financing an experimental change of practicum. The term "experimental" is used because the choice of organizer to be funded is based on the fact that is should be possible to compare different designs and their outcome. Not all applications for funding of the re-organization were accepted but the application from Mälardalen University (hereafter abbreviated MDH) was (Mälardalen University, 2014).

In this article the focus is on the implementation of the new organization of practicums. The aim of this paper is to increase knowledge about implementation of the change and the results of the study will be a contribution to a continuing discussion about the role of practicums in ITE (Moran, Abbott and Clarke, 2009; Iucu and Platis, 2012; Niklasson 2011, 2014). In addition, staff in ITE whose voices have been heard less often, i.e., administrators, give their response to the issue. The article contributes with an example of using a timeline, logic model and SWOT analysis as a method when gathering data.

The article continues with a presentation of selected earlier literature about practicums in ITE and is followed by a description of the local organization of practicums in the selected case study. After that the method for data collection and results are presented. The results are discussed and lastly, the limitations of the study are clarified. The article ends with a conclusion.

II. Practicums in Teacher Education

The literature review show that practicums are both a hope for integrating theory and practice and a part of ITE which is often critically discussed. Staff at school supervising the student teachers are referred to as "mentors" below and staff at MDH as "teachers."

This discussion is not new according to Vick (2006), but has been a constant since the early 20th century when mass education started and ITE became formalized in Teacher Education Colleges. ITE should be both an education where graduates should be able to start teaching immediately in the classroom, mainly following established routines, and at the same time be informed by new research and not only follow tradition but contribute with the latest knowledge concerning education. By using data from the early 20th century in England and Australia (about 1900-1950) Vick argues

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that some of the issues in current ITE have been debated since the start of formalized ITE. Many student teachers spread out in schools over a vast area created problems in visits from college teachers (12 would be the limit during a year), while other schools could be overloaded by trainees. The amount of time spent in practice teaching has changed over the years, and mentors´ lack of skill in discussing lectures and college teachers´ lack of current teaching practice in relevant school forms have also been issues.

These issues were addressed with placing students in carefully selected schools closer to the Teacher College, some mentors got part-time work at the Teacher College to teach methods and also visit the student teachers at schools and a closer cooperation could start between college teachers and mentors as they were in the same department. Even placing students four days a week in schools and using their practice teaching to inform theoretical lessons were used. Changes were carried out, but the form with on-campus and practice schools and staff at both remained, ITE was perceived as a collaborative assignment. The solutions also led to new problems such as criticism of the part-time mentors/teachers for ignoring the college directives. This historical review gives insight into earlier issues. many of which seem to remain. Vick (2006) suggests that a historical perspective on new reforms can lead to more modest expectations concerning practice teaching in ITE.

Reid (2011) also uses a historical perspective when she discusses a possible shift to practice in ITE. Three different perspectives could be described: apprenticeship, training and education. In early ITE the student teachers could be working in the classroom and get instructions from the formal teacher, a practice-based kind of apprenticeship. Later in the 20th century ITE was more formalized into institutions and the student teacher was supposed to learn from observing model lessons in model classrooms, a teacher-training perspective. The latter was a reaction toward the apprentice model which could result in repeating traditional methods. Depending upon the current reform perspective, ITE could also be perceived as education that includes more of other subjects and a deeper knowledge about philosophical and sociological aspects. Despite changes, as Reid notes, it seems that ITE could never meet the standard of the stakeholders. Either it is too university based, or too practice based.

A close co-operation between university and schools could not only concern the student teachers, it could also concern professional development for both student teachers and staff. Darling-Hammond, Bullmaster and Cobb suggest close cooperation where professional development is enhanced within so-called professional development schools (PDS) (1995; Darling-Hammond, 1999). The model with PDS includes a restriction of the number of schools and an increase in research into collaboration between staff at university and schools.

An additional issue is where ITE itself is placed in the education system. Elstad (2010) describes how ITE during the early 20th century was organized autonomously from the university (where some of the teacher students studied subjects separately) in Norway. A discussion started during the 1970s about merging Teacher Colleges with universities which resulted in a suggestion in this direction in 1986. This merging resulted mainly in adaptation to university standards, that is, teaching experience is regarded as having lower status than research. In texts suggestions for practice are considered “recipes”; critical discussion is perceived as more academic. On the other hand teacher educators could perceive the current educational research as impractical. In a hierarchy at the university, ITE could be perceived as having a low position. This situation continues a tension between a school-practice orientation and a university-based ITE, even though it is gradually decreasing in the Norwegian example.

