Turning Conventional Teacher Education Clinical Practice Assessment on its Head

A COVID-19 Inspired Response to Practicum Assessment

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Abstract

Teacher education, like any other professional preparation programme, requires that its candidates be engaged in authentic learning and assessment experiences that represent what they will do when they enter the real world of practice while gauging their level of readiness for the field. This paper examines the use of two strategies already available to us as a part of our pedagogical toolkit in teacher education programmes – microteaching and demonstration teaching – which were co-opted as our 'remote emergency response' to the need for an alternative approach to the assessment of the practicum following the closure of schools due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The use of these taken-for-granted and sometimes misunderstood peda-gogical tools allowed me to critically revisit and rediscover their purposes, potentials, and possibilities as assessment strategies in the practicum. The paper concludes with a recommendation for diversifying the methods used for assessing the various competencies targeted in the practicum.

Keywords: teacher education, practicum assessment, pedagogical strategies

Introduction

OVER THE PAST FOUR DECADES, TEACHER EDUCATION HAS changed as a consequence of the reform efforts that were directed at strengthening the knowledge base of professional practice (Shulman [1987] 2004; Darling-Hammond and Snowden 2005). These efforts were part of a larger and unrelenting move to improve the professional status of teaching by first targeting teacher education where the formal process of becoming a teacher begins. Significant changes have been made to both the conceptual and structural framework of teacher education programmes in order to address the many shortcomings which were manifest in teacher preparation. Chief among the problems was the perceived and real disconnect between theoretical and practical preparation. There was a need, for instance, to ensure that the learning and assessment experiences of prospective teachers were both authentic and substantial.

Among the many critiques of traditional teacher education were those related to the length and sequencing of the student teaching experience which, in a few colleges was confined to last for "six or eight weeks for one-half a day" while very often being the last of the courses to be taken by students (Cronin 1983, 182). The lack of coherence among the different courses across programmes, exemplified by the lack of a strong link between theory and practical experiences (Feiman-Nemser 2001), and the overly theoretical nature of programmes (Hammerness et al. 2005) were other shortcomings commonly cited in the literature. The investigations into teacher education carried out by Garry Hogan served to confirm these and other earlier critiques, leading him to conclude that programmes were structurally 'disjoined and disparate' (Hogan 2002, 2004, 2005, cited in Loughran 2006).

It was against this background of wide-ranging criticism of teacher education programmes that the reform initiatives of the late 1980s and thereafter were undertaken (Cochran-Smith and Fries 2005; Darling-Hammond and Snowden 2005). They were aimed at removing the various structural weaknesses identified, thereby building both conceptual and structural coherence among all components of such programmes. In our local university context, we were not left unaffected by the changes that were taking place at the international level. While we took note of the developments and incorporated new ideas into our course content, the structure of the programmes remained intact. As such, a comprehensive review of the practicum component of the undergraduate three-year teacher education

programme was undertaken and completed between the academic years 2014/2015 and 2016/2017. It was in the practicum, its organisation and implementation that some of the weaknesses expressed about teacher education programmes were most evident. These included the inadequate linkages across academic, professional and foundational or core educational courses, and between course work and field experiences. The field experience was therefore the component most in need of change as it was not effectively "organized around an explicit and thoughtful mission and conceptual framework" (Feiman-Nemser 2001, 1021).

The revised practicum component was in the third year of its implementation when the COVID-19 pandemic led to the closure of schools. This caused a further re-examination of the purposes of the practicum in the overall preparation and assessment of student teachers occasioned by their inability to engage in the face-to-face practicum after March 2020. The assessment exercises could not be undertaken in the conventional sense. The assessment of the practicum component was subsequently carried out using traditional pedagogical strategies, microteaching and demonstration teaching, which were not only repurposed to serve as assessment tools but to be used under remote emergency conditions, utilising a blend of synchronous and asynchronous methods. The search for an alternative to the assessment of the practicum highlighted the need to reconsider how student teachers' practical pedagogical development could be better facilitated and assessed on a continuum and through the in-house practical and school-based experiences.

Statement of Purpose

The specific focus of this paper is on the practicum component of teacher education which is widely regarded as that critical or core element of teacher education where the practice of teaching takes place and is assessed in the physical and social settings of schools and classrooms. The paper takes a contemplative look at how the changes which COVID-19 precipitated in the assessment phase of the course "Initial School Based Experience: The Practicum", have led to a reconsideration of the way in which the practicum is conventionally assessed in the programme. While the situation created a challenge, it provided the opportunity for the School of Education (SOE), at The University of the West Indies, Mona Campus, to revisit two longstanding but variously used and understood pedagogical strategies to complete the assessment of the field experience component of the course which

also includes a teacher portfolio with entries linked to the practicum experience.

In outlining the different assessment options that were considered before arriving at the final iteration of the alternative assessment developed for the practicum component, this paper examines and reflects on microteaching and demonstration teaching as additional assessment tools in the overall assessment of the practicum. The central questions to be addressed are

1.   What are the purposes, potentials and possibilities of microteaching and demonstration teaching as additional assessment strategies for the practicum?
2.   What specific teaching competencies should they target in order to provide a more holistic picture of student teachers' professional learning at the point of assessment?

