CHAPTER 9

Rites of Passage in Practice Teaching Experiences: A Necessary Evil?

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The motivation for our collaboration in the writing of this piece arises from our passion and commitment to opening up crucial conversations (Patterson, Grenny, & McMillan, 2011) about the field placement experiences of teacher candidates (pre-service teacher training) which is an integral part of their preparation to enter the teaching profession. Throughout this chapter, we use the term "teacher candidates," although we acknowledge that the term "student teachers" is often used in the literature on this topic. We wish to share some key insights, based on our experiences, into the acts of microaggressions and injustices that are not discussed candidly and are not addressed in many cases. By and large, most practice teaching experiences are fulfilling and rewarding both for mentor/associate teachers and for the teacher candidates under their tutelage. However, in a community of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991) we should be able to dialogue, critique, and open up the lines of communication in order to innovate, change, and remain current in our quest for quality teaching and learning for the students in our care. The purpose of this paper is to critically interrogate the manner in which

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teacher candidates are initiated into a community of practice through legitimate peripheral participation and the so-called unwritten *rites of passage* through which teacher candidates as "sojourners" are required to negotiate. These issues are of particular significance to teacher candidates in general, and especially to those from immigrant and ethnically diverse backgrounds who face special challenges related to linguistic and cultural dissonance and a lack of intercultural competence at the school level. Powers and Duffy (2016) argue that although there has been much progress "there is still a great need for reflexive work on intersectionality and cultural competence" (p. 61). It is a matter of professional integrity and responsibility for all those involved in teacher education in any capacity (whether as associate/mentor teachers, university professors, university and school administrators, or other stakeholders) to address the injustices, expressed mainly through microaggressions, encountered by some teacher candidates in their initiation into the teaching profession. The argument commonly made is: "If you (meaning the teacher candidate) cannot handle the pressures, then it is not the profession for you." We know that in every profession there is a period in which novices struggle to *learn the ropes* and the apprenticeship model places them in a power differential where they have to stay quiet and *suck it up* if they wish to be successful in their field placement (the practicum). Such a discourse nurtures a culture of fear, creates spaces for microaggressions to occur, and further bolsters the idea that everyone has to do it and suffer these injustices in silence thus stifling the potential for teacher candidates to experience authentic learning in a supportive and nonthreatening environment.

This is a reflective and interrogative piece on the state of the practicum, in which we glean from our own experiences and also from various informal discussions with teacher candidates (from whom we obtained informed consent) about their perceptions of the field experience component. This is not a study of all teacher candidates in our program and elsewhere. The fact that the voices of associate teachers are not being heard is another limitation of this chapter (and something we wish to pursue in another paper). We do not wish to make generalizations of the entire practice. Despite these caveats, we bring to the forefront some troubling issues about the practicum that are talked about privately, but are rarely discussed in the open with all those who are involved in these practicum experiences. We ought to conduct a serious investigation into existing structures and power dynamics in the field experience component of teacher education in order to engage in an open and honest

dialogue with a sense of fearlessness for a common purpose; namely to improve the practice teaching experience.

The first author, a professor at a faculty of education in Ontario, has extensive experience in education across various levels, and also in teacher education at different universities in Ontario; the second author was a teacher candidate in Ontario a few years ago. We have purposely come together (one with many years of experience and the other with fresh perspectives from the field) so that we can use different lenses to view these issues and arrive at a synthesis of ideas. We believe it is time to deconstruct current unwritten practices and the taken-for-granted way of conducting business so that we can transform teacher education to benefit the profession, and in particular the students we are entrusted to educate in the best manner possible. We ask pertinent questions and offer testimonials from teacher candidates; however, our intention in undertaking this task is not to malign associate teachers/mentors and their service to the profession, but to propose ways to open up the dialogue on current practices that are inadequate in many aspects in meeting the needs of teacher candidates who will be teaching twenty-first century skills. Sometimes, teacher candidates are not being given authentic learning and mentorship experiences. In a world filled with rapid changes, new challenges and ambiguities, inauthentic approaches are not conducive to teacher education and to professional development. Current practices continue to propagate the status quo in terms of teaching and learning as opposed to having a new discourse infused with fresh ideas and perspectives. When innovation and different ways of thinking are suppressed, it not only hurts the teacher candidates and their mentors, but ultimately the students who could benefit from thinking differently. It is dangerous rhetoric to harbor a mentality that everyone has to "bear the cross" during practice teaching. We have to increase awareness of the role of institutionalization which "occurs when there is a reciprocal typification of habitualized action by types of actors" (Berger & Luckmann, 2002, p. 42). When we "get stuck" in habitualized actions, we perpetuate the idea that oppression is acceptable just because it is familiar (Adams, Bell, & Griffin, 1997) and we become socialized into accepting this way of doing things as a *rite of passage*.

