Action Research within Pre-Service Teacher Education

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Abstract:

   Action research (AR) is an effective means of allowing pre-service and in-service teachers to develop professionally. The focus of this article is to report the results and implications of using action research within a pre-service teaching practicum and to identify the influences of an associate teacher's and a faculty advisor's active engagement in praxis with pre-service teachers during practicum placements. This article explores how AR can be used to specifically assist pre-service teachers involved in a practicum situation to grow both personally and professionally. From journaling and reflective processes, participants discovered deeper implications of practicum experiences as reflections were revisited and restudied, revealing how embedding an action research process within a teacher education practicum is a mutually-beneficial process for the pre-service teacher, the associate teacher, and the faculty advisor. Individual and shared reflection via dialogue can establish a foundation on which theoretical knowledge and purposeful action combine to form praxis—theory in action.

Key Words:

   Action research; preservice education; practicum; reflection; teacher education.

Introduction

Action Research (AR) has been recognized for decades as an effectual means within pre-service and in-service education to professionally develop while teaching and operating in the classroom, school, and educational community (Kostaris, Sergis, Sampson, Giannakos, & Pelliccione, 2017; Ryan, 2013). Historically, this position can be traced back to Lewin's (1948) four action research phases, namely, planning, acting, observing, and reflecting, within a role, occupation, or professional capacity. The phases are recursive and cyclical, leading to a "spiral flow that allows the researcher to reflect on and redesign…action research. It gives the opportunity to the action researcher to go through all the phases again, via a new action cycle and bring additional elements into the study" (Aidinopoulou & Sampson, 2017, p. 239). This recursiveness is an approach and research strategy that allows the action researcher to revisit, reflect, and refine actions within any AR investigation in an intentional and methodical manner (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The recursiveness seems to complement the routinization normalized in education via daily patterns (i.e., schedules), weekly cycles filled with lessons, and planned annual units that can often be challenged by limited teaching time.

Lewin (1948) was not a singular voice in the early days of action research, evidenced by the words of another action research enthusiast and supporter who concluded: "The action researcher is interested in the improvement of the educational practices in which he [she] is engaging. He [she] undertakes research in order to find out how to do his [her] job better—action research means research that affects actions" (Corey, 1949, p. 509). And just a few years later, Corey (1953) concluded that AR is actually, "research that is undertaken by educational practitioners because they believe that by doing so they can make better decisions and engage in better actions" (p. viii). Most, if not all educators, would like to do everything well, and if they recognize the need to improve, AR is indeed a tool within reach that is both pragmatic and accessible.

AR is a critical research approach, described by Kuhne and Quigley (1997) as exploration focusing on "gaining a better understanding of a practice problem or achieving a real change or improvement in practice context ... [that] allows practitioners to both improve their practice and better understand the nature of that practice" (pp. 23–24). The allure of AR as a research mode is also rooted in the fact that it is adaptable, malleable, and can be utilized in many disciplines. However, it is in education that AR is often enacted by students, educational professionals, and professors of education to professionally develop, solve problems, locate answers, and examine authentic experiences (Ryan, 2014). The need to revisit elements in teaching leads to the responsive nature of AR with its recursive phases named so many years ago. Planning, acting, observing, reflecting (Dewey, 1933; Lewin, 1948), and revising supplements and nurtures educational development (Ryan, 2009a).
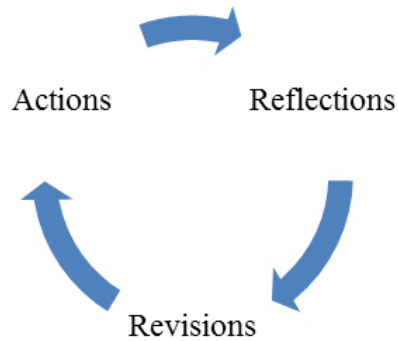
Figure 1. **The Action Research Cycle (Ryan, 2009a)**

The practicum's formal and informal classroom observation has distinct phases which include the planning conference, observation, data collection phase, and the feedback (phase) conference which complements AR with its action phase (observation and data collection), reflection (planning conference) and action (feedback conference) (Ryan, 2009b; 2016). AR empowers by giving voice to researchers and participants; in many ways, it can be used as an anti-oppression response to forces within education (Gomez & Ryan, 2016).

Action Research within Pre-service Teaching Programs and Processes

Within pre-service, AR enables and supports student teachers (Barbre & Buckner, 2013; Ryan, 2016) as they plan lessons, take action in practicums and pre-service classes, observe, and reflect on their experiences. The phases and development are very personal, causing many involved in the promotion of AR, such as Stenhouse (1975), to note the importance of teachers investigating their own work. Some may harbour the notion that pre-service teachers are not ready to investigate their own practices; however, even with introductory experiences (Dewey, 1933) and with data collection and evaluation, pre-service teachers can travel deeper into their own learning (Ryan, 2008; 2016).