Unpacking the Role of the Practicum in the Curriculum of Teacher Education

Student teaching has been the mainstay of teacher education from its origin in normal schools. It remains a feature of teacher preparation programmes as normal schools morphed into teachers' colleges and as colleges were absorbed into universities (Labaree 2008; Smith and Lev-Ari 2005). These structural changes were accompanied by a shift in emphasis from a focus on practical preparation, typical of the normal schools and colleges, to a focus on theory when teacher preparation became a part of higher education (Smith and Lev-Ari 2005).

As it is currently organised and conceptualised across teacher education programmes and contexts, the practicum is the place for prospective teachers to interact with students and to practice the teaching skills learnt in their professional courses, integrated with the content knowledge garnered over time but significantly expanded from their academic courses. The practicum is also the place where prospective teachers' knowledge of learners and the learning process will gradually inform their overall pedagogy which, when it integrates the content and pedagogical skills, is referred to as pedagogical content knowledge, a term coined by Lee Shulman ([1987] 2004). These skills can only be effectively developed over time in relation to the content being taught and in consideration of the strategies used to foster learning and to gain and maintain students' attention while managing their classroom behaviours. If these are the chief elements of theoretical preparation, it means that the practicum is the place for these knowledge, skills,

understandings, and overall teaching competencies to be demonstrated through actual practice.

Zeichner (1996) pointed to research that "has clearly shown that field experiences are important occasions for teacher learning rather than mere times for teacher candidates to demonstrate or apply things previously learned" (cited in Zeichner 2010, 484). The research evidence accumulated over time about the field experience as an important site of teacher learning, has led some teacher educators to suggest that ". . . clinical experiences should be the central focus of pre-service teacher education from which everything else in a program emanates" (Turney et al. 1985; Ball and Forzani 2009, cited in Zeichner 2010, 484–485).

The relevance of the field experience is frequently echoed by student teachers, often cited in the research literature as rating ". . . their student experience as the single most beneficial and worthwhile segment of their teacher education programme" (Griffith 2004/5, 52). Myers and Simpson (1998) confirm the real significance of the practicum as the site for learning about teaching in remarking that ". . . much of what teachers learn about teaching is 'by teaching and from teaching'" (cited in Loughran 2006, 30). The relevance attached to the field experience is further evidenced in Hollins and Guzman's (2005) observation that

> Field experiences have long been identified by both teacher educators and prospective and experienced teachers as a major, if not the most important, part of preservice teacher preparation. It is broadly assumed that field experiences are the key components of preparation where prospective teachers learn to bridge theory and practice, work with colleagues and families, and develop pedagogical and curricular strategies for meeting the learning needs of a diverse population. (493)

A Revised and Restructured Practicum Programme: The Mona Model

Though the field experience is often lauded for its significance in the learning-to-teach process, it is also that element of teacher education that has been consistently criticised in relation to its organisation and implementation. Lack of uniformity in how schools and teachers contribute to the learning-to-teach experience of prospective teachers is also a common weakness across programmes, irrespective of the context. The initial teacher education undergraduate programme offered by the School of Education, The UWI, Mona Campus, was similarly beset by organisational and conceptual shortcomings which stimulated a review of the

practicum component commencing in the academic year 2014/2015. This review was completed and implemented by the academic year 2017/2018 and accomplished the twin goals of keeping abreast with developments taking place at the international level in teacher education programmes while introducing well-needed changes in the overall programme structure.

The changes were designed to produce a more robust and well-coordinated practicum which would not only articulate with local standards of practice as outlined by the University Council of Jamaica (UCJ) but also respond to the conceptual and structural changes which were taking place in teacher education programmes worldwide. The rationale provided in the School of Education's (2017) programme proposal captured the local readiness and global reach of the revised practicum:

> The Bachelor of Education Programme is designed to prepare initial teacher education students for the contemporary 21st century classroom and is intended to provide professionally prepared teachers for the Jamaican classroom primarily though such teachers will be able to teach in a regional and global context based on the quality of the preparation they will receive…
>
> In recognition of the diversities of 21st century classrooms and students, the overarching goal of the newly revised programme is to lay the groundwork for its graduates to acquire the *habits of mind* of a reflective educator, one who will be committed to accommodating for these diversities, will be responsive to student's learning, wellbeing and continued progress while attending to their own personal/professional development as life-long learners. (3)

This revision saw substantial changes in the articulation of the five practicum-based courses starting from year one through to year three and was presented as a response to the developments which were taking place in teacher education globally. The changes made it possible to show the connectedness of the practicum to the theoretical courses in all the specialist academic and professional content areas, along with the core education courses. It was also now possible to demonstrate the integrated and spiral nature of the courses which constitute the practicum component across the three years of the programme.

The conceptual framework of the practicum-based courses was hitherto loosely held together; the framework existed in fragmentary documentation and in the memory of a few members of the SOE who were associated with the programme from the early years of its existence. Knowledge of the content of the courses and how they related to each other was confined to those who delivered them, for

the most part. Specialist subject options operated in isolation from each other, coming together only in the practicum courses which all students from the different subject specialisations did in common. It was within the context of these courses that the disparities in preparation became evident, even as the common focus on other aspects of teacher preparation within options was also evident. Much of the teacher education literature bemoans the tendency of programmes to leave student teachers to establish the linkages between academic content courses, professional and core educational courses, and their student teaching courses (Feiman-Nemser 2001; Hoban 2004; Darling-Hammond and Snowden 2005). In arguing that the "key to quality teacher education is to have a coherent conceptual orientation with integrated elements", Hoban (2004) articulated that