This paper begins with a brief overview of some of the main concepts that define the parameters within which the field experience component of teacher education takes place. Next, we provide voices from the field to provide powerful illustrations of the issues and problems, with

a specific focus on microaggressions and injustices that occur for some teacher candidates during the practice teaching phase of their teacher education program. In the concluding section, we provide suggestions for opening up the dialogue for crucial conversations (Patterson et al., 2011) to occur so that we continue to engage in authentic learning in a community of practice.

Conceptual Frameworks

We frame our discussion of the complexity of the field experience by elaborating on the context and content of the notion of a *rite of passage* and the role it plays in a community of practice—namely the community of practice of the teaching profession. Under the umbrella of practice teaching as a rite of passage lurks the potential for microaggressions and lateral violence that must be discussed as we deconstruct the complex relationship between teacher candidates and associate teachers during the practicum.

A Rite of Passage

Practice teaching/field experience is considered a rite of passage for novices'[1] entry into the teaching profession. In the field experience segment, teacher candidates are assigned to particular schools and classrooms for a period of time. The Ontario Ministry of Education mandates a minimum of 80 days of practice teaching over the course of a two-year teacher education program. During the practice teaching period, also called the practicum, teacher candidates are mentored by associate teachers who usually are teachers with considerable classroom experience, and further, school principals recommend these teachers to serve as associate/mentor teachers to teacher candidates.

Interestingly, as we headed into the final edits for this chapter we were directed to a recent issue of the *Journal of Education for Teaching* (2017) devoted to the topic of the rite of passage for teacher candidates as they train to become master teachers. Previously, Head (1992) and White (1989) built upon research done in anthropology on initiation rites/rites of passage in order to draw analogies to student teaching/practice teaching. Almost three decades ago White (1989) wrote about student teaching as a rite of passage, and therefore, inherently fraught with problems and tensions. She argues that "initiation rituals

are powerful tools for the social organization of people, ideologies, and social practices" (p. 178). White investigated previous studies on rites of passage to show that the induction of novices into the profession followed a classic rites of passage format: separation (where they leave the confines of the university classroom); transition (where they learn the strategies of the classroom, teacher, students, cultural frames, and other aspects); and incorporation (when they are successful at the end of the program they can enter the teaching profession). For the purpose of this paper, we focus on the first two stages: separation and transition. Head (1992) also wrote about practice teaching as an initiation into the teaching profession using the term *liminality*[2] to underscore the threshold stage of ambiguity and uncertainty for teacher candidates/student teachers where they are neither here (students) nor there (teachers)—rather, in an in-between stage. Petersen (2017) quotes Turner (1969, p. 359) to describe liminality as "betwixt and between." Hence, as teacher candidates encounter both the first two stages of the cultural compression stage and liminality, they experience a lack of a sense of belonging, identity confusion, and disappointment as their expectations are not met (Petersen, 2017). They begin to conceptualize their experiences with the system and with their associate teacher as a rite of passage. They may see it as something that has to be done in order to cross over that proverbial bridge to becoming a teacher. Therefore, even when teacher candidates do not agree with the associate teacher's directives (for example, being assigned to do "busy work" as opposed to attending to skills and strategies), they often perceive such directives as a necessary evil, a rite of passage that everyone has to endure in the process of becoming a professional teacher.

Head further points to five important elements in what she terms the *cultural compression stage* that are congruent with the separation and transition stages described by White (1989). In the cultural compression stage (Head, 1992), as teacher candidates enter a community of practice, they experience: (1) isolation and separation when teacher candidates are removed from the university classroom and separated from their peers; (2) an emphasis on giving and receiving, but often not knowing how much support they will receive and to what extent they can take an initiative while being careful not to disrupt the associate teacher's routines and practices; (3) a sacred atmosphere that could be equated to an intimidating atmosphere as they are not sure how the associate teacher is going to treat and assess them; (4) the use

of strangers as instructor/mentors as they do not know the associate teacher and his/her temperament, style and expectations; and (5) rigid rules of conduct where they are fearsome about what they can and cannot do under the tutelage of the associate teacher. These five domains of experiences in the practicum become a slippery slope for microaggressions (slights, insults, disrespect, devaluation) (Beaulieu, 2016) to flourish due to the power differential between the associate teacher and the teacher candidate.

