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# Oral presentation submission:

## TEFANZ Conference 2014

**Title:** What do teacher educators perceive to be the purposes of practicum?

**Presenters:**

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**Background to the topic**

Research and policy literature highlights variable purposes for the practicum in initial teacher education (eg. Russell, 2005). However, a review of the literature found no research that directly investigated (a) how teacher educators view the purpose of the practicum, nor (b) how such purposes are prioritised.

**Research question**

How, and why, do teacher educators from one institution prioritise the purposes for practicum in initial teacher education?

**Research methods**

The pragmatic mixed-method research design (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2010) included an anonymous questionnaire consisting of a diamond ranking activity (requiring placement of 9 of 11 pre-determined from literature practicum purpose statement cards) and open response items seeking explanations of placement determining criteria and statement elimination. Following analysis of the questionnaire a focus group of six participants met with the researchers to further explore the aggregated findings.

30 teacher educators from one university completed the survey.

**Analysis and findings**

*Quantitative analysis:*

Data were entered into an Excel spread sheet. Weighted frequencies for the statements were determined for each participant and aggregated across the sample. The statements clustered into four groups. Cluster 1 included the purpose statements "Enables student

teachers to learn about the complex role of the teacher” and “Assists student teachers to develop teaching strategies/practices”. Purpose statements receiving moderate support included “Helps student teachers to develop an identity as a teacher” (Cluster 2) and “Is a context for assessing a student teacher’s competency” (Cluster 3). Receiving least support was “Helps student teachers to determine if a teaching career is really for them” (Cluster 4). The clusters were a mix of practical and philosophical statements. For each statement there was a wide range of placement indicating different opinions amongst the faculty who completed the survey. Seven of the 11 statements had ratings across the possible range of 0 (not ranked) – 5 (most important).

#### *Qualitative analysis:*

Reasons provided for the prioritisation of statements were collated according to statement position in the diamond. Analysis of these reasons suggests participants consider practicum purposes are strongly contingent. Different reasons for elimination of statements and suggestions of other purposes will also be presented, as will findings from the focus group.

### **Contribution to knowledge**

This study - the first of a series designed to elucidate understandings of how conceptions of purpose influence teacher education practice - has uncovered that teacher educators hold wide-ranging perceptions of the purposes of practicum. The findings have implications about visiting lecturers’ practice when supervising students on practice, practicum support and professional development for visiting lecturers.

### **References**

- Russell, T. (2005). Using the practicum in preservice teacher education programs: Strengths and weaknesses of alternative assumptions about the experiences of learning to teach. In G.F. Hoban (Ed.), *The missing links in teacher education design. Developing a multi-linked conceptual framework.* (pp.135-152). Dordrecht, The Netherlands: Springer.
- Tashakkori, A., & Teddlie, C. (2010). *Handbook of mixed methods in social and behavioral research* (2nd Edition). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.