The challenges seem to have continued, but researchers have suggested how they could be coped with. Lynch and Smith (2012) carried out a study about how increased co-operation between university and schools affected ITE. One challenge in ITE concerns the fact that ITE is often framed by national directives and a demand for accreditation of the organization of ITE. The design of ITE implies a common understanding between different stakeholders, which Lynch and Smith doubt can be realized. Instead there are different understandings of partnership. In addition the directives for ITE give little opportunity to create and construct at a local level. Despite this, it was possible to carry out changes within a selected ITE in Australia and compare the results between this and an ITE without the same changes. The main changes concerned more extensive co-operation between a university and schools such as flexibility in which assignments the student teachers got during practice. The aim of the changes was to create mutual co-operation and responsibility for a mutual goal, ITE, instead of what Lynch and Smith call a “practicum service agreement” where communication mainly happens via a student teacher handbook.

The results from a survey to student teachers (graduated from ITE) and mentors from the ordinary and revised programs showed that the students from the revised program felt better prepared for teaching, while the mentors also rated them as better prepared. Comments during interviews with mentors in the revised program underlined the importance of increased communication between the university and the schools, as well as the possibility to make input to the program (the flexibility with practice assignments). The earlier university-based tasks were considered inflexible and not suitable for the day-to-day work in class. This

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flexibility also resulted in revised practicum handbooks. The conclusion Lynn and Smith make is that partnership has to include shared decision-making in an integrated organization, which also includes discussion of resource allocation.

An increased co-operation between university and schools could be perceived as a shift to practice, or rather a focus on practice. However, Reid (2011) argues that a shift to practice with ITE based at schools and a minimum of university is not a solution. With early entry to practice, and ITE based in schools, there is a risk that student teachers will have trouble reflecting about teaching due to lack of distance to their own experiences of school. The student teacher needs to take on a novice role and successively develop knowledge and skills to achieve the level of advanced beginner or competent performer (Dreyfus & Dreyfuss, 1980, 1986, 2004; Green, 2008, as cited in Reid, 2011).

A further critical discussion about university-based and school-based ITE is carried out by Beach and Bagley (2013) who argue that a shift to practice has some doubtful consequences. When they compare education reforms in England and Sweden they found that changes in England during the late 1970s, not always positive, have been introduced in Sweden later on, during the early 2000s. Their main focus is on whether a student teacher should participate as an apprentice and be trained to more or less execute directives in a curriculum (how) or be educated and able to critically scrutinize reforms and have a deeper knowledge of context of a curriculum and education as a political construct (why). In a historical overview Bagley and Beach present an early ITE in both countries which was to a higher degree practice and school-based, with a later, more formalized ITE in institutions where ITE became more theory-based.

The theories concerned not only how to become skillful in teaching subjects, but, here simplified, also concerned the role of school in society. According to Beach and Bagley there was a gradual de-theorizing of ITE in the 1970s in England, which was followed 30 years later in Sweden. The result is that student teachers are no longer required to have research skills and from a policy level there is less interest in investing in research to create a scientifically founded base for ITE. As Sjöberg (2011, as cited in Beach and Bagley, 2013) phrase it, there is a change in focus toward subject knowledge and skills in how to teach the subject, a competency-based teacher training, instead of support for critical thinking.

The short overview above shows that there are some lasting issues in ITE. The roles and responsibilities between staff at university or schools are not always clear, and not agreed on. Staff at both organizations dispute each other´s knowledge and competencies. In practical terms there is a problem if schools are widely dispersed when student teachers should have visits, while on the other hand some schools could be overloaded with student teachers. The place and amount of practice time in ITE is critically discussed and even ITE as such could have a low status at universities. Lastly the question of research, about what and with whom, is an issue of concern. Where there does seem to be agreement, even though reluctantly, is that staff at schools and universities have to co-operate and that policy writers have to acknowledge this need.

In the next section the re-organization of practicum at MDH is presented and shows if any of the abovementioned issues are addressed.