Correa, Martiniez-Arbelaiz, and Aberasturi-Apraiz (2015) frame beginning teachers as "sojourners" and the teacher candidates in this paper fit that description. As sojourners, they are pressured into aligning themselves with the status quo that is a state of compliance (also mentioned by Leshem, 2012). Further, Correa et al. (2015) argue that as sojourners they are viewed from a deficit perspective by their schools and associate teachers coupled often with an unrealistic expectation "that a teacher education program can produce what might be termed the finished product straight off their assembly line" (Gilroy, 2017, p. 129). However, it is important to underscore that during the rite of passage, perceived as the liminal stage between the university and the classroom, the teacher candidates are at the periphery of legitimate participation in the profession, and as such, they often cannot explore the numerous theories, concepts, and ideas discussed and debated in the university classroom. Oberski, Ford, Higgins, and Fisher (1999) provide an argument that furthers the idea that teacher candidates may feel pressured into doing what they are told as they attempt to jump through the proverbial "hoops" of the practicum/field experience component of a teaching program. Oberski et al. found that teacher candidates often hesitated to be open and honest with senior members of the school staff, specifically with regard to areas that could be viewed as problematic for their practice teaching experiences. Hobson (2002) also provides an example of a student who was afraid of her mentor and was deemed to be "quiet" because she was reluctant to speak up. In fact, the student was quiet because she was treading carefully and wanted to ensure that she would have a successful experience and get a favorable final report. In teacher education, as in many other professional degree programs, the internship/practicum inherently has a power imbalance as associate teachers have the power to pass/fail teacher candidates, thus becoming gate-keepers to the profession.

Microaggressions and Lateral Violence

The hierarchical nature of the relationship between associate/mentor teachers and teacher candidates by its very nature could, sometimes, lead to an abuse of power manifested in microaggressive behaviors. The concepts of microaggression and lateral violence are relevant and important to the field of teaching and learning. Sue et al. (2007) provide a definition from Piece from the 1970s that defines microaggressions as being automatic and subtle nonverbal exchanges that are used as put-downs. For example, one teacher candidate could not enter the assigned classroom until the associate unlocked the classroom door for her. This might not appear problematic on the surface. However, it was important for this teacher candidate to have access to the classroom to prepare and set up before classes commenced and her associate unlocked the classroom only 5–10 minutes prior to the first bell. This act implies that the teacher candidate is not worthy of having access to this space and that their time and needs are not being respected. Another example of such behavior was manifested when an associate teacher abruptly interrupted the teacher candidate and took over the lesson (thereby sending a message to students that the teacher candidate was not capable of teaching). Such acts undermine the teacher candidate's status in the classroom and further erodes his/her self-confidence. Such instances are so ingrained through different interactions in daily life that they are dismissed or accepted as part of the rite of passage. Teacher candidates who experience such microaggressions will often accept such behaviors as their lot to bear in order to succeed.

Lateral violence (or horizontal violence/hostility) refers to intergroup conflict and aggression, with examples being nonverbal innuendo, withholding information, sabotage, scapegoating, backstabbing, not respecting privacy, etc. (Stanley, Martin, Michel, Welton, & Nemeth, 2007). Lateral violence is identified as a workplace stressor that has both personal and organizational consequences by leading to a decrease in job satisfaction and commitment. It is important to raise awareness and understanding of lateral violence in order to create a genuinely friendly and supportive work environment and to reduce attrition rates (Ceravolo, Schwartz, Foltz-Ramos, & Castner, 2012). An interesting parallel to this finding is prevalent in our testimonials. One teacher candidate mentioned how acts of microaggression/lateral violence against her accumulated over the course of the three-week practicum leading to

an emotional breakdown and a short hospitalization for stress. Despite the poisonous environment she endured, she persisted and completed the practicum. She shared with us her feelings of dread and trepidation and the visceral reaction she had every time she even drove by a school, leading her to consider quitting the profession.

In our paper, we demonstrate how some teacher candidates face microaggressive behaviors from their associate teachers/mentors during their practice teaching experiences in schools. Some of these attitudes have been identified as being influenced by biases and stereotypes about certain groups of people. The dynamics of power and privilege often play a role for some associate teachers/mentors to demonstrate their rank and to ensure teacher candidates are in compliance. Some teacher candidates face innuendos and also outright comments regarding their age, experience level, creative choices, race, and background; perceived by teacher candidates as attempts by some associate teachers to exert their dominance over teacher candidates assigned to their care. Andersson and Pearson (1999) identify how acts of microaggression, lateral violence, and workplace incivility could pose a larger problem if not addressed in a timely manner. Such behaviors can escalate quickly, spiral out of control toward a tipping point where coercion, conflict, and threats develop. One aim of this chapter is to open the dialogue to recognize the moral implications of such acts in order to strategize ways for change to create a community of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991) so that we can foster more productive and positive experiences during this rite of passage into the teaching profession.

