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Quality from participants'
perspectives:
The experiences and beliefs of pre-service
teachers regarding professional practice.

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Title of your paper: Quality from participants' perspectives: the experiences and beliefs of pre-service teachers regarding professional practice.

Abstract (288/300 words)

Teacher education has a great and long-term impact on the quality of teaching in schools. In preparing teachers, professional practice is a fundamental component that can provide relevant and authentic learning experiences. Beyond preparing teachers in subject didactics and pedagogical methods, teacher education shapes pre-service teachers' outlook on learning and teaching, which further influences how they approach teaching in school. Hence, understanding pre-service teachers' perceptions of practice can enhance our knowledge on how to improve the teaching profession and the opportunities for future teachers to learn to and from practice.

This qualitative study aims to understand pre-service teachers' perceptions and beliefs regarding their development as teachers, specifically the learning experiences that emerge before, during, and after professional practice. To unravel participants' perspectives of quality in the teacher education program, I delve into their beliefs and experiences of collaboration with teachers at school and university using online questionnaires and semi-structured interviews. The data draws from 184 unique questionnaires conducted before and after the practice period and 28 interviews.

The preliminary findings indicate that pre-service teachers experience practice as an in-between of learning to teach from various knowledge sources and the challenges of hybrid practice during the COVID-19 pandemic, which led to frustration and greater demands. Pre-service teachers further reflect on how the practice period is paramount in their learning process. Meeting the teaching profession firsthand allows them to see through direct experience with pupils how their future career development may unfold. However, challenges of crossing boundaries, adapting to new technologies, and communication with peers and supervisors may hinder the overall experience and integration of epistemologies during

practice. Hence the value of quality professional practice in teacher education that fosters pre-service teachers' learning and teaching in schools in the future.

Extended summary (1000/1000 words, excluding reference list)

Introduction: Professional practice is undoubtedly a fundamental element in the preparation of future teachers. However, teacher education (TE) has been long criticized for the perceived disconnection between theory and practice (Allen et al., 2013; Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999; Darling-Hammond et al., 2005). In response to this, contemporary educational research assigns a paramount role to practice and relies on partnerships to create stronger connections between schools and TE programs. Partnerships that genuinely compromise and collaborate have been shown to deliver positive learning outcomes for pre-service teachers (PSTs), which in turn is significant for pupils' learning outcomes (Darling-Hammond, 2010, 2014; Zeichner, 2010, 2012). Learning to teach requires a sound integration of theoretical knowledge and coherent and authentic experiences from practice.

Partnerships that foster positive cooperation are promising to curtail these disconnections. However, more research is needed to understand how such partnerships function in reality and how their planning is operationalized in professional practice. To establish successful partnerships, we need more knowledge on how connections are made, how participants perceive their roles, and whether coherence and collaboration are achieved. Such explorations may further shed light on how stakeholders collaborate to enact practice that successfully assists PSTs' learning process.

In this study, my purpose is to explore PSTs' perceptions regarding their roles in the TE program, specifically the learning experiences that emerge before, during, and after practice. To accomplish this, I intend to delve deeply into PSTs' beliefs about practice, collaboration with teachers at school and university, and their opinions about their learning process in the TE program. These research questions guide the study:

- How do pre-service teachers perceive their roles in the teacher education program and the practice at schools?
- How do pre-service teachers integrate their lived experiences into their development as teachers?

Theoretical background: This study draws on the concept of the third space (Zeichner, 2010) and boundary crossings (Akkerman & Baker, 2011) as the conceptual underpinnings. The third space is a concept used to denote partnerships where more symmetric and collaborative relationships between schools and universities occur (Zeichner, 2010). The

premise behind the third space metaphor indicates that partnerships move beyond complementary relationships where each institution has its responsibilities and priorities towards an integrated effort that fosters connectedness and relations of equivalence.

As professional practice in TE is embedded in complementary learning experiences from practice and theory, the third space guides creating partnerships that blur boundaries and favors the crossing of ideas and discourses between schools and TE institutions (Ramsaroop & Gravett, 2017). Learning does not take place within a single context or domain. Instead, it includes various contexts and actions that take us across and between practices (Engeström, 2008). Hence, the learning process entails crossing boundaries, the frequent negotiation of perspectives, and collective work practices (Akkerman, 2011). As teacher educators move across different settings, boundaries may further constraint and limit the gain from the diversity of collaboration. Therefore, crossing boundaries can both challenge and enrich teachers' professional learning.

Methods: This study seeks to generate an in-depth understanding of PSTs' experiences and perceptions about professional practice. A case study design is adopted to explore this complex social phenomenon from participants' accounts of their experiences in a real-world context (Cohen et al., 2018; Yin, 2014). The data is collected from two PST cohorts of a practical pedagogical program (PPU), both part and full-time students in autumn 2020 and spring 2021 participated. The data collection was conducted before and after practice, using an online questionnaire and semi-structured interviews. In total, 88 students answered the questionnaire before practice, and 96 answered the questionnaire after practice. As the questionnaires were anonymous, it is impossible to say how many answered both prior and after. Thus there are 184 unique answers, but the overlap is unknown. 28 PSTs participated in the interviews.

Findings: The preliminary findings indicate that PSTs experience practice as an in-between of learning to teach from various knowledge sources and the challenges of hybrid practice during the COVID-19 pandemic, which led to frustration and greater demands. Further, PSTs perceive their role as relevant for their learning process and their development as teachers beyond the teacher education program. PSTs reflect on how the practice period is paramount in their learning process. Meeting the teaching profession firsthand allows them to see through direct experience with pupils how their future career development may unfold.

However, challenges of crossing boundaries, adapting to new technologies, and communication with peers and supervisors may hinder the overall experience and integration of epistemologies during practice. Hence the value of well-established partnerships in teacher education.

Relevance: Teacher education has a long-term impact on quality in schools. Beyond preparing teachers in subject didactics and pedagogical methods, TE programs influence teachers' outlook on learning, which reflects on the quality of every activity taking place in schools. Improving the teaching profession and the opportunities for PSTs to learn to and from practice can enhance coherence in TE and emphasize the relevance of knowledge and competence.

In Norway, the national strategy 2025 (MoE, 2017) highlights the need to establish a framework for partnerships between TE institutions and schools that improves PSTs' professional practice and strengthens schools' competence and development. A critical focus in the strategy is that the quality of TE does not solely rely on TE institutions. Schools are essential contributors by providing quality professional training to the PSTs who later will take up employment in the schools. Schools are equal actors in the formation of future teachers.

This study contributes to these efforts by identifying the aspects that PSTs consider crucial in their development as teachers and the characteristics of the partnerships that foster quality professional practice and enhance collaborative work. Furthermore, in the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic, partnerships are increasingly needed to adapt and integrate digital technologies that facilitate reflective and collaborative practice. In sum, by exploring the experiences and beliefs of PSTs, this study seeks to expand our knowledge on how partnerships work and how best to prepare the teachers that will enact quality teaching in schools in the future.

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