A reflective, action-oriented way of professional life is crucial for educators to grow, mature, and be successful. Once made a habit, reflective action can become commonplace, leading to a sense of freedom (Ryan, 2014). Reflection as a "moral reaction, however, is seen to transform practice, because it reconstructs experience in light of the values one has in life, such as justice and equality" (Luttenberg, Meijer, & Oolbekkink-Marchand, 2017, p. 90). Reflection provides the researcher with a means to sort the present and/or the past in personally meaningful ways. It is a vehicle through which teacher-researchers can gain a sense how their philosophies of teaching and learning are enacted and evolve in the field.

Pre-service teacher preparation is a time for all to reflect upon *field readiness* while confronting and overcoming problems, dilemmas, and challenges that surface in pre-service training (Ryan, 2016). Pre-service is a stimulating experience that requires the application of theory to practice, or *praxis*, as pre-service teachers transform and

construct identities within often unfamiliar, fast-paced, and intense practicum environments.

Professional teacher training programs provide a wide array of topics and terms such as curricula, management, and equity, which surface, puzzle, and prompt questions. Through reflective practice and an attention to praxis, pre-service teachers can examine the ways in which education is enacted within their contexts and identify their roles in supporting or leading change. Personal inquiry via AR motivates educators to move forward and scrutinize the local landscape in a manner that enables, empowers, and initiates self-help. As Illingworth (2012) noted, new teachers begin stronger if "they have some theoretical and practical learning before standing in front of a class" (p. 191), and teachers who embrace inquiry into their own professional practices are prepared as life-long learners to face the evolving demands society places on the education process.

The focus of this article is to report the results and implications of using action research within a pre-service teaching practicum and to identify the influences of an associate teacher's and a faculty advisor's active engagement in praxis with pre-service teachers during practicum placements. The pre-service teacher is defined as the student enrolled in a teacher preparation program who must successfully complete degree requirements including course work and field experience before being awarded a teaching license. The associate teacher (AT) is the school-based supervisor who takes on the daily role of classroom mentor and supervisor for the pre-service teacher during practicum. The AT remains responsible for the class, yet is expected to gradually release teaching and assessment of student learning to the pre-service teacher throughout the practicum. The faculty advisor (FA) is a representative of the teacher preparation program who supervises the student teacher on practicum. The FA observes, documents, and evaluates the pre-service teacher's progress during set classroom observations throughout the practicum, providing feedback and suggestions for improvement.

We have included two cases: excerpts from journals written by pre-service teachers collected as part of a reflective pre-service class exercise which supports the AR process and illustrates the struggle to make sense of experience. Each journal entry is included in its entirety so the reader can trace the (Act)ion–Reflection–Revision thinking of the pre-service teacher participant who was actively engaged in the AR process. Although names and locations have been redacted in the journal entries to preserve the authentic voice of its author, the grammar and sentence structure have not been altered.

With these cases and through an exploration of the literature related to pre-service teacher education and reflective practice, we argue that embedding an action research process within a teacher education practicum is a mutually-beneficial process for the pre-service teacher, the associate teacher, and the faculty advisor. Individual and shared reflection can establish a foundation on which theoretical knowledge and purposeful action combine to form *praxis*—theory in action.

Pre-Service Education

In pre-service teacher preparation programs, the dominant focus is on understanding what it means to be a teacher and learning *how to be a teacher* rather than *learning how to teach* a specific subject to students (Illingworth, 2012; Kraglund-Gauthier, 2014). Having an undergraduate degree before beginning teacher training can enable the pre-service teacher to focus completely on becoming a teacher since the content within the discipline has already been set in place, it is hoped. Within a Faculty of Education, the intent is for newly-certified teachers to move into their careers not only as subject matter experts with pedagogical skills to effectively deliver course-specific content to students, but also as individuals who embrace a collaborative mindset that is open to ongoing development of their professional learning throughout their career (Illingworth, 2012). While this intention may fall short for some graduates, "this collaborative element to teacher training in universities is important if the beginning teacher is to see the potential for change, and for them to become agents of that change" (Illingworth, 2012, p. 189).

Most often, a person enrolled within a pre-service training program encounters a practicum placement within a regular classroom setting under the guidance of an in-service teacher/mentor. The experience is deepened when AR is embraced and used since "action research is a mechanism for teachers to improve their own effectiveness. Action research is a mechanism for teachers to improve their own practice and focus on positive changes within the classroom" (Cantrell & Cantrell, 2003, p. 119). It is this element of change that is important since teacher training can be a time of rapid growth, adjustment, and professional development. Pre-service teacher preparation programs that create spaces to cultivate inquiry into professional practice help its students assume the responsibility for acquiring the knowledge and understandings that are expected as a demonstration of their abilities and subject matter expertise in their own classrooms (Kraglund-Gauthier, 2014). By encouraging praxis, practicum placements help orient the pre-service teacher to AR, and the AR-oriented associate teacher can grow from the mentoring relationship too.