> a conceptual framework that promotes a fragmented teacher education program does not complement the nature of teaching as a complex profession. Moreover packaging educational knowledge into independent courses presents the curriculum as a jigsaw puzzle and leaves it to students to integrate the content so that they have to construct their own 'big picture' of the education landscape. This piecemeal approach to teacher education does not embody the dynamics of a real classroom. Conversely an acceptance of the complex nature of teaching necessitates a more integrated approach to the design of teacher education programs beyond a mechanistic training model.
>   . . . A view of the nature of teaching as a complex profession implies that a conceptual framework needs to be devised that focuses on the links among the elements and embodies the dynamics of real classrooms. (123–24)

A conceptual framework as suggested by Hoban (2004), and described as "the 'cornerstone' of a coherent program" (Howey 1990, cited in Feiman-Nemser 2001, 1023), provided the means by which the significant components or categories of knowledge offered in the programme could be identified and their relationship to the practicum explicitly shown. The framework also shows the points at which theoretical knowledge from courses is integrated with practical knowledge to provide opportunities for the practice and demonstration of teaching knowledge and skills among peers through in-house microteaching exercises. In addition, based on recommendations by reviewers from the Cave Hill and St. Augustine campuses of The UWI, specific attempts were made to show how field experiences are integrated in successive phases of the programme over the three years with increasing range and complexity to provide authentic learning and assessment opportunities. Both in-house and school-based clinical experiences are significant
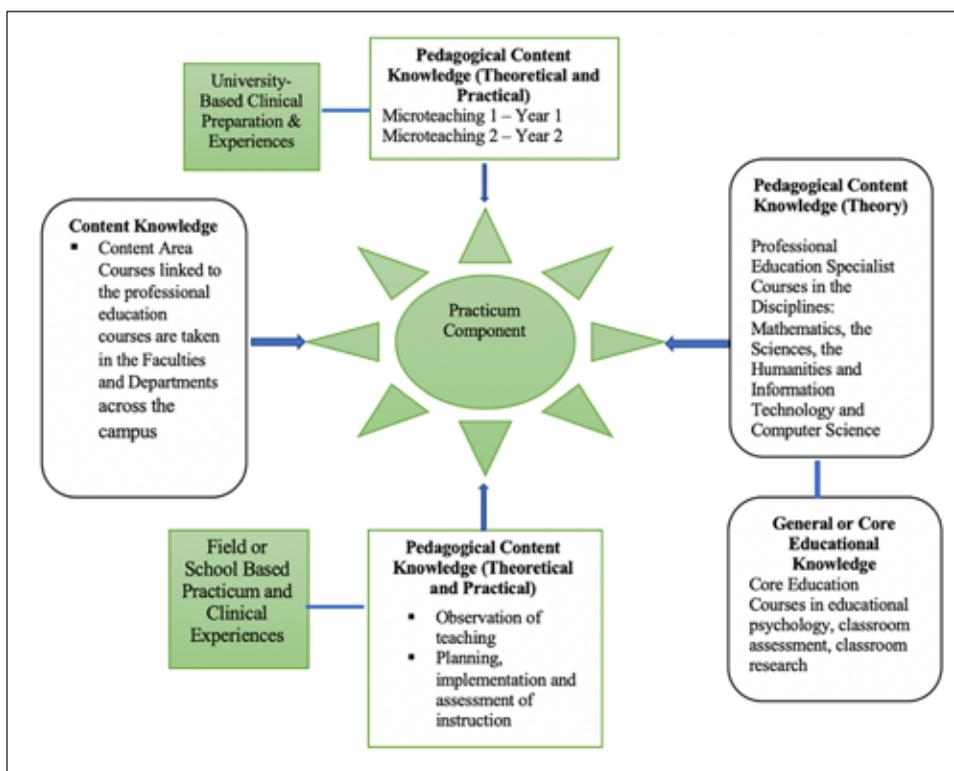
Figure 1a. Conceptual framework showing the different categories of knowledge – the knowledge base for teaching – around which the BEd programme is organised

points at which learning about teaching and teaching competencies are assessed.

A condensed version of the conceptual framework is presented in figure 1a to show the structure of the practicum and how it links with other elements of the overall programme, representing key aspects of the knowledge base for teaching as proposed by Lee Shulman in 1985 (Shulman [1987] 2004).