III. Are-Organized Practicum during ITE

a) Government Initiative

All school forms in Sweden have separate ITE, such as for preschool, kindergarten class and primary school, lower secondary and upper secondary (including adult education). When the current ITE was launched in 2011 an important change concerning practicums was already carried out (prop. 2009). First of all, the school–based practicums became formalized in course plans including content, learning goals and description of assessment to get ECTS. Secondly, the practicum period was reduced to 20 weeks (30 ECTS) during a teacher program, independently of whether ITE was aiming at work in preschool, compulsory school, upper secondary or with adults.

Earlier critical voices concerning how practicums were carried out (Skolverket 2007, Högskoleverket 2008:8R, and Lärarförbundet 2008 in Utbildnings departementet 2014) concerned student teachers placed in school forms not relevant for their future teaching and getting mentors without the relevant subject knowledge, while others were concerned that the placement could be changed too often during ITE. As a response to the critique a committee suggested that practicums should be strengthened by a system that involves selected “field schools” with mentors who had relevant supervision education (SOU 2008:109). The name “field schools” was introduced and an increased number of mentors attended supervision courses but there was no selection of schools. In spring 2014, the government offered financial subsidies, via the Ministry of Education, for reorganization of the practicum in ITE according to certain directives (SFS 2014:2). For institutions with approved applications the implementation of the reorganization was supposed to be carried out from autumn 2014 to spring 2019.

b) Local response

Due to the acceptance of the application for re-organizing practicums (Mälardalens högskola, 2014), the university will have a dual organization of practicums with field schools and practice schools. The organizers of K-12 shall select schools based on new criteria (SFS

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2014:2). The practice school should organize education matching the actual ITE offered and the student teachers should have their placement at the selected practice school during the main part of their practicum. The school should have at least six mentors who have participated in a supervision course comprising 7.5 ECTS for mentors, they should participate in a mentor work team at each school and have several student teachers. As there should be at least six mentors and several student teachers for each mentor there will be about 12 student teachers at one school. The consequence is a reduction of schools and an increase in the number of student teachers at each school. The placement of student teachers at practice schools started in autumn 2014 with 210 student teachers and is planned to comprise about 1,300 student teachers by 2018.

A contract is written between the university and the organizers of K-12 where roles, responsibilities and payment to organizers of K-12 is settled. The choice of practice schools was carried out by the organizers of K-12, which guaranteed that the criteria mentioned above were met. The university offers mentor education comprising 7.5 ECTS. The practicum courses are organized by the university, and teachers and mentors should follow and contribute to the development of the student teachers during practicum. These teachers should aid the mentors in the assessment of the practicum. There is now a possibility for mentors (or other teachers at schools) to have a combination assignment, working in school as well as at university. This combination assignment is also meant to encourage collaborative research. A special center at the university, the Mälardalen competence center, will organize open lectures and support increased research where the practice schools should be engaged.

c) Practicum courses

There are three practicum courses within ITE irrespective of which school form the student teacher is going to work in. The course plan includes content, learning goals and directives for assessment. The work team at the university consists of a teacher responsible for the course and course teachers. Teachers visit the practice school during the three practicum courses, and have a three-party dialogue (student teacher, mentor and teacher) as part of the assessment of the student teachers. The teachers should also lead seminars with student teachers and mentors in midcourse. All student teachers receive a handbook for practicum, in which the three courses during practicum are presented. They document their learning process in this book, and the mentors write comments about their process. This document is subsequently given to the responsible course teacher, who is responsible for the final assessment of each course after a concluding seminar at the university, to which the mentor is invited.

In summary, the status of practice could be perceived as increased when the practice was organized in a formal course since the introduction of 2011 ITE. The remaining problems are some already presented in the earlier research, while some seem to be in the Swedish context. The supposed lack of skill among the mentors is addressed both in offering courses and in the demand that mentors must participate in the course. The selection criteria addresses the problem of a large number of schools, which are now clearly reduced. But the selected schools are not necessarily close to the university, so a "visiting problem" can continue. A demand for separate work team with mentors at school and central contact persons from the organizers of K-12 could be perceived as strengthening of the practice organization. The organization is also strengthened by administrative support to the implementation.

d) Administrative support to the project

During the application period in spring 2014 there was a coordination group. The group consisted of one professor, an administrator responsible for ITE, the leader from MKL, one representative from the practice work team at MDH and a project leader (earlier member of the practice work team).

During autumn 2014 the participants in the coordination group changed. A new work team was created for practice with a leader and two coordinators. The leader for the work team also became the new project leader. The administrator for ITE continued and an additional administrator for placement during practice was aligned. The leader from MKL also continued. The researcher made observations during these meetings in 2014 and also reported from the study to the participants.