The Associate Teacher (AT) within Pre-service Placements

Practical experience or learning "how to teach" in an authentic and carefully observed (school) clinical environment (Beynon, Geddis, & Onslow, 2001) can be the most stressful experience during pre-service. A practicum results in successes, distress, and personal challenges as in-class personalities, opinions, and behaviour produce eclectic outcomes (Ryan, 2008). Consider the following, excerpted from a journal entry of one pre-service teacher who engaged in AR within a practicum:

> During my time at [Oakway School], I was immediately faced with several classroom management issues, which I was forced to address. Within my Associate Teacher's (AT's) classroom there were several distinct management issues including [*student A, student H*] with identified exceptionalities....Also, several of the students within my AT's classroom were easily distracted by any disturbances within the classroom. Most of the students in the class could be brought back to task via a slight verbal reprimand. However, there were several

students who would not respond to sight cues, and more forceful verbal reprimands were required.

In the case of *student A*, who was also observed displaying all of the off task behaviors described above, an increased degree of latitude was afforded do to his exceptionality. However, some verbal prompting and was required to limit the disruption to the rest of the class. *Student H* was by far the most disruptive of all the students in the classroom [and had]…a behavioral exceptionality, displayed a number of off task behavior including a refusal to do his work, resistance to instruction, and defiance of authority. *Student H* was also observed interacting with his fellow students encouraging off task behavior, being verbally abusive, and encouraging other students to display unacceptable behaviors. *Student H* was also suspended during the initial observation for fighting with other students when placed in the hallway for a "timeout". Therefore, this was not a management strategy that could be employed to deal with his behavioral actions. Students within the classroom environment who displayed off task behavior on several occasions, and who did not respond to verbal reprimands were kept after school in a remedial detention.

Another management difficulty that was encountered initially was the evaluation of the student's level of understanding of the material which was being covered. An attempt to gauge the level of understanding was made through a simple question and answer process ("Does everyone understand how we got this answer?"). However, this process was further complicated by several students who consistently answered "No" whenever this question was posed; whether they understood the material or not. I found that I had begun to ignore the students whose default answer was always "No".

Reflect

During my initial lessons, I was extremely discouraged with the student's preponderance for off task behavior. As stated above, many of the students within the class were easily distracted; so as one student would begin to exhibit off task behaviors others would follow. I was reluctant as a teacher to reprimand the students within my AT's classroom. However, I had witnessed my AT using such a management strategy. Therefore, I decided that such a strategy would be appropriate to employ. Initially when this strategy was employed, the students would react and begin to refocus on task. This initial success was encouraging, but the off task behavior would begin again as the various students began to disturb the class. I found that my frustration would increase as the same students were constantly getting off task. I also observed that one student in particular was more likely than most too simply deviate from the designated tasks.

I found that *student H* served as a catalyst within the classroom. As this student's off task behaviors would surface he would to, put it simply, take others with him. This student acts as a leader within the class, and I found that it was a constant struggle to maintain order within the classroom while *student H* was present. As I witnessed this dynamic forming within the classroom, I found my level of frustration with *student H* growing. I was also extremely frustrated with what I

perceived as a lack of useful management strategies that could be implemented in order to control this student's behavior exceptionalities. I admit that this frustration stems more from my inability to control this young student, and the feelings of inadequacy that this apparent 'failure' to maintain a properly disciplined classroom evoked, than the actions of the student in question. Upon, I considered many options in an attempt to curtail this student's disruptive tendencies. I first considered changing the student's position within the classroom; however, I could not bring myself to do this as *student H* is verbally abusive with several of the other students within the classroom and is currently placed as far away as possible from these students. I also considered placing *student H* in the hallway for a "timeout", but this practice was one that I was particularly hesitant to employee, as this student had already been suspended for fighting in the hallway during one such "timeout". Finally, I determined that sending this student to the office for disrupting the class, which would occur every day, was not an option. I therefore came to a decision concerning what my actions would be if this student was in my own classroom that I believe would be in both his best interests and in the best interest of the other students in the class. This decision was based partially upon observations of classes dedicated to behavioral classes within my host school.