The categories of knowledge shown, represent what teachers should know and be able to do after pursuing a course of study in a teacher education programme with the understanding that these categories of knowledge will enlarge with practice over their career cycle. The figure illustrates that courses from all components of the programme contribute to the knowledge for teaching which is essential for practice. Figure 1b represents the structure of the practicum over the duration of the programme. It shows the three main components of the practicum, the horizontal and vertical organisation of the learning experiences prospective teachers acquire, as well as the expected learning outcomes for each main element of the practicum preparation.
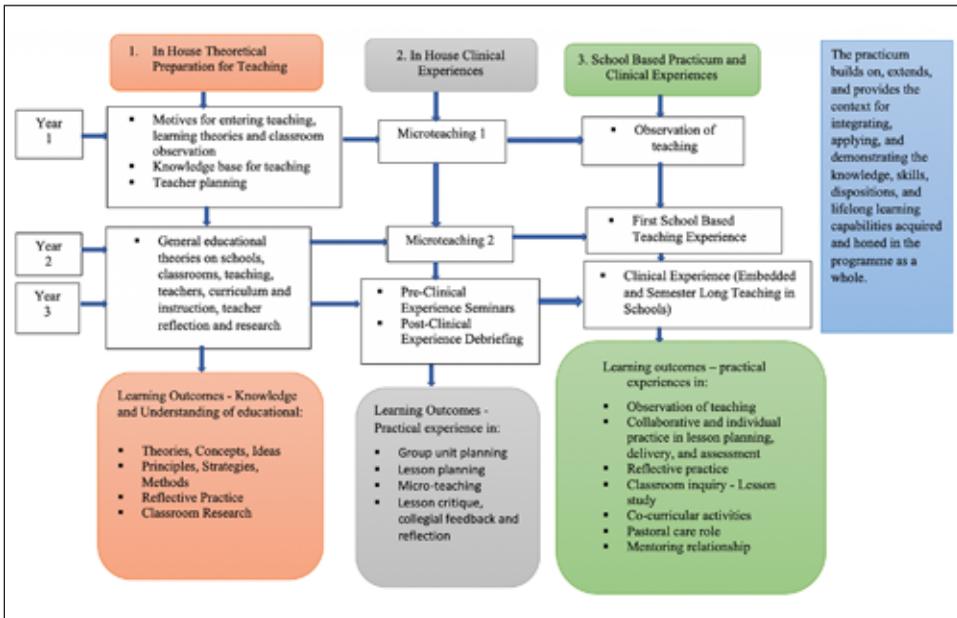
Figure 1b. Structural framework of The UWI School of Education (Mona) teacher education practicum (BEd 90 credits)

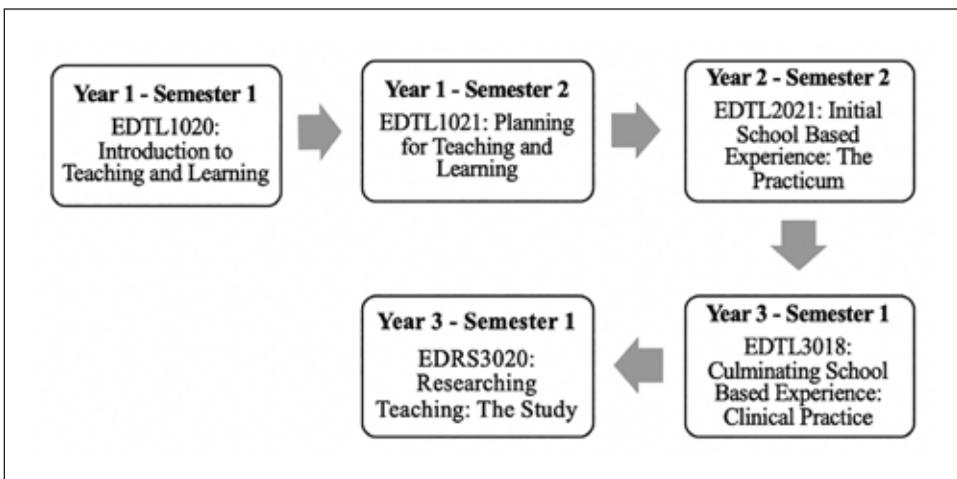Figure 2 shows the sequence of the five practicum-based courses over the three years.

Figure 2. The Practice of Education courses in the School of Education three-year degree programme

Table 1 summarises the content and assessment details of the five practicum-based courses while figure 3 outlines the teaching models which underpin the two school-based practicum courses – EDTL2021 and EDTL3018, done in years 2 and 3, respectively. It was EDTL2021, offered in Semester 2 of each academic year, that was derailed as a result of COVID-19 and for which alternative assessments were offered.

Table 1. Summary of the content and assessment components of the five practicum courses in the School of Education's three years' degree programme

Courses	University Based Component	School Based Component	Assessment
EDTL1020: Introduction to Teaching and Learning	Student teachers examine what is teaching, motives for entry, the sources of teachers' beliefs, theories of learning and the role of observation in learning to teach.	Classroom Observation over a two-week period	Classroom Observation Report and portfolio of entries linked to specific content of the course
EDTL1021: Planning for Teaching and Learning	Students are introduced to the core work of teaching – planning for students' learning. This is prefaced by an examination of the knowledge base for teaching and a consideration of the essential knowledge needed to carry out this core teaching function.	No School-Based Component	Teacher Portfolio Microteaching Exercise In-Course Test
EDTL2021: Initial School Based Experience: The Practicum	In the first six weeks of the semester, students examine schools as social/learning organization which includes school culture and climate, curriculum, and administrative structures. They review the instructional planning process and some key teaching roles such as teachers as instructional leaders and classroom managers.	Six weeks of teaching in placement schools. This includes classroom observation, co-planning, and co-teaching with the classroom teacher then peer teaching (two members of the cohort team teach)	Teacher Portfolio Classroom Teaching
EDTL3018: Culminating School Based Experience: Clinical Practice	Prior to the beginning of the school-based clinical experience, students are engaged in a series of seminars and workshops over a two- week period. These reinforce and extend previous learning in topics such as reflective practice, planning and classroom observation.	Ten weeks of teaching in placement schools	Teacher Portfolio Classroom Teaching
EDRS3020: Researching Teaching: The Study	This is a capstone research paper based on a teaching/learning research informed by research and follow up lessons done during the teaching period.	Linked to EDTL3018. Data for the Research Study are collected during the clinical practice period.	Research Study linked to the Practicum

EDTL2021: Initial School Based Experience: The Practicum Teaching Model Promoted for First Field Experience: Coteaching