During autumn 2014 it became clear that the coordination group did not have any mandate to make decisions, as a steering group was lacking. The coordination group was dissolved and instead a steering group was created in 2015. It consists of the manager for the department, two professors, a representative from organizers of K-12 and the leader from MKL. The project leader is always adjunct to the meetings. In practice the manager of the department is the one with last say in all issues. The researcher does not observe, but only reports to the steering group.

IV. Method

When the application for re-organization of student teaching from MDH was written it also included that the implementation should be followed by one or more researchers. That is, this study is part of an ongoing research study concerning the implementation of the reform in a local context.

In a first step an ex-ante evaluation was carried out by the author during 2014 (Niklasson, 2015). The

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ex-ante evaluation with timeline, logic model and SWOT analysis suggested limitations and possibilities for change (van der Knaap, 2011). The logic model was constructed based on boxes for resources/input, activities, outputs, as well as immediate, intermediate, long-term, and ultimate outcomes for the participants (the longitudinal goals concerning change) (Holliday, 2014). In a second step a SWOT analysis (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats) (Cojocariu, Lazar, Nedeff and Lazar, 2014; Iucu and Platis, 2012) was carried out. The empirical data used for the timeline, logic model and SWOT analysis were texts concerning the forthcoming practicum (SFS 2014:2; Utbildnings-departementet 2014; Mälardalens högskola, 2014) and observations during meetings with the planning committee.

The timeline, logic model and SWOT analysis were then used for critical discussions with the administrators working with the re-organization of practicums in ITE (Fielden, Rusch, Masinda, Sands, Frankish, & Evoy, 2007; Poon, Leung Wing-sea, Louie, & Vergel de Dios, 2013). The administrators included the first project leader (only in the first group meeting), the project leader/leader of the practicum work team, the two coordinators for practicums, the administrator for placement and the leader for MKL.

Before the group interviews the respondents got the text with timeline, logic plan and SWOT analysis to read. Two group interviews were carried out in winter 2015. The timeline and logic plan were discussed during the first group meeting and the SWOT analysis during the second group meeting. The meetings took place in conference rooms at the university and lasted one and a half hours. The group interviews were transcribed verbatim.

All respondents were informed about the research assignment and that the research applied ethic rules according to the Swedish Research Council (Vetenskapsrådet, 2011). That is, they participate voluntarily, they are informed about the aim of the study, and their individual answers should not be traceable.

The data is analyzed in two separate steps. First the data from the group interviews were repeatedly read and then summarized in the results section. The presentation is in sequence in accordance with how the timeline, logic plan and SWOT analysis were discussed. An additional analysis is carried out in the Discussion based on which perspective of ITE the challenges and solutions contribute to: apprentice, training or education. The additional analysis is thereby a contribution to a critical discussion about practicums and ITE.

V. Results

The results are presented in accordance with sequencing of the timeline, logic plan and SWOT analysis. For each section the suggestions from the author are stated first, after which the group discussion starts. If the authors' suggestions are reintroduced it will be clarified in the paragraph. MDH will be referred to as "university."

a) Revision of the timeline

The suggested timeline for the project consisted of three phases (Niklasson, 2015). Spring 2014 was regarded as the first phase with application, initial contact with organizers of K-12, letter of intent and a dual admission to the course for mentors. Autumn 2014 was suggested as a second phase with implementation of the re-organization and realization of the training for the mentors. In a third phase, 2015-2018, the organization was expected to be established as well as the course for mentors.

The idea of autumn 2014 as implementation time was not perceived as correct by the group. Even though a contract was written and the student teacher had chosen the practice schools, only the student teachers in the preschool program had completed their practice teaching. There was also a change as schools are added and deleted in the practicum organization. The implementation was instead regarded as ongoing until spring 2019. It is not until all student teachers have placement in the field schools that the implementation could be regarded as accomplished. In general the concept established was not used as the practicum organization would be constantly changing.

Then the question was raised about what actually was "established": was it a model, an organization, a concept or an idea? It could be perceived that the concept of practice schools will be established, but never the organization, as it always changes. Instead the concept of "operational idea" could be used. Then it could be perceived that a concept was implemented both in theory and in practice during 2019 when the new criteria will be met (six mentors with supervising education, 12 student teachers, fewer schools, etc.).