Also, during such reflections I was faced with the difficulty of assessing the level of understanding that the students within the class possess without formal evaluation. Because my instructional time with the students is very limited I attempted to gauge their reaction to the material given to them by simply asking them if they understood the material presented, and by watching their facial expressions. However, as mentioned above I was faced with students who would answer that they did not understand the material even if that was not the case. Therefore, I unconsciously began to develop a tendency to ignore these particular students when they stated that they did not understand the material. However, as time went on I noticed that several of these students wore looks on their faces that displayed an increasing level of frustration. I surmised that these students were indeed having difficulty with the concepts being taught therefore a change to my approach was required.

Revise

As my time in the classroom was limited I found that many small changes had to be made in my teaching approach, and that I have several ideas that I hope to implement upon my return to the classroom. However, I am limited as a teaching candidate as to the extent of the actions I can take. In fact, one management strategy that I may wish to implement in my own classroom is a drastic measure that is not feasible given my current position.

As mentioned above "off task behavior" is consistently a problem within the classroom in which I was placed, as is evaluating the level of understanding that is exhibited by the students. In an attempt to address both issues, a series of interactive questions and brainstorming activities were chosen to be used during language arts lessons. These exercises allowed the students to offer input and express thoughts that could be considered higher-level thinking. These activities

appeared to keep the students on task though several of the students did not participate in the dialogue. This lack of participation will have to be addressed in subsequent lessons.

An attempt was made during a math lesson to address both the off task behavior and the apparent lack of understanding displayed by the students. The students were led through a series of problems with many of the solutions to these problems being placed on the front board by myself. The students were initially challenged to find the solutions to the problems on their own and student volunteers were asked to come up and present their answers to the class. While this method appeared to work for a time, the students soon became restless and the off task behavior returned. Concurrently several students appeared to have difficulty understanding the topics no matter how "step by step" the answers were presented. It was apparent that these students needed more individual attention than was possible within a full classroom. Therefore, I offered to provide additional instruction for these students after school during the remedial work period. Several of the students attended this help session, which lasted for almost an hour and a half. I fully intend to once again instigate this after school program upon my return to Oakway. Though the issue of "alone time" with the students will have to be addressed.

Finally, the case of *student H* was one of the final classroom management issues that I feel needs to be addressed. During my time at Oakway I was lucky enough to observe several special education classes dedicated to students with a wide range of exceptionalities including ones that were behavioral in nature. The dynamic in these classrooms thought "energetic" was far more conducive to learning. This conducive learning environment is do greatly in part to the presence of a Full time Educational Assistant who often spend their time wandering the classroom and providing additional help to students in need. I do believe that *student H* would benefit from such an environment, as would the other students in his class. This theory was somewhat born out during my last day of in class instruction during which time my Associate Teacher sat with *student H* for a short time to offer him assistance. During this time he stayed on task and was able to solve rather complex problems with a minimal amount of prompting. It should be noted that when I left Oakway steps were already underway to relocate *student H* into a special education classroom equipped to handle his exceptionality.

The pre-service teacher's evolution as an educator is evident in this journal entry, and a growing confidence in professional ability and awareness of the complexities in teaching are emerging. Each practicum is yet another opportunity to cultivate and engage in AR, and it is a means to mature professionally within the practicum (Ryan, 2014; 2016). For this participant, the AR reflection process was a conduit to process feelings of frustration with events unfolding in the classroom and to identify not only alternatives to the issue at hand—classroom management—but also to come to terms with their limitations as a pre-service teacher in someone else's classroom.

Like most teachers, ATs are busy people; they have taken on the additional task of mentoring pre-service teachers who, depending on their level of experience and

competence, may require unanticipated levels of support from them. A practicum instruction booklet outlines the roles and expectations of ATs, but may not be read as closely as necessary (Ryan, 2016). For this participant, the AR cycle was a way to deal with the tensions stemming from different balances of power and limitations of the education system itself.

These tensions within the practicum are opportunities to grow as a classroom teacher and leader. The practicum is merely a stage for trial and error AR and teaching (Conderman, Johnston-Rodriguez, Hartman, & Walker, 2013). Reflection upon the past within AR is a moral enterprise and a quest to improve and become a better teacher since "it is essential for that teacher to reflect on…personal development, who he/she is, and who he/she desires to be" (Luttenberg et al., 2017, p. 91). The practicum is a critical period of growth and fact-finding as "personal or artistic reflection is concerned with the teachers' personal preferences and experiences and seeks answers to the question 'what is good'" (Luttenberg et al., 2017, p. 91). Moreover, as Kraglund-Gauthier (2014) noted in research with pre-service teachers learning to integrate technology into pedagogical processes, co-construction of knowledge and application of that knowledge in the field required skilled communication, collaboration, and leadership within the teaching–learning process.

