

Presentation: The Practicum Phase of Education for the Professions: Canadian Findings

Edwin Ralph is a professor and researcher in the Department of Curriculum Studies in the College of Education at the University of Saskatchewan in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, Canada. His professional interests lie in the areas of effective teaching and learning (and its related supervision/ mentorship) at all levels from K-16.

ABSTRACT

The practical or clinical program has long been a key component of professional undergraduate education in such diverse disciplines as the Health Sciences, Engineering, Law, Education, Social Work, or Theology. Novice practitioners regularly report that their practicum experiences were the most critical part of their pre-service program in preparing them for their first positions in their respective professions. The importance of this practical/clinical component, together with a growing global shortage of professionals in a variety of fields, require that professional education institutions explore how they might design (or re-design) this “experiential learning” phase of their pre-service programs.

In the cross-Canada study to be summarized in this session, the presenter and his colleagues explored five basic areas of practicum/clinical experience across several disciplines: (a) the terminology used by various fields to describe the practicum; (b) the design of that program, (c) the supervisory process used in the practicum, (d) the strengths and weaknesses of the practicum, and (e) innovative practices with promise for the future. (A part of this synthesis includes the voice of several hundred post-practicum students from three disciplines, who divulged their views of the most positive and negative aspects of their recently-completed clinical/practicum experiences.)

The presenter will also invite participants to: (a) respond to the study’s findings, and (b) share/compare their own situations regarding the clinical/practical programs offered within their respective disciplines. It is hoped that this cross-disciplinary conversation will help inform and stimulate session participants interested in enhancing this most critical phase of pre-service professional preparation.