Lave and Wenger's: A Community of Practice

The process of learning to teach is about "becoming a member of a sustained community of practice" (Lave, 1991, p. 65); the process does not exist in a vacuum or in the abstract but is a product of negotiation and consensus in a learning community. In this paper, we employ Lave and Wenger's (1991) conceptual framework that embodies interrelated ideas of a *community of practice* in which *situated learning* through *legitimate peripheral participation* guides the learning of a novice and their initiation into a profession. Lave and Wenger's framework underscores the notion of reciprocity in learning as teacher candidates move from legitimate participation at the periphery in their role as novices to the center

of a community of practice, in the situated learning context of their field placements. In the sphere of apprenticeship-expert learning, Lave and Wenger's work is internationally respected and referenced, and although they do not speak specifically to teacher candidates' practices in the field experience component of education, we find important parallels that we employ to anchor our discussion in this paper.

We examine each of the aforementioned interrelated concepts in a linear fashion with a qualifier that, in reality, these are iterative activities. We further wish to declare that Lave and Wenger's work is complex with multiple definitions and interpretations. In this short paper, it is not feasible to explain these complex terms in detail that is required to do them full justice. Therefore, we draw upon the salient features of the concept of a community of practice with the explicit purpose of using key understandings as they relate to the messiness of the novice-expert relationship that is the subject of this paper.

We begin by explicating the key elements of a community of practice. What is a community of practice according to Lave and Wenger, and what are its implications for teacher candidates in their field placements? A learning situation where newcomers and experts engage with each other in a collective enterprise (in our case that of learning to teach) is a community of practice. Wenger (2006) as quoted in Woodgate-Jones (2012) states that "communities of practice are groups of people who share a concern or a passion for something they do and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly" (p. 148). Lave and Wenger identify three dimensions of a community of practice: *mutual engagement, joint enterprise,* and a *shared repertoire*. Mutual engagement is understood to be when two or more people engage in learning as a social activity in a community in which there is enabling engagement or a sense of belonging and diversity (i.e., diversity of ideas, opinions, experiences, and skills). Mutual engagement is also characterized by a community in which disagreements and differences are perceived as integral to learning:

> A community of practice is neither a haven of togetherness nor an island of intimacy insulated from political and social relations. Disagreements, challenges, and competition can all be forms of participation. As a form of participation, rebellion often reveals a greater commitment than does passive conformity. A shared practice thus connects participants to each other in ways that are diverse and complex. (Wenger, 2006, p. 76)

The second characteristic of a community of practice is a joint enterprise, which does not mean that the beliefs and practices of all members of this community are aligned, but that disagreements and differences are viewed as part of the process/enterprise and are "communally negotiated" (p. 78). The third characteristic of a community of practice is a shared repertoire that includes mutually agreed upon roles, rituals, tools, ways of doing things, symbols, gestures, and other aspects that comprise a repertoire in a community:

> The repertoire combines both the reificative and participative aspects. It includes the discourse by which members create meaningful statements about the world, as well as the styles by which they express their forms of membership and their identities as members. (p. 83)

Situated learning (or situated social practice) and legitimate peripheral participation in a community of practice are most relevant to the dynamics between the teacher candidate and mentor/associate teacher. Situated learning is synonymous with experiential learning where learners are actively involved in learning through real-life experiences. This description fits well with the practice teaching requirements in most teacher education and teacher training programs. The field experience (or practicum) provides teacher candidates opportunities to engage in real life teaching experiences, to learn from their challenges, successes, and failures in a safe and supportive environment so that they can build upon the ideas, concepts, and theories discussed in their university classrooms.

Hobson's (2002) study further investigated the practicum experience through interview data from teacher trainees about their school-based mentoring experiences. Some of the limitations they mentioned included: mentors not making time for them, lack of feedback or constructive criticism, lack of support from mentors, personality clashes, and mentors being out of date with changing theories and practices. Surprisingly, Hobson identified that 12 of the 16 participants reported some problems with at least one of their associate teachers (p. 14). Hobson delineated some of the ways that associate teachers utilized their power dynamic in order to get teacher candidates to comply with their directives. One participant mentioned that at the direction of the associate teacher, he had to teach classes not allocated to him. Hobson argued that teacher candidates needed supports and a safe learning environment to grow as future educators. The teacher candidates in Hobson's study stated that learning to teach is often a stressful and threatening

experience and the lack of support might lead to teacher candidates dropping out of their program of study. We must explore these issues in order to deconstruct dysfunctional and unproductive mentorship relationships that are being perpetuated due to the institutionalization (Berger & Luckmann, 2002) of such a rite of passage. We ought to interrogate the effects these experiences have on teacher candidates, school culture, students, and ultimately the teaching profession in general. Such unproductive practices have far-reaching and long-lasting effects on all actors involved in this socialization process.