Coteaching Model 1: Observation of Teaching: In the first two weeks of the practicum, student teachers observe the classroom teacher

Coteaching Model 2: Alternate Teaching: Student teachers plan and teach alongside clasroom teacher in alternating sequence

Coteaching Model 3: After observing, the planning and teaching alogside the cooperating teacher and planning with the, student teachers placed in pairs begin team teaching in the final three weeks

EDTL3018: Culminating School Basd Experience: Clinical Practice

Teaching Model Promoted for Second Field Experience: Independent Teaching and Collaborative Practice

Phase 1

In the early weeks of the field experience, teacher candidate plan and execute lesson independently

Phase 2

By week six of the field experience, teacher candidate in consultation with classroom teacher begin working on a research lesson to be taught individually but observed by both the classroom teacher and the clinical supervisor

Phase 3

Following the observation of the research lesson, teacher candidate receives feedback from classroom teacher and supervisor and use this feeeback to review the lesson plan and re-teach the lesson to another group or the same group

Figure 3. Teaching models used in the two school-based experience courses in the BEd Programme, School of Education, Mona

From the 'Conventional' to the 'Novel': COVID-19 and the Shift to Remote Teaching and Assessment

After three years of working with the revised practicum component of our initial teacher education undergraduate programme, the task of refining and reflecting on the changes is still ongoing and is characteristically fluid and emergent. Although some of the challenges which existed prior to the revision of the practicum, such as the placement of student teachers remain, the most insidious of the problems such as timetabling have been reduced considerably. The increased practicum hours, resulting from the revision, have led to the inclusion of non-instructional, teaching-related activities in the total number of credit hours to be satisfied by each student teacher. The COVID-19 pandemic, for all its catastrophic effects and its vice-like grip on every human endeavour, provided an opportunity to revisit, reflect on, and reconsider the assessment of the practicum component of the teacher education programme which, up to March 2020, was heavily dependent on the assessment of teaching in the clinical face-to-face setting of schools.

In the second week of March 2020 of what should have been the formal start of the practicum teaching in schools, the Jamaican government announced that the country had recorded its first known case of COVID-19 which the World Health Organization (WHO) had declared a pandemic. By the end of the week, the government ordered the closure of all schools (OPM Communications 2020). Similarly, The UWI announced the cessation of classes beginning Friday, March 13, 2020. In response to the closure of the university and acting in my capacity as the Practicum Coordinator for the School of Education, an email message was sent to the Option Coordinators to inform them that the students had been withdrawn from the practicum as of March 16, 2020. The coordinators of subject options were informed that, "We will be recalling our students from the practicum as of Monday March 16, 2020 until further notice. In the meantime, we will be considering how to address this in the best possible way. Please watch out for the update" (Email communication).

The Search for an Alternative to the Conventional Face-to-Face Assessment

In the immediate aftermath of the closure of the university, plans got underway to revise and make alternative arrangements for the assessment of courses which

could not be assessed in the traditional face-to-face examinations. In the case of field-based programmes, such as teacher education, student teachers could not be assessed in the conventional face-to-face setting of their placement schools. The one-month closure of the university was therefore used to reconfigure courses, rework assignments, and retool for remote delivery. Towards the end of the first week of the cessation of classes, a request was made through the office of the Dean of the Faculty of Humanities and Education (FHE) for information on the adjustments to be made by the SOE in its research and practicum courses.

The formal effort to arrive at an alternative to the school-based practicum began when the Director of the School of Education requested "a summary of the steps we have taken/will take to address how we plan to help students to complete their programme with minimum negative effect" (Email correspondence to academic staff, March 19, 2020). The first two suggestions for the alternative assessment of the practicum failed to meet the approval of the Board for Undergraduate Studies (BUS). The first was a suggestion to postpone the Year 2 practicum to the new 2020/2021 academic year and for it to be done immediately before the final year practicum. The second suggestion was to allow for student teachers to engage in online teaching with cooperating teachers in their placement schools. Anecdotal information shared by students and news emanating from the electronic media made it clear that the online teaching option was not feasible at the time. It was in light of these two failed attempts to arrive at a suitable alternative to the assessment of the practicum, that the third and final alternative was conceptualised.

In retrospect, the search for another alternative was the best course of action to pursue. Not only were students and staff affected by the anxiety and sense of uncertainty that prevailed because of COVID-19 but students were also concerned about being assessed in a manner which did not align with their face-to-face preparation. Further, the challenges that were being reported about online teaching in the print and electronic media, as well as through various social media platforms, added greater unease. The single most pressing concern was to find an alternative strategy which would assess the knowledge, skills, and understanding targeted in the first practicum experience.

This practicum is organised around the co-teaching model which "occurs when two or more professionals jointly deliver substantive instruction to a diverse, blended group of students in a single physical space" (Friend and Cook 2007 cited in Conderman, Bresnahan and Pedersen 2009, 2). There are several co-teaching models with team teaching regarded as "the ultimate goal of coteaching"

(Conderman et al. 2009, 30). Team teaching promotes shared responsibilities for instructional planning, lesson delivery and management, and other aspects of the teaching role. This model is highly dependent on a close working relationship with the host teacher. One of the purposes of the co-teaching model, therefore, is that it orients prospective teachers towards collaborative practice.