In a self-study on developing as a teacher educator and as a FA for practicum placements, Bullock (2012) reported how one FA felt being a critical professional friend to pre-service teachers during practicum observation de-briefings was the most important role of a FA, assuming these fledgling teachers would want to try new pedagogical strategies in their first practicum. "Instead, teacher candidates used teaching strategies designed to fit in with the perceived expectations of their associate teachers" (Bullock, 2012, p. 149). There are tacit expectations that the pre-service teacher will in some way follow the leader—in this case, the AT. For instance, the following journal excerpt illustrates portions of the AR cycle another pre-service student action researcher, troubled by classroom management, underwent:

Act

During my November placement there was only one lesson in which I really lost control of the classroom. The day before my final lesson with the CHC2D class I got sick and couldn't prepare for the next day because I had two other lessons to plan before period 4. I had never taught a lesson that I wasn't thoroughly prepared for, and I had no choice but to wing it. I wanted to finish our learning on the Japanese internment and then prepare students for the debate we were having on the next day. I had a point form plan of what we would do, but the lesson itself was not as structured as usual and this made management *much* more challenging.

Students came to class today thinking they were going to be finishing *Schindler's List* and gave me a hard time when I told them they would have to wait for Ms. W to come back to watch it on Friday. I explained to them that we would be finishing the lesson started on Monday, my evaluation day, when I taught using extracts from Joy Kogawa's Novel *Obasan* in an activity. After some new learning about the internment, students broke up into pairs to find 3 significant ideas, moments

or points from the different excerpt taken from *Obasan* that would reveal information about the internment. Students wrote the points out in marker on graph paper and pasted them on the board. Everyone worked well, but we didn't have time to present what we learned from the pieces of *Obasan* to each other because the activity took a long time and I didn't want to stop them as long as they were engaged. I thought that the beginning of the Thursday class mentioned above would be a perfect chance to present to each other what we had written on the graph paper.

Students didn't seem very eager and were shy to talk about what they wrote. Students wanted to discuss issues instead of presenting them to each other. We were supposed to be using the points to create a list of "yes" "no" responses to the following statement: "Should we be ashamed of the internment of Japanese Canadians during WWII?" We continued the discussion, but upon request, instead of each group coming up to present, I quickly scanned the sheets to go over the significant points. Basically, I did the work for them so that they wouldn't be uncomfortable coming up to the front of the class. This was a terrible way of dealing with the situation because I gave students the power to tell me how I would run the class just because they didn't like what they were doing.

The next portion of the lesson was intended for forming our debate groups and deciding our points. As mentioned in my last management reflection, this class did really well with the structure of group work for the last debate about the WWI internment. I wanted to try a new method this time so that students would be excited to try something new, and so they could *choose* the side they wanted to be on instead of me delegating their positions. The last time I set up a debate I did a lot of things to ensure a smooth and orderly operation and preparation. For example, the first time around we used "The Can of Destiny" and then students were given the opportunity to choose their roles and the organization of their teams using the handout. This role card handout had to be handed in by the end of the class. I also used "The Can of Destiny" to divide the Pro groups from the Con groups without any argument from the class. Each of the 4 roles on the handout was clearly defined at the top of each square. Students had to decide who would be the "Reporter", "Recorder", "Organizer/Time keeper", and "Resource Locator/annotator" by considering their own strengths and weaknesses. I gave students a 30-minute time limit and the goal of combining information to plan out their arguments and possible rebuttals. I think that assigning the group roles helped students get organized and take responsibility as contributing members working towards a common goal, so on Thursday's class I distributed the same handouts to everyone. The difference in how I tried to set up debates teams this time is that I tried a 4 corners approach. I pasted signs in each corner reading, "Agree", "Strongly Agree", "Disagree" and "Strongly Disagree". Anyone who chose to remain neutral was at the centre of the class.

While this process seemed fairly structured and like a great opportunity for students to argue their own positions on the matter, the distribution of groups ended up being based more on socializing than on arguments and sides. We had tried the 4 corners structure in Classroom Methods, but I did not consider how

much cliques and social groups would control the distribution in a younger classroom. There ended up being 22 out of 33 kids in one corner, 6 in another, 1 in another, and 4 who wanted to remain neutral. I tried to split up the large group into 4, but they were so squished in the one area that it was hard to tell where the groups divided themselves. They all had role cards to fill out, but were distracted by each other, this did not happen as quickly as it did the last time because the groups were not well defined.

During the last 20 minutes (while students were supposed to be working on their top 3 arguments), a few students who had missed the last two classes because of basketball asked if I could photocopy them the homework they missed. I notified the supply teacher that I would be going to photocopy something thinking that he would manage the class while I was gone. He didn't. When I got back to the classroom students were standing up talking loudly, laughing, and horsing around. I asked them to settle down as I circulated the room to see what they had done. My group of 1 in the corner had an entire page of arguments, but as for the majority of the groups, I think they were very distracted and off task, so they didn't have a whole lot written down.