Sharing Their Stories, Hearing Their Voices

In this section, we present selected testimonials and provide analyses using the lens of rites of passage through legitimate peripheral participation in a community of practice. We have removed all identifying markers to protect the confidentiality and to preserve the anonymity of participants. As these participants are recent graduates who are seeking employment in the field, we have taken great care to ensure that we do not jeopardize their futures. These precautions are an indictment of the field where there is a danger in speaking out boldly against the current state of affairs. Further, it is important to note that participants have agreed to allow us to present their voices so that readers get a glimpse into the dilemmas and the subtleties of microaggressions that novices face in their rite of passage into a community of practice. In fact, some expressed an eagerness to have their voices heard in the hope that changes could take place to benefit others who will follow in their path in future years. Below are two poignant excerpts from testimonials provided by one teacher candidate who was in an intermediate/senior cohort three years ago.

> Testimonial #1:
> I was very fortunate to have wonderful practicum experiences. However, as a sociologist by training, I intently observe and reflect on human behaviour. I found it interesting in some of my practicum experiences to see the dynamics of interaction between myself and my associate when trying to engage with different methods. I am very interested in educational technologies and integrating them to benefit student learning. I tried to make aspects of a dry unit/lesson plan into something fun and exciting for students through technology enhanced engaging projects. I remember being told by my associate that I should not use so much technology and instead should utilize his method as students apparently liked it better.

> The mentality and motto of "why reinvent the wheel" was frequently discussed and I recall an associate passing me their book of notes and telling me to just follow along.

> Testimonial #2:
> I recall an instance when I had a whole lesson planned and I had it paired with a very specific video. However, when I was about to start my lesson, my associate teacher interrupted me and took over by asking the class if they wanted to watch the film that I had specifically selected and aligned to the curriculum, or if they wanted to watch another totally unrelated film that he had selected. The class immediately turned on me and wanted to watch this other film, scrapping my lesson to the side.

In the testimonials stated above we see that the mentors/associate teachers involved were generally well-intentioned, but oftentimes the assessor role took over, nullifying the need to move teacher candidates from the periphery into the mainstream of action. These narratives that further align with Correa et al. (2015) claim that teacher candidates, as sojourners, might feel pressured into compliance, and therefore, be unable to explore the different concepts taught in the university classroom. The compliance with the mentor/associate when they veered off the lesson demonstrated the inauthentic experience that sometimes occurs for the teacher candidate as a sojourner in a community of practice. Furthermore, when the teacher candidate attempted to introduce new ideas, these lessons were viewed as potentially threatening. While teacher candidates have much to learn from an experienced teacher and mentor, they also bring fresh ideas and unique perspectives that they should feel safe discussing and sharing in a community of practice. Teaching is messy, and teacher candidates should have opportunities to try and also to fail as they learn from their experiences. Teaching should not always be about fail-safe practices.

The following anecdote from another recent graduate demonstrates the sense of insecurity that mentor/associate teachers might experience when their own students favor a younger and more energetic person who establishes a better rapport with students.

> Testimonial #3:
> I recall at the end of one of my practicum experiences, I asked for anonymous feedback from students so I could see what they liked, what they didn't like, etc. and one student said they had learned more with me than they did with their time before with the associate teacher.

Obviously, one could argue that this is the voice of a single student and there are other factors to consider, but we should be asking whether teacher candidates, even as novices, have something to bring to the table, and if their ideas could potentially enhance the learning experience for students and the experienced associate teacher. There are ways to harness the novice's potential for creativity if we wish to create a community of practice in which reciprocity (manifested in the exchange of ideas and learning experiences) benefits everyone involved.

The climate of the school plays a decisive role in the teacher candidates' practicum and lunch-time rituals are especially informative. We have heard narratives about lunch-time and staff-room experiences repeatedly over the years and in different settings, and therefore, we chose one testimonial that represents a concern expressed by several teacher candidates. In some schools, teacher candidates were explicitly directed to stay away from the staff room at lunchtime claiming that seating space was an issue. In other instances, the cold reception they encountered (through lack of a warm word or hostile glances in their direction) conveyed that they were not welcome into the staff room as they were not "real" teachers. Therefore, throughout the day these teacher candidates did not have a place they could go to for a break, and to connect with other teachers, discuss ideas and strategies in a community of practice. Furthermore, due to security issues in some schools, teachers also locked their classrooms, so alternative venues for breaks, and to prepare for the afternoon, were taken away from teacher candidates.