The change is not necessarily a question of geographical distance from the university, as some organizers are located far from it (one hour), but to a higher degree of a combination of meeting the new criteria and access to good transport facilities. The consequence is anyway that few rural schools will be practice schools. They will not be able to meet the criteria with six mentors.

b) A revised logic plan

The first logic plan (Niklasson, 2015) regarded national level and local level. Challenge/opportunity, resources, activities and desired change were suggested. As it is the same implementation case, some repetition is unavoidable.

On the national level challenges/opportunities were presented as practicum-related problems in ITE. The resource was national financing, the activities were directives for application, information about acceptance

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and a potential follow up. The desired change was quality assurance of practicums in ITE.

After a first glance, the group had some comments regarding the national level. Those in the group who had already been engaged in practicum issues wanted to underline that the quality problem in practicums was a problem from a national perspective. The local practicum got positive reviews from students and also from national inspections. The declining results from Swedish students in the PISA testing could be a major incentive for this national initiative, "better teachers will lead to better school results." There was a suggestion during the latest ITE reform in 2011 that an ITE model from Finland should be introduced, much like practice schools, which was not accepted by the Swedish organizers of ITE. This idea has now been re-introduced.

The change could also be perceived as a response to a "big city area" problem where it has been harder to get placements, and student teachers had to practice in school forms where they would not be teaching. Placements in school forms is more strictly regulated in the practicum school organization.

On the local level the challenge/opportunity was presented as sustaining and improving quality of practicums in ITE and participation in a national initiative (Niklasson, 2015). The group agreed about this, but added that the change is perceived as a development project at the local level. The financing also contributed to the interest and there is hope for an increase in status, as the university was selected among several applicants. This status could also be attributed to the schools involved.

This description of the local practicum is rather positive, but not everyone at the university was positive about the change. Why change a system that is functioning well? It was also a fear that the staff at school would think that some schools are A-schools, which are practicum schools, and some are in a B-group, with excluded schools. Due to "exclusion" it could be harder to recruit staff as the student teachers are not familiar with the school. One response to this issue will be invitation to all schools concerning open lectures about research.

The suggested resources in the logic model were based on the earlier timeline with three phases (Niklasson, 2015). These phases were already dismantled during the earlier discussion about the timeline, and now a division was made between the application phase and the next phase, the implementation. In the application phase the resources were a work team with a project leader, with the caveat that the vice chancellor had approved a re-organization and an affiliated researcher. There were no comments from the group regarding this description.

During the first suggested implementation phase the resources were a coordinating team, a project leader, an affiliated researcher, a doctoral student, teachers for the supervising course and local and national financing. The group commented that some changes had been made in early 2015. Contact was made with administrative managers from organizers of K-12 in preparation for creating an external reference group. Instead of a coordinating team there was a steering group and the work team for practicum could be added instead as a resource. The center for further education, MKL, was also mentioned as a resource.

In addition, the structure with contact persons from each organizer of K-12 should be mentioned. In this case the contact persons are from all organizers, not only the practice school organization. Successively, there will be fewer contact persons, and they will have an increased number of student teachers. The contact person, in turn, works with the leaders of the practicum work team at each school. This leader could actually work with mentors from different schools as a practicum work team could comprise several schools (most oftenpreschools). There are also schools that have deliberately teamed up because they are located in areas with different socio-economic situations. With this cooperation the student t eachers could be placed at one school and visit the other. A few schools also have staff working in combination assignments, partly at school, partly at the university, who are also perceived as resources.

A professional advisory board for preschool with participants from organizers of K-12 and staff from MDH is established. There will be one for compulsory school and one for upper secondary school. These boards are considered resources.

The first suggested activities to reach the aim (Niklasson, 2015) were a work team, writing application and assigning an affiliated researcher. All organizers of K-12 were invited to get information. Letters of intent were written and signed for the actual participating organizers of K-12. After the letters of intent, regular agreements were signed with actual participants (as the vice chancellor of the university had decided that the re-organization should take place, irrespective of national financing). Supervision courses were announced and carried out. The comment from the group regarding this first suggestion was that it should be underlined that there is a duplicationof the supervision course.