Microteaching and Demonstration Teaching

The conventional method of assessing the year 2 practicum was shelved in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic for an alternative assessment which was both remote and blended. The assessment which was finally administered was the third and final iteration of the alternatives suggested. The alternative assessment consisted of two pedagogical strategies which were not 'novel' to teacher education but were used in novel ways to assess the practicum component of the year 2 programme. The more familiar and more often used *microteaching* is a key component of most teacher education programmes and is used in the SOE's programmes to provide student teachers with the opportunity to practise specific teaching skills among their peers. Microteaching was introduced into teacher education by educators at Stanford University in 1963 and was described then as "a scaled down teaching encounter" in the sense that the "complexities of the normal teaching encounter have been reduced and the level of feedback to the teacher has been greatly increased" (Allen and Eve 1968, 181).

Less popularly used throughout our current teacher education programme is *demonstration teaching*. Demonstration teaching is a direct instructional method which allows the teacher to communicate information directly to students in a sequential manner, to explain ideas, to illustrate steps in a process or to demonstrate an action or skill. As Moore (2005) explains

> The demonstration is the method by which the teacher or another designated individual stands before the class, shows something, and tells what is happening or what has happened, or asks students to discuss what has happened. . . .[It] is a process of teaching by means of using materials and displays to make information accessible to students .(259)

In showing its versatility as an instructional method, Moore further stated that "The demonstration can be successful in many subject fields" and may be carried out ". . . by the teacher, a student, by film or videotape, by Internet, or even by a sequence of pictures" (259). A key feature of demonstration, as Lang

and Evans (2006) outlined, is that it "normally involves both a visual part and a spoken explanation" (328). It also makes use of observation on the part of students, which is a well-established and research-validated medium through which learning takes place. In addition, demonstration serves some useful instructional purposes. Thus

> Demonstrations can stimulate interest and provide the advantage of having students use several senses. When demonstrations are done well, ideas and concepts are presented clearly. The result should be increased student attentiveness, learning, and performance … Demonstration can be used to enhance aspects of every school subject. (Lang and Evans 2006, 328)

In selecting microteaching and demonstration teaching as assessment tools for the school-based practicum, we not only engaged student teachers in two conventional practices within teacher education but also incorporated these pedagogical tools as assessment tools in a more reflective and rigorous way than usually done. The selection of these two pedagogical strategies as assessment alternatives for the practicum amounted to a re-discovery of well-established strategies which were not put to their best uses. When re-purposed, these strategies provided the solution to a problem of practice for which an acceptable alternative was required.

Irrespective of the usefulness of these two strategies in fulfilling the immediate purpose of finding an alternative assessment, the work towards the alternative bore in mind their suitability for replacing the conventional assessment, and how far substitute activities could be found which articulated as closely as possible with the established assessment criteria. The main limitation in the creation of the alternative assessment was the lack of opportunities for interacting face-to-face with students. This limitation is especially noticeable in the assessment of classroom organisation and management skills. This, however, was replaced by an activity which required student teachers to critique a video presentation on classroom management which featured a student teacher seeking advice from educational experts on how to deal with recurring classroom management issues ahead of an assessment visit by her supervisor. The assessment of their ability to relate theoretical understandings of schools as organisations to their practicum context was eliminated and represented, but one element from among the four domains of knowledge – specifically, the teacher professionalism domain – could not be assessed in the conventional sense. Table 2 highlights the performance criteria which are used for the assessment of the face-to-face practicum and the criteria which were just as applicable to the remote and blended alternative.

Table 2. Applicability of the performance criteria for the face-to-face practicum assessment to the remote and blended alternative assessment inspired by COVID-19

Performance Criteria for face-to-face assessment	Applicability to Alternative Assessment	Explanations
1. Instructional planning document • preparation for teaching • overall structure of planning documents • provisions for student learning • student assessment	✓	The planning documents remains the same whether the lesson will be implemented or not. Instructional planning provides information on how well student teachers understand the planning process and gives insight into their understanding of the content of the unit and the selection of appropriate strategies and methods for lesson delivery and assessment of students' learning.
2. Classroom teaching skills • verbal and non-verbal communication • questioning skills • other key teaching skills • pedagogical strategies • giving feedback • set induction and closure	✓	Teaching skills targeted in the first practicum represents the basic and key teaching skills. These can be effectively demonstrated through in house teaching activities such as micro peer teaching and demonstration teaching. The purpose and focus of these in-house pedagogical strategies must be pre planned.
3. Classroom organisation and management • learning environment • clasroom organisation • classroom rules and procedures • management of students' behaviours	✗	In-house pedagogical strategies are limited by what teaching skills can be adequately demonstrated outside the context of real classroom. Hence this component of the face-to-face practicum though not replicable outside the classroom context was replaced by an activity based on the critique of a video presentation depicting a student teacher who sought advice from educational experts on classroom management issues.
4. Teacher knowledge and professionalism • pedagogical content knowledge • reflection on teaching • evidence of professionalism • awareness of practicum context • knowledge of the moral and ethical dimension of teaching • professional dress and conduct	✓ ✓ ✗ ✓ ✓	This component of the practicum assessment is honed both through theoretical preparation, in-house activities and classroom practice. All elements in this domain except the practicum context were applicable to the alternative assessment. The practicum school context — organisational, administrative, and curriculum structures as well as school culture and climate — though examined in the course are features of school contexts that students are usually required to describe in relation to the theoretical knowledge on schools as social organisations. In their portfolio assignment, the entry relating to practicum school context was revised to former high school context.