> Testimonial #4:
> I went to various schools during my practicum experience, and the lunch hour rituals were interesting to observe. At all of my schools, the associate/mentor teacher would go on their own at lunch. At one school, I entered the lunch room to a hostile environment where the teachers were gossiping, and in general I sensed some negative energy. I was oftentimes the only teacher candidate in this lunch room and I would sit in the corner and not be acknowledged. There was a very clear mentality that I was subordinate to these "real" teachers. I even noticed that the only time someone really would talk to me in this lunch room was when they were an occasional teacher for the day. This was also because they were categorized as being subordinate in this hierarchy of power. At another school, the lunch room was similar, however I had other teacher candidates to eat lunch and discuss things with. However, the few of us were crammed into a corner and were left to talk to each other as opposed to the teachers in that school.

The example in the testimonial above is reminiscent of what Head (1992) argued was a result of liminality—a stage of ambiguity and uncertainty for teacher candidates as they were neither here (students at the university), nor there (teachers), rather they were in an awkward in-between stage. Since teacher candidates do not have clearly defined identities (i.e., they experience liminality), they do not fit into the power structure or hierarchy of a full-fledged teacher, and therefore, they are seen as not deserving of time or respect from peers in the lunchroom. Furthermore, the above testimonial demonstrates the lack of mutual engagement, specifically in regard to a sense of belonging, that is a necessary component in order to engage in a community of practice.

Some teacher candidates have discussed troubling issues of racial and cultural biases that teacher candidates from immigrant backgrounds, specifically from Asian or Middle-Eastern backgrounds encounter during the practicum, thus adding an additional level of complexity to the debate:

> Testimonial #5:
> I still recall one of my fellow peers, also belonging to an ethnic minority, telling us of her unsettling experience with an associate teacher. A substitute teacher, filling in for an associate, told this teacher candidate about how surprised she was with the proficiency of her English because she was under the impression that there might be communication and language problems associated with her accent. My peer was shocked at this remark and wondered how an educator could pass this kind of uninformed judgment based on race and ethnicity. No one should have to question their ability as teachers just because they are from a different country or different from other teacher candidates. Unfortunately, this is a common occurrence.

In placing teachers in schools, the field experience office at our university (most faculties of education have office staff dedicated to organizing and placing teacher candidates in schools for their practicum) will try to ensure that placements are as compatible as possible by asking schools for their preferences in terms of available mentors and classrooms and then the office staff will attempt to match teacher candidate and school accordingly. One of the authors who work in an advisory capacity was shocked the first time she heard comments from a couple of schools such as: “Please don’t send me teacher candidates with funny sounding names.” The following testimonials are taken from one teacher candidate

who came from a South Asian background and had a distinct name such that even before she arrived at the school, certain stereotypical assumptions were already in place

> Testimonial #6:
> The attitudes of many of my fellow minority teacher candidates can be summed up in the opinion expressed by one of my classmates. He said that he appreciated the efforts of the faculty of education in recruiting and retaining ethnic minority teacher candidates, however, he was concerned about the selection process of associate teachers and the acts of subtle racism occurring during placements.

The prevalence of disrespect, and the perpetuation of microaggressions expressed in the testimonials above "communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative messages" (Beaulieu, 2016). We had considerable challenges in picking just a few voices for this paper from the plethora of narratives we gathered about teacher candidates' field experiences. Most teacher candidates stated that they have had positive experiences and learned a lot about teaching by being in the field and gaining pedagogical skills. Unfortunately, too often, we also heard narratives such as the ones shared in this paper. The teaching profession is grounded in a moral imperative of justice and fairness, but both were missing in the accounts given here. We refer back to Head (1992) who delineated the cultural compression stage in which individuals were in an intimidating atmosphere with the uncertainty of how they were going to be treated. The testimonials above demonstrate the manner in which the cultural compression stage was experienced by these particular teacher candidates: They encountered an atmosphere that was hostile and intimidating with an undercurrent of racism.

Teacher candidates provided examples, and reflected on subtle aggressions they experienced:

> Testimonial #7:
> In my own experience, I can recount many occasions where certain restrictions were unfoundedly imposed upon me. For example, some of my associates did not give me the freedom to photocopy materials, or in some cases, they withheld the list of my students' names from me for many days. Similarly, associate teachers refused to provide me with any resources and took a long time to respond to my e-mails.

> Testimonial #8:
> I was given feedback right in front of the students. My associate never hesitated to belittle me for insignificant and trivial things. This kind of uncooperative demeanor undermined my confidence as an aspiring educator, it was even more demeaning to my sense of worth even though I worked very hard to please my associate and did everything I was told to do. I was very hurt that my associate teacher failed to acknowledge and respect my dignity and intrinsic value as a human being.