Reflect

As mentioned above, I should have had an interesting hook to present that would get student's minds off of the fact that we could not finish *Schindler's List*. One student even announced, "I cancelled a doctor's appointment so that I could be here today to watch the movie". I think students were unenthusiastic because they were disappointed that we couldn't watch the movie and because I didn't give them anything to be excited about at the beginning of my lesson. I usually have excellent hooks, but on this day I tried to jump right into the lesson and I really saw how a hook is important. Another problem with the presentation portion of the class was that too much time passed from the time they wrote the ideas to the time they were asked to present. Also, I didn't have very good questions or direction for them when they were to talk about the 3 points. Another element that threw off my self-confidence was that I had a substitute teacher sitting in who didn't speak or move during the entire lesson. He did not introduce himself and the students had never seen him before. I think this was very uncomfortable for everyone, especially for me.

Instead of losing confidence when student's seemed disengaged, I should have kept my energy and enthusiasm up to get them to do what I asked regardless of their reluctance. I could have modeled what I expected or given them more direction on how to present the ideas on the graph paper. This lesson taught me that Grade 10 students need to be told exactly what is expected of them or they feel insecure and vulnerable. The "Yes" "No" chart I had them create was fairly useful because it gave them somewhere to start once they were in groups, but I should have made the groups physically separate once I saw the disproportionate division of corners. Very few students could concentrate enough to really focus and come up with points with so many distractions and opportunities for side tracking. I should have emphasized a time limit for filling out the role cards instead of assuming that they would just get it done because it was

something they had done before. I should not have assumed that the supply teacher was going to help me out when I left the room. Next time I will tell students to wait till the next day for the photocopies so that I can take care of it after class. I am sometimes too eager to please and this gives students an opportunity to take advantage of my kindness. No one even claimed the photocopies once I got back to class, so this was all for nothing.

Revise

While I did do a lot of things wrong during this lesson, it was not a complete failure. During the first half of the lesson, after the presenting of ideas from *Obasan* was over, students were very engaged in discussion for a solid 40 minutes. This says something about my ability to capture an audience and get students interested. It was when we transitioned into group work that management went terribly wrong. This debate preparation was far less productive and successful from the last time, so I will not try the four corners strategy again with a Grade 10 class or with any class of this size. I will find other ways of structuring debates that do not include giving students *too* much freedom to choose, but where they can still form arguments that they believe in. On Friday one of my classmates provided several ideas on how to structure debates in the classroom. Instead of having one speaker per group, she had each student take a turn presenting an argument on behalf of their group. I really like this concept because it ensures that everyone is heard and that everyone is practicing communication skills not just those who are already comfortable speaking in-front of a group. I will continue to find other ways to structure debates wherein students can choose the side they want to argue without ending up in large unstructured groups. I think it is important that students are exposed to both possibilities in a debate situation. They need to get used to arguing any side that they are given, but they also have to learn to structure arguments that they genuinely believe in without getting emotional or aggressive. I will work on compiling different styles of organizing debates so that I can continue to test what is effective and what is not.

Also, the next time there is a supply teacher that I don't know in my classroom I will take a moment to introduce myself and to briefly discuss what each of our roles are during the lesson. If the substitute doesn't know that I can use their help, then they could end up just sitting back watching like this one did. I will not leave the classroom ever again to photocopy something for a student, and I will not let students stay standing in large crowds when they are supposed to be working. The classroom should be set up so that desks divide groups in at least slightly secluded work areas. I will not let students convince me to teach in a way that makes things easy on them and hard on me. While I do believe in teaching to individual needs and in a variety of ways, I am in charge and it is not up to the students to decide how and what we will learn during class time.

In this case, the pre-service teacher has demonstrated, through a reflective process, how their initial thinking, assumptions, and actions, when coupled with the classroom context, led to certain desired and undesired outcomes. Through the "post mortem" as it were, the pre-service teacher discovered causes for the decline of the lesson, assigned

responsibilities to those outcomes, and attached rationale for doing things differently in the future—yet another AR cycle in the quest for improved teaching.

Herein this context of tacit expectations and realities is the politics of the practicum. To please the authorities within the practicum is to succeed, which may not be in the best interest of the pre-service teacher.

AR is a tool and a means to adjust teaching behaviours while examining practical issues to uncover alternative solutions and personal remedies (Stringer, 2014). AR is largely qualitative in design (Saldana, 2011), yet it can incorporate many modes of research within a larger landscape of inquiry designed to find and implement potential solutions to identified issues (Creswell, 2012). AR may be employed "to improve the practice of education, with researchers studying their own problems or issues in a school or educational setting" (Creswell, 2012, p. 592).