The goal is to have at least six mentors having accomplished supervising education with at least two student teachers. The mentors should be gathered in a practicum work team. The field school system should be ended. There should be combination assignments where staff from school work at the university (Niklasson, 2015). The comment on this from the group is that the goals will not be reached during 2015. Some mentors have just started their supervising education and not all schools have 12 student teachers. It is not clear what "at the same time" means when a mentor

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should have at least two student teachers "at the same time." Are these student teachers from the same group in a program or could they come from different groups? One comment was that it will be two students coming each term who are assigned to this mentor. The issue continued to be unclear.

One activity should be added and that is the open seminars where research is presented arranged by MKL. There is also an initiative taken for funding of research concerning practice schools where research teams can apply for funding. This announcement will be published in 2015 by MKL.

During the discussion some suggestions were made concerning information activities, such as logo, information material and maps showing the inclusion and exclusion of schools.

The suggested activities (Niklasson, 2015) should lead to a desired change such as fewer schools, increased number of student teachers at each school and practicum work teams with trained supervisors. This description was perceived by the group as correct and partly accomplished. Here a comment was made concerning quality, that the mentors now will have a supervising course was suggested as an increased quality. Another issue was discussed about what could be perceived as result and effect. The example was "fewer schools" which could be perceived as a short-term result, but also as an effect.

Another suggested change (Niklasson, 2015) was that the stakeholders in ITE reported increased satisfaction with practicums. This raised a question in the group about what the stakeholders are satisfied with and what the baseline is concerning this issue. One important stakeholder is the student teacher group and their perceived satisfaction. Then students in the same semester should be compared, not the total groups. In addition the comparison has to be made after one semester as some leave early in the program.

One issue could be whether the student teachers pass the practicum course and how many times they fail before they pass. One comment was that this is a grey area because some student teachers drop out. This leads to the issue of comparing differences in the number of students accomplishing the ITE. Especially in the ITE for upper secondary it would be positive if increased cooperation between mentors and the university would lead to fewer dropouts. Dropouts during ITE is one issue, but another is dropping out of in-service teaching, the retention rate. It would be a positive effect if student teachers from practicum schools were more inclined to stay and teach as the practicum experience led to a better preparation for everyday work at school.

ITE is financed nationally and an amount of money is distributed via organizers of ITE to organizers of K-12. A desired change was suggested (Niklasson, 2015) that mentors at practicum schools are granted the prerequisite for developing pedagogic work. This suggestion started a discussion in the group about how the money to the schools is used and the impression was that it was often used for substitute staff when mentors attended seminars or courses. The increased cooperation between schools and university should be underlined, and an open question was raised, what is the effect of this? The group agreed that this was a desired change. The re-organization will have as an effect that an "infrastructure" be created for starting common school development.

Another issue concerned whether the researcher from the university works together with practice schools concerning research. A question was raised whether there is evidence that this actually leads to development work and increased results. Development work could be the aim of research, but not necessarily increased results. On the other hand, it could be perceived as positive if researchers are engaged in school development, which in turn can strengthen the professional teacher identity and role in itself. A comment was made that when a researcher is engaged questions are asked and the staff has to reflect about everyday life in a manner which is not always possible to do, sometimes due to time limits. When an external researcher is engaged then someone is interested and it could increase a desire to develop pedagogic work.

A discussion followed about how the re-organization would affect student teachers and in the long run the pupils. An important positive effect could be that all staff (school, university) is more inclined to perceive that ITE is a common endeavor and all are parts in a greater unity. This could be a question of identity.

In the national documents it was implied that this re-organization could affect the status of teachers (Niklasson, 2015). The group commented that it would be a positive effect if mentors in practice school would perceive that they have an increased status, that their work is acknowledged. It will be very hard to measure status in general for teachers and the mentors at practice schools, so a suggestion is to ask them about their perception. From experience there will be an abundance of articles in mass media in the future about the "bad situation at school and about how unskilled teachers are."

In the end a discussion started in the group about the national intention. Not all organizers of ITE are re-organizing, and those who do re-organize practicums all have different models for the re-organization. Therefor it is vital to call this project a trial. Some in the group perceive that the intention is that the idea should spread to all organizers of ITE, others maintained that it is a trial and the result will show if there will be further implementation.

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c) A revised SWOT analysis

In the earlier ex-ante evaluation (Niklasson, 2015) the SWOT analysis was used as a final discussion of the implementation. This final discussion could also be read as a summary, and as mentioned above, some repetition is unavoidable.