Testimonial #8, in which a teacher candidate describes being belittled and insulted in front of students, is a clear example of microaggressive behavior under the guise of mentoring. The teacher candidate became anxious about what she could or could not do under the rule of the associate teacher. Testimonial #7 brings to mind Head's cultural compression stages, specifically stage five which addresses rigid rules of conduct. In both testimonials above, we can sense fear and ambiguity, as both teacher candidates were filled with doubts of what they could accomplish based on their associate teacher's use of power. In the first example, the denial of access to resources demonstrated a denial of Lave and Wegner's dimensions of a community of practice, i.e., the third characteristic as a shared repertoire (e.g., mutually agreed roles, rituals, tools, ways of doing things) (p. 78). However, this particular associate teacher was not sharing resources, thus, the associate teacher was not contributing toward a community of practice built upon mutual engagement, joint enterprise, and shared repertoire.

We need to understand the ramifications the microaggressions in the above testimonials have on teacher candidates and their future as educators and human beings:

> Testimonial #9:
> While all of this was hard to handle, I took the turmoil of these experiences positively and instead of losing heart, I tried to incorporate them into my own teaching. I pledged to become more compassionate towards all my students, including the ethnic minority students in my class, who sometimes face inequities on a daily basis

The thoughtful reflection noted above from a teacher candidate from a minority background (and with a considerable teaching experience in other settings outside of Canada) provides a glimmer of hope and remarkable resiliency from someone who had to endure a rite of passage fraught with microaggressive behaviors. Because we know the details of the unjust treatment

that this teacher candidate experienced, we were amazed at her strength in articulating hope and compassion. However, the question that we ask repeatedly is "Why does it have to be this way?". Does this rite of passage have to be manifested in an attack on the teacher candidate's sense of self and efficacy or is there potentials for it to be supportive and nurturing?

> Testimonial #10:
> These practicums produce the next generation of teachers who have low self-esteem and a low level of conviction and confidence in their teaching. Furthermore, hostility and an unappreciative attitude can act as catalysts for the dissipation of passion for teaching. After dealing with discouraging experiences at the hands of associate teachers, many teacher candidates become dispassionate about an aspect of their lives that they were once hopeful and enthusiastic about—educating our future generations. The harsh and high stress environment of the practicums sometimes even forces teacher candidates to rethink their choice of this noble profession.

> Testiominal #11:
> Look at me. I loved teaching all of my life, from tutoring kids when I was just a teenager, to my actual teaching in schools on two different continents. Now I don't even want to look at schools when I pass them while driving. How can these placements create such a phobia in someone?

The powerful message provided by both testimonials #10 and #11 underscores the urgency to open the conversation between the school/school boards and the faculties of education. The teacher candidate in the above testimonial barely survived the last month of the practicum due to the stress and the unwelcoming environment that she had to endure throughout her placement. The potential for a wonderful and symbiotic relationship to benefit all parties involved, and in particular, the students in that classroom turned into something more dark and threatening. We feel a sense of urgency to discuss these matters, not for the purpose of maligning individuals, but to take a proactive stance so that such experiences could be avoided or eliminated.

Suggestions Moving Forward

There are many eager, passionate and committed teacher candidates ready to take on the challenge of the teaching profession and there are many outstanding and supportive mentor/associate teachers. Most teacher candidates have positive and rewarding practicum experiences

in their rite of passage into becoming fully qualified teachers. However, in this chapter, we have focused on those teacher candidates who experienced microaggressions, as we wanted their voices to be heard and also to underscore the complexity of the undertaking that is the practicum. Even when such cases of microagression are few, they have to be addressed. We contend that if the practice teaching experiences of even a few teacher candidates are fraught with microaggression leading to great anxiety and stress, then we cannot dismiss these cases merely as a rite of passage.

It is often said that it is easy to critique, but it is more challenging to propose constructive solutions. We again reiterate that the social construction of institutional practices permits certain ways of doing things to be taken for granted. In order "to make the familiar strange", bold and forward-looking steps must be taken. We believe that enhanced training in mentorship for associate teachers would be helpful. Therefore, universities, the Ontario College of Teachers, Ministries of Education and school boards should make a serious commitment and investment in pre-service teacher education that would include intensive training for associate teachers in preparing them for this very pivotal mentorship role. In this training, the elements of a community of practice (as outlined earlier in the paper) must be interrogated through a reflective and reflexive process so that we create a genuine learning community among teacher candidates, associate teachers/mentors, schools and university personnel. In such a community of practice, ambiguity and complexity are embraced so that a safe environment free from aggression and injustice is nurtured. Although power dynamics between novice and veteran cannot be totally eradicated (nor is it advisable to do so), the dynamic, although hierarchical to some extent, must allow for nonthreatening spaces for crucial conversations to occur as part of this repertoire of education and training.