While the AR phases, namely, planning, acting, observing and reflecting (Lewin, 1948), have been contracted herein to act, reflect, and revise, the written excerpt is but one cycle within a multi-practicum educational program. The student reflects and restudies (restories) experience, leading to fresh levels of awareness and an ability to articulate what has occurred in practicum to learn even more from the experience. "Education, as a 'field of action' of action research, can significantly affect the development of reflection" (Luttenberg et al., 2017, p. 94). As a participant in this AR process, the FAs, experienced pedagogues and often educational researchers themselves, and hopefully reflective practitioners themselves, have a role to play in supporting the development of pre-service teachers' reflective processes.

The Faculty Advisor (FA) in Pre-Service Education

A third character in this teacher training plot is the university Faculty Advisor (FA), who represents the teacher preparation program in the field and is responsible for assessing and evaluating pre-service teachers in action. They are guided by directives etched in practicum booklets, while offering perspective, positive support, and critical observations via limited classroom visitations (Clarke, Triggs, & Nielsen, 2014).

The FA can be a critical friend, reinforcing the argument that all stakeholders should be engaged participants within the investigative processes of AR (Stringer, 2014). Yet FAs "tend to be transients in schools" (Beynon et al., 2001, p. 14), and much of the student teacher time is spent with the AT who "receives little or no training…resulting in communication with the university [being] tenuous at best" (Ryan, 2009a, p. 67). Transient FAs can confuse the practicum as they are out of touch with the day-to-day events and may offer ambiguous feedback, instructions, and new understandings of the practicum guide. They may even contradict the directives of the AT who is much more present, situated, and conversant with the local teaching contexts and landscapes (Rolheiser, 2008; Ryan, 2016).

Within the practicum, the readiness of pre-service teachers and/or their progress and development in the classroom and school can be less than expected, and this status can be tacitly linked to past performance. As Chehayl (2007) noted:

Every human experience brings with it previously constructed impressions or pre-understandings, so that no experience is purely devoid of consideration. Pre-understanding is how an individual thinks about these ever present horizons *prior* to experiencing engagement with them. …Through the lens of our pre-understandings, we navigate the unknown events or circumstances that lay before us on the "horizons" of our life journey. (p. 74)

In each of the cases above, the pre-service teachers' reflections reveal their assumptions and prior understandings about the nature of teaching and learning, of classroom management, and of the ways individuals act within a social, educative setting. Their journal excerpts serve as reminders of the importance of encouraging pre-service teachers to reflect on past experiences as they navigate through any turbulence within the practicum in order to move beyond past outcomes to realize professional growth and personal development. Their realizations and subsequent planning for future interactions with these same students and other students in the future are predicated on how they have come to interpret the results of their reflections and internalize the feedback from their ATs and FAs and take up their role as an AR practitioner in their own classrooms.

Guiding the Process of Reflective Practice

Within AR, "the ethical imperative [is to] to *do good*, rather than simply *doing no harm* in the context of qualitative inquiry significantly increases the obligations of the researcher to understand the ethical principles" (Jones, Torres, & Arminio, 2014, p. 175). Also, AR can be a complex endeavour since it can involve multiple people (participants) and several levels (personal, professional, political) within experiences that are challenging and often new. Therefore, it is necessary to consider the whole and the parts of any system as Luttenberg et al. (2017) explained:

A complex system can be seen as a coherent whole, comprising different parts, which is able to maintain itself as a relatively autonomous entity in the face of changing circumstances. The parts themselves can also be seen as coherent wholes that are relatively independent of each other and of the system. To survive as a system, a constant interaction and exchange of matter, energy, or information between the parts, and between the parts and the context, must occur. Because of these interactions and changes, the whole is more than its composing parts and cannot be understood through knowledge of the composing parts. (p. 93)

The practicum in its entirety is a constantly changing experience, and to find clarity, the pre-service teacher may have to focus on individual elements within the whole when following the observational checklists used by the AT and FA. Equally important is for the AT and FA to see how they too are a part of the whole of the pre-service teacher's experience.

The need to look analytically at the practicum may, however, overwhelm pre-service teachers who are learning and evolving as teaching professionals as fast as they can in a high-stakes, contextualized, evaluative process. Therefore, it is imperative that the FA and AT communicate effectively with the pre-service teacher and with each other

throughout practicum (Beynon et al., 2001). Through effective dialogue and ongoing communication, they and their ATs and FAs can build a relationship that breaks down the "epistemological barrier between formal and informal knowledge" (Bullock, 2012, p. 154). Through reflection and conversation, each, as AR participants with the practicum, can come to terms with what Bullock (2012) identified as "an embodied representation of formal knowledge" (p. 154) that may not align with knowledge gained from experience in the classroom, from praxis.