In the first SWOT analysis (Niklasson, 2015) a division was made between internal strengths and weaknesses and external opportunities and threats. First the group discussed how to define what was internal and what was external. An agreement was made that sometimes it is hard, but essentially activities arranged by or within the university were considered internal. In addition, an internal weakness could also be perceived as a threat and during the discussion this wording will sometimes also be used for internal weaknesses. The group also discussed within which time-frame the SWOT analysis should be carried out, was it the current situation or was it the future? A suggestion was that internal was to a certain degree regarded as the current situation, while external was to a higher degree regarded as in the future.

The suggested internal strengths (Niklasson, 2015) were an existing practicum organization, that no arguments had come up showing resistance, that an application was written and accepted, and that contacts were made with organizers of K-12 with letter of intent and agreement. Finally an organization for the implementation had been devised.

A comment was made from the group that earlier there had been internal opposition. The earlier practicum work team was not in favor of changing an organization which worked well. The remaining staff from that group have accepted the decision and are working according to the directives. The organization with support from university level and department manager level, a project leader, the change to a steering group and an external reference group were perceived as internal strengths. The practice work team with partly new members has found its structure and is prepared to work with continuing issues. The communication within the practicum organization and externally is open. Any doubt about the possibility of re-organization has faded away. There is also an interest from the researchers to be engaged.

Another internal strength mentioned was that the entire practicum organization is changed, compared to other organizers of ITE who change for some groups. Now there could be a discussion for some time about differences in the parallel system, but the intention is clear.

The number of courses in Higher Education depends on national assignments or contract education. The directives from the vice chancellor have been to prioritize programs and not offer too many separate courses. This could lead to a better status for ITE as its importance is strengthened.

The suggested internal weaknesses (Niklasson, 2015) were that there was a lack of information to the work team about the process of application and its content, lack of examples of what the achieved higher quality could consist of, unclear goals and a risk that decisions concerning use of money are not being supportive concerning implementation of the change.

The group was concerned about how to distinguish between what was an issue because of the re-organization and what was an earlier perceived problem. An example is field studies during theory courses, which is not actually an issue for the practicum work team. On the other hand, if the practice schools think that the shorter visits create a problem, then the cooperation/partnership is affected and suddenly an issue for the team. So there are a lot of “gray areas” to handle. One suggested way was to present theory courses with field studies on the website.

The external communication about the change was perceived as more effective than within MDH. There is a supposed line of communication from the practicum work team to a program council (for each school form) which should inform all staff in the respective programs, which do not seem to function that way. Staff working in the programs are not always informed. This led to a discussion about the status of practicum within the teacher program, which was perceived as low.

The use of money was commented on as the application is written in a detailed way and suggests roles and activities which have to be funded. At the same time it is stated in the application that the suggestion are not financed by the practicum funds. This creates a dilemma.

The lack of examples of achieved higher quality was discussed and could be handled if the stakeholders could be engaged in this issue. The quality issue is complicated as student teachers placed at field schools should have the same quality as those placed at practice schools (which should have increased quality). This also creates a dilemma.

Suggested external opportunities (Niklasson, 2015) were the already existing cooperation between organizers of K-12 and the university, that the university was perceived as reliable, that letters of intent were signed, that there was no total change in the practicum organization, that hundreds of mentors are already educated and that there is national funding.

There are several organizers of K-12 in line to become partners, which was perceived as an external opportunity by the group. Several organizers of K-12 have also expressed a positive expectation concerning school development due to increased research. There is an understanding among the organizers of K-12 that this re-organization will last for several years.

The suggested external threats (Niklasson, 2015) were uncertainty whether the information has reached all levels of organizers of K-12, difficulties in

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explaining the reason behind the change externally, not conveying examples of expected achievements, which can lead to lack of motivation, and exclusion of some schools, which might create perturbation among the organizers of K-12.

The group reminded that an initial information about the amount of money to the schools was changed in a later phase, and the sum was lowered. This was perceived as a possible threat to the credibility of the university. In addition the university has to present an attractive activity which is financed by the reduced sum. On the other hand, the schools are getting extra implementation funds during the first year based on number of students.

The group commented that a another threat is that some organizers withdraw from the cooperation or that it will be hard to find volunteer representatives in the different groups of stakeholders which are created (such as professional advisory board and external reference group).

An additional threat is that the communication about the re-organization has not reached all levels, as some central contact persons, headmasters and mentors have not understood the design. In autumn 2014 student teachers could contact mentors who did not know that the school was a practice school. Other mentors called the university and asked why they did not get any student teachers. More information, such as a film with presentation of practice school organization is suggested. It became clear that some organizers of K-12 also prepared information.