The concept of the "art of crucial conversations" (Patterson et al., 2011) has been used extensively in business and leadership training programs. What does it mean and how could we employ it in practice? Patterson et al. (2011) state that a crucial conversation is a "discussion between two or more people where (1) stakes are high, (2) opinions vary, and (3) emotions run strong" (p. 3) and the outcome greatly impacts their lives. The authors offer insights into strategies for successful dialogue among people and underscore the importance of mastering the art of crucial conversations through understanding and practicing the skills and strategies needed to have a high-risk conversation.

Further, they state that fear kills dialogue—an important assertion especially in the case of a power differential between the associate teacher and the teacher candidate. We have to train our teacher candidates to overcome fear by providing them with supports needed in order to have a free flow of ideas and suggestions while engaging in a high stakes conversation (as required) with their associate teachers. We believe that both associate teachers and teacher candidates should be provided with the necessary skills and strategies (emotional resilience, ways to address injustices, standing up for oneself in a nonconfrontational manner and other such strategies) to deal with emotionally and professionally risky dialogues. An investment in training, although cost prohibitive in an era of belt-tightening and cut-backs, should be given high priority as there are potential long-term benefits for all.

Of course, these ideas sound easy on paper but they require guidance and practice, and most importantly the will to make a difference. None of the ideas suggested in this paper will come to fruition if stakeholders lack the will to think differently. We wish to conclude this paper with one more testimonial from a recent graduate of our program.

> Testimonial #12:
> I believe that the associate teacher should be responsible for creating a safe, affirming and positive learning environment not only for their students but also for their teacher candidates. Teacher candidates should feel safe and secure under the wings of their associates so that they can practice that freedom to express and implement their ideas during practicum. I believe that it is imperative that teacher candidates are allowed this freedom and are not made to feel insecure and unworthy.

The aforementioned testimonial is a powerful insight from a teacher candidate as to what they believe an associate teacher should provide. When we consider this narrative, it becomes apparent that they are asking for basic dignity and respect. They are essentially asking the associate teachers to provide the same type of learning environment to them as they are supposed to be extending and modeling to their own students in the classroom.

We understand that a community of practice is a complex and messy entity. However, we need to learn to be open to and embrace the messiness that comes from these interactions. In the words of the beloved cartoon educator Ms. Frizzle (from the series *The Magic Schoolbus*):

"take chances, make mistakes, get messy!" Ms. Frizzle's quote teaches us that in order to have authentic learning experiences, we need to embrace a level of uncertainty. We need to have skills to deal with tough experiences that include disagreements, challenges, and difficult conversations. As previously outlined, these are all valid forms of participation in a community of practice that will allow for authentic learning, rather than passive conformity. However, in order for teacher candidates to feel confident and comfortable disagreeing, challenging, and proposing difficult discourses, they need to feel supported and respected. If there are rigid power dynamics and structures in place that build barriers against teacher candidates, there will never be a chance for educators to take that leap into a community of practice. Pailliotet's (1997) study (from two decades earlier) of teacher candidates found cases of disempowerment, with unauthentic learning and lack of communication; it is unnerving that such narratives, although not rampant, still persist.

Teacher candidates are at a fork in the road. They are neither here (university students), nor there (teachers); they are in a liminal stage. They fall into an awkward in-between stage, many feeling stuck, helpless, and without a sense of identity. They lack a formal place and space in their professional milieu. Associate teachers, as members of a profession dedicated to learning, collaboration, and social justice, should be working toward a community of practice that fosters inclusive and safe environments for teacher candidates to learn, experiment, and grow. Given the number of years, teacher education in North America has required a practice teaching component it is fair to assume that most, if not all teachers, have once been in the shoes in which teacher candidates currently stand. While it is easy to get caught up in power dynamics, it is important for the associate teacher to pursue reflective practice to understand and deconstruct their own professional journey, starting from the time when they were the inexperienced novice.

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Notes

1. Note that not all teacher candidates are novices in the true sense of the word. Some teacher candidates who may be certified and experienced in other countries take this program to gain certification to teach in Ontario. Further,

we need to consider the group of teacher candidates who might have come to teacher education after having had previous careers (Gilroy, 2017).

2. Petersen's (2017) article further explores this liminal stage faced by novice teachers. Based on a research study she conducted in South Africa, she argues that novices often encounter numerous challenges at this stage and that their expectations are often unrealistic.

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