The alternative assessment satisfied three of the four main areas or domains of teaching competencies generally assessed in the face-to-face practicum. As outlined above, there was one element of the teacher professional knowledge and professionalism domain – awareness of practicum context – that could not be assessed. For the most part, therefore, the alternative assessment satisfied the need to produce an assessment that was comparable to the approved assessment format. The difference in assessment context (in-house rather than in schools), provided an avenue to combine the strength and versatility of blended methods and learning experiences in a way not previously tapped or considered in the conventional face-to-face practicum assessment. This was achieved through the use of the two pedagogical strategies noted earlier. The microteaching exercises were conducted remotely and synchronously using BlackBoard Collaborate (BBC), hosted on the university's learning management system, OurVLE, or via the Zoom web-conferencing platform. The demonstration teaching constituted the asynchronous component of the assessment as student teachers planned and videotaped a lesson of approximately thirty minutes in duration to demonstrate a skill or explain a concept related to a topic extracted from their unit plan.

Both the microteaching and demonstration teaching as instructional and assessment strategies provide opportunities for addressing the development of content knowledge, knowledge of how students learn, and knowledge of how to select and use the most appropriate pedagogies, resources, and technological tools and apply these to either face-to-face or online instruction. Microteaching and demonstration teaching are amenable to a blended approach to the assessment of prospective teachers' pedagogical knowledge and skills and can therefore be used to diversify the in-house or campus-based learning-to-teach and assessment opportunities for student teachers. The field or school-based assessment could build on the areas assessed in-house while being more focused on those aspects of instruction and the job of being a teacher which can only be assessed in the physical or virtual online classrooms and schools.

Lessons from the SOE's COVID-19 Inspired Practicum Assessment

Using microteaching and demonstration lessons did not only lead to a revisit of the purposes of these two pedagogical strategies but also provided an opportunity to examine their potential for use as assessment tools and to enhance their use

through digital technologies. They present several possibilities for enlarging the experiences provided to student teachers to gain practice in refining and extending their pedagogical content knowledge and for thinking about teaching in a more holistic way in an environment that is safe and designed to provide multiple opportunities to plan, reflect on, and revisit their teaching. Microteaching provides the opportunity for student teachers to be guided and supported as they enact the pedagogical reasoning cycle (Shulman [1987] 2004), in a deliberate and focused way. This will provide relevant practice in researching, understanding, and transforming content to match with the most appropriate strategies for teaching, while helping them to develop their reflective capacities.

Video-recorded demonstration teaching complements and extends the instructional skills and knowledge developed through microteaching. In addition, it can be structured to provide practice in the design of age-appropriate lessons that will consider students' expected prior knowledge and common misconceptions in the subject. The skills which are best honed through the orchestration of a demonstration lesson include explaining, questioning (with emphasis on wait time), illustrating, and showing – in relation to the use of visuals as well as verbal and non-verbal communication. Through demonstration teaching, student teachers learn how to plan for lessons, thereby promoting active learning which is "critical to student engagement" (Barkley 2010, 577).

The school-based practicum – whether online or in-person – can be better focused on other teaching competencies such as classroom management and organisation and lesson management skills, that are best developed and sharpened within the context of actual classrooms. At the same time, the knowledge and pedagogical skills learnt within the context of the microteaching and demonstration teaching can be tested and enriched in the teaching of students who are not their peers and require the planning and implementation of lessons which are age appropriate. The videotaped demonstration lessons will also function as pre-packaged instruction for students to engage in learning outside the formal classroom setting, as part of a flipped classroom arrangement which also provides for the employment of asynchronous methods and learning experiences.

The lessons learnt from the search for, and implementation of an alternative assessment to the initial school-based practicum were many. Two, however, are of specific relevance to this paper. The first and most significant of the many lessons is the realisation that as teacher educators we are likely to neglect or take for granted long established methods and techniques for newer and ostensibly

more sophisticated developments. The rationale for the development of micro-teaching as a pedagogical strategy and its specific purpose has become shrouded in the repeated reference to its shortcomings, linked to the teaching of peers rather than school-aged students. This was not a part of its initial purpose. The centrality of microteaching as a pedagogical strategy in our programme, however, ensures a general level of familiarity with its origin, rationale, and purpose. As the comments below of an Option Coordinator in the Department suggest, the decision to use microteaching as an assessment tool was an acceptable challenge. On the other hand, the demonstration teaching, as noted earlier in this paper, is far less commonly used and created an appropriate balance between the familiar and the strange

> I thought that using the microteaching and demonstration teaching were good alternative assessment activities to the face-to-face practicum assessment. The microteaching was useful in that it was more focused, for example on questioning. This helped to clarify the benefits of microteaching for many of us as supervisors. Before, when we did microteaching there was always the concern that it was not a real class and the student teachers would not be as prepared to teach a concept while managing the real classroom behaviour issues.
>
> Demonstration teaching was new to us as practicum supervisors and to the students . . . I was excited for the students to venture into this form of teaching as I think it is an ideal method for training teachers to teach using explana-tions to teach concepts . . . (Option Coordinator 1: Personal Communication via WhatsApp 2 Nov. 2020)