Another threat is that there will be too few mentors, or that organizers of K-12 do not provide the resources that the mentors need. It is possible to compare offers between different organizers of ITE as some have an organization which could be perceived as "better" (money directly to mentors).

The timing of practicum during a semester has also long been an issue. Sometimes it is placed over holidays when the pupils are not in school. Sometime practicum overlaps between several groups of student teachers, that is, a large group of student teachers is present. This is due to organizational issues at the university, but could lead to too heavy burden on the mentors. On the other hand, the concentration of student teachers is a vital issue. In the earlier organization a mentor could have two student teachers with one visiting during autumn and the other during spring. The idea is to have a continuum of student teachers.

VI. Discussion

Earlier literature (Darling-Hammond, 1999; Vick, 2006; Moran et al., 2009; Reid, 2011) shows that the practicum and its place in ITE is a constant issue to discuss for researchers and for deciding on reforms for politicians. During the implementation of a reorganization of practicums in a national and local context it was possible to find both opportunities and challenges according to the administrators working with the re-organization of the practicum.

Based on discussions on timeline, logic plan for the implementation and a SWOT analysis it became clear that some of the earlier challenges during ITE, already present for a century or more, are still at hand. Even though there is progress as well. The issue with widely scattered schools (Vick, 2006) is partly addressed with the six mentors with adequate supervising education criteria which limits the amount of schools, especially in rural areas.

The compulsory education for mentors seem to address an earlier issue concerning mentors´ skills. The often discussed tension between staff at school and staff at university (Reid, 2011; Lynch and Smith, 2012) seems not to be the biggest challenge, instead it is risk of not assigning enough mentors with required education, unfavorable prerequisites for mentors at schools, problems with reaching out internally and externally with information and disputed clarity in how funding should be used. These are some of the perceived issues. In addition the status of ITE at the university and for practicum in ITE are issues considered worth noting (Elstad, 2010).

The new practicum organization includes a renewed interest in research, but not necessarily in the way Beach and Bagley (2013) address the issue. Just like Reid (2011), they are interested in whether the focus is to train student teachers to know how to teach a subject, an apprentice perspective, or also to reflect and carry out a critical discussion about the teaching and the education system in itself, an education perspective. The reformed ITE from 2011 did shorten the practicum time, so in that aspect there is an increase in amount of time for theory. But it is another issue whether the theory content is subject theory (Sjöberg, 2011, as cited in Beach and Bagley, 2013) or theory that is useful, for example to take part in public debate. Earlier studies have shown that inspiring stakeholders in education, such as teachers, to take part in critical discussions about issues concerning education is a difficult matter (Hilton, Assuncão Flores and Niklasson, 2013).

However, within the practicum organization there are aspects that could support a critical stance. The open seminars with presentation of the latest research can open a window for student teachers, mentors and teacher to jointly listen and reflect. In addition the concentration of student teachers and mentors in combination with school development projects could lead to an increased interest in reflection and critical discussions. This direction also supports the professional development schools argued for by Darling-Hammond (1995, Darling-Hammond, Bullmaster and Cobb, 1995)

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Finally, when is the practicum re-organization accomplished? From the literature review and the findings from the data collection, the current re-organization can be preliminary accomplished, but the role of the practicum in ITE seems to be a long-term issue.

VII. Limitations of the Study

The study is limited in several ways. The data collection was carried out in the first phase of the implementation of the re-organized practicum in ITE. By that there are many uncertainties in how the implementation will proceed. As such the opportunities and challenges are limited to this initial phase. As ITE varies due to national context, especially concerning whether or not subject studies are completed before pedagogic studies and practicum, the findings cannot be generalized. The findings show that an initial picture of mostly positive perspectives is now enriched with some earlier and current doubts concerning implementation. The group interview could therefore be supplemented with results from individual interviews with the administrator as this could reveal even further critical insights.

VIII. Conclusion

The opportunities and challenges concerning re-organization of practicum outlined in the article seems to align with an understanding that ITE and especially practicums within ITE are a matter of constant dispute and reform. Every time period is affected by national policy, even international policy, and staff at school and universities have to be prepared for future changes too. An insight that the ITE and its practicum aspect is a construction based on research, but also on political decisions, is essential for retaining engaged staff at school and at universities.

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