Coming to terms with the conflicts between espoused theories and lived experience requires a change in perspective from being a student to being a teacher. The practicum demands new skills as student teachers transition from Faculty of Education desks to the position of teacher within a classroom. Some may suggest the move is from follower to leader and from observer to reflective practitioner. Leadership within the teaching role can lead to reflecting *in the moment* (Schön, 1983) and reflecting (Dewey, 1933) upon *past actions* of teaching and leading (Ryan, 2016).

Reflection is a state of mind, something that is quite personal and yet very much a formal enterprise in the practicum. Within AR, it requires self-leading, self-study, and self-determination. As Luttenberg et al. (2017) suggested, it requires connecting separate pieces to form the whole of a complex system, and it requires an individual— whether that be the pre-service teacher, the AT, the FA, or other stakeholders—to characterize their leadership roles within a school as pieces of the process of knowledge generation. Moreover, it requires an environment that embraces the reflective practices of school-based action research as an improvement process (Kraglund-Gauthier, 2014) and leadership support within the school to communicate and advance those processes.

In research designed to understand the impact of the practicum experience on pre-service teachers' understandings of formal and informal school-based leadership, Cherubini (2008) confirmed the recreation of traditional structures of power relations in the school, in which "teachers catered to furthering the educational value of teaching and learning in the classroom while principals administered over the school organization and exclusively made executive decisions" (p. 87). As Ryan (2016) noted in related research, the observation of a traditional hierarchy within a school can change *what* and *how* one communicates.

Classroom teachers are an authority within their classrooms, but school leadership (administration) is responsible for pre-service teacher issues, leading Cherian and Daniel (2008) to characterize principals as critical agents who either directly or indirectly espouse school culture and impact how their teachers, whether new or experienced, theorize and enact the educative process. In investigations (see, for example, Ringler, O'Neal, Rawls, & Cumiskey, 2013), teachers felt their principals' support was crucial for professional growth. Without this support, professional growth can slow and teachers could begin to experience unwanted feelings that can have an adverse effect upon students and school community (Ryan, 2016). As a participant in the AR process, principals can "recognize the knowledge, skills, attitudes, and assumptions that new teachers bring" (Cherian & Daniel, 2008, p. 4), and ideally, principals can be a part of the reflective process that can facilitate growth of pre- and in-service teachers.

   Induction and mentorship programs have a positive impact on new teachers' successful transition from teacher education programs into the field (Fantilli & McDougall, 2009). A pre-service teacher education program and its associated practicum can be thought of as an induction program, in which soon-to-be teachers require support to ensure they are extracting the most from the available learning opportunities (Clarke et al., 2014). As a visual representation of the relationship between the pre-service teacher, the AT, and the FA, Figure 2 suggests the movement of one stakeholder can influence the other via interdependence (Ryan, 2016). Careful communication can propel a pre-service teacher, and a lack of it can cause inertia or even deterioration of performance during a practicum (Ryan, 2012; 2016).
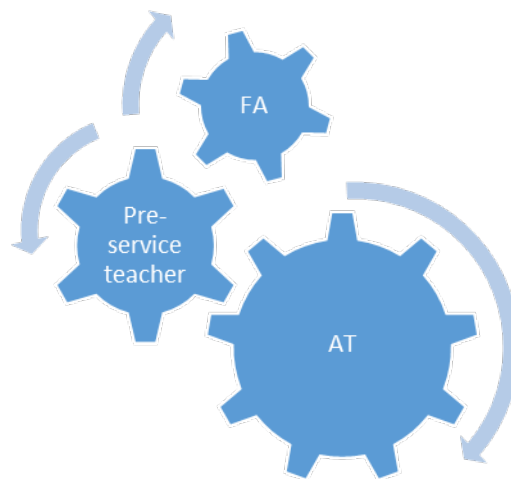

Figure 2. The interdependence within a pre-service practicum (Ryan, 2009a)

   As teacher candidates embrace theory and gain practical teaching experience, they construct a knowledge base that can be impacted by communication with peers, faculty, and themselves, that is, inner forces/reflexivity (Ryan, 2016). A practicum can be the catalyst, yet requires a commitment to a relationship built on ongoing communication and reflection (Ryan, 2012, 2016).

   We argue that AR is an integral ingredient in the catalyst mix, where open communication during a shared reflective process can resolve the conflicting messages the pre-service teacher receives within teaching programs, classrooms, and staff rooms. As a process of trial and error (Kuhne & Quigley, 1997), the pre-service teacher can embed AR into learning how to teach. Through AR, the pre-service teacher, the AT, and the FA can each grow and develop from their symbiotic relationship, co-creating and sharing knowledge and insights on the current realities of teaching and learning within the school. Through AR, the theory of education and learning and the practice of teaching can merge to become *praxis*, an embodiment of how one's professional identity as an educator lives in the classroom and shapes a commitment to life-long learning.

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