The second lesson learnt was a lesson missed while it was unfolding. The act of colleagueship that was demonstrated in searching for an appropriate alternative was not seen as such until there was some purposeful reflection on the activities we engaged in and which were stimulated by the writing of this paper. The task felt onerous because of the circumstances under which we were searching for solutions and the timeframe within which our responses were required. There were moments of quiet rage but then came the moment when I and my colleagues knew that we had arrived at a workable and pleasing alternative. Another Option Coordinator described the experience as interesting as she was part of a histo-ry-making moment in experiencing 'several firsts' caused by the pandemic and resulting in a collaborative decision-making exercise that was occasioned by a problem of practice for which we worked as a team to find an alternative to the practicum assessment. At the same time, she described her efforts to allay the

anxieties of her students about completing the practicum specifically, and the implications that would have for completing the programme generally. Of the alternative assessment that was finally decided on she wrote:

> I was satisfied with the content of the final alternative assessments. It was a good compromise based on the situation that we were in . . . I am proud of the final output and that I was a part of this historic undertaking. I like challenges – educational challenges – these are the opportunities to see and do things differently – in ways not previously thought of . . . Although the COVID-19 pandemic has had negative impact in many ways, there were positive outcomes at least for the practicum because it allowed us to reconceptualise practice. It was a good learning experience for me as I had to come to grips myself with the new knowledge/skills (e.g. scripting, demonstration lesson). Not only did I have to process this information, but I had to know/understand it well enough to be able to explain it to the practicum supervisor and students.

> An unexpected outcome of the experience for me, was the feeling of being a part of a team as we grappled to find solutions. As we engaged in reviewing the various draft [course assessment] documents there was a distinctive collaborative aspect that I had never experienced before in relation to the practicum. (Option Coordinator 2: Email communication 3 Nov. 2020)

These were our lessons and our experiences. How different were these from those of teacher educators in other contexts? While it is certain that closure of educational institutions at all levels and the adoption of remote emergency teaching were common global responses, the adjustments made to courses and assessments were varied. Our face-to-face practicum was replaced, and an alternative found. In a real sense, the final practicum which is more extensive and embedded would have presented far more challenges. When examined against the responses from the teacher education institutions represented in this paper, The UWI Mona SOE's solution to the closure of schools and the postponement of in-person practice teaching appears to be a more tolerable outcome. Early writings in response to COVID-19 indicate that teacher educators in their different programmes implemented various curricular and pedagogical adaptations and intensified their concerns over students' social and emotional well-being (Hadar, Alpert and Ariav 2020; Leacock and Warrican 2020).

In all instances examined, remote emergency teaching using a range of online platforms was the common response as face-to-face instruction was moved online with a rapidity hitherto unseen. This uniformity in transferring in-person teaching to online modalities was not replicated with respect to practice teaching. This

element of the programmes was continued online as in the case of one institution in Portugal (Assunção Flores and Gago 2020), cancelled in one college in Israel (Hadar, Alpert, and Ariav 2020) and postponed in the case of the final practicum for students in the BEd and Post Graduate Diploma in Education (PGDip Ed) programme at The UWI St. Augustine Campus (Kalloo, Mitchell and Kamalodeen). In the English context and specifically based on the experiences of four university providers, student teachers were unable to continue their practicum and had lost between eight to nine weeks of teaching practice when schools and universities closed in the third week of March. In this context, the Department for Education (DfE) introduced the "notion of the trajectory to qualification" which, in effect, allowed teacher education institutions to "make judgements on trainees based on assessments already completed and each trainee's current trajectory of progress towards meeting the Teacher's Standards (DfE, 2020 cited in La Velle, Newman, Montgomery and Hyatt, 2020, 6–7).

Along with curricular adaptation, the shelving of some content and the focus on emotional well-being, it was recognised that all student teachers, irrespective of their context, had suffered some learning loss as a result of the pandemic. This was due to the dislocation caused by the closures, as well as the inequities and disparities in relation to access to resources needed to engage meaningfully in remote teaching and learning. In reference to their context, La Velle et al. (2020) acknowledged in relation to the curtailment of practice teaching that ". . . these new teachers will need extra support as they start in their first teaching post" (7), a likelihood similarly remarked on by Darling-Hammond and Hyler (2020) who suggested that veteran teachers could provide mentoring and support for colleagues, including new teachers, in view of the fact that "New teachers whose student teaching was altered by COVID-19 in the spring of 2020 may need additional support as they begin their careers . . ." (5). With respect to the need for a renewed emphasis on social emotional learning, the pandemic made it clear that teachers should know ". . . how to enable social emotional learning and how to engage in trauma-informed and healing-informed practice" (Darling-Hammond et al. 2020, 4).

Conclusion

The process of seeking alternatives to the conventional face-to-face practicum assessment was taxing, onerous and, at times, depressing, isolating and vexing.

It was also intellectually challenging and stimulating and inevitably collegial. It created along the way a feeling of disequilibrium as we dug deep into our teacher educator selves to solve a problem of practice unlike any we had encountered before. The activities we engaged in to rework the practicum assessment took approximately seven weeks to be finalised. The alternative assessment which went through three main iterations was released to students on 27 April 2020, by which time teaching had resumed well over one week.

This meant that throughout the entire period of the COVID-19 induced closure of schools, the cessation of teaching did not approximate to a cessation of work; in fact that continued, ironically, at a more intense pace and under trying and fretful circumstances. In the end, it turned our conventional approach to practicum assessment on its head. In doing so, we found a COVID-19 inspired response to our assessment of the school-based practicum – a response that we will reflect on, refine, and incorporate into our assessment processes to provide a wider range of opportunities for students to improve and enhance their pedagogical content knowledge over time during their teacher education programme and beyond.

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