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Dear Reader,

This special issue, *Teacher Education Practicum in Policy and Practice*, explores key aspects of student teachers' work placements within teacher education. Positioned between universities and schools, the teacher education practicum serves as a meeting point for different educational practices and as a space where the roles of university staff and school staff are shaped and negotiated. Its core aim is to help student teachers connect practical experience with research-based knowledge.

This special issue highlights critical aspects of the practicum, such as assessment procedures and the diverse conditions that affect student teachers' learning during the practicum periods. Recent reforms, such as the introduction of specifically designated training schools and preschools, have increased oversight of practicum placements. These developments underscore the need for closer collaboration between universities and placement schools to better support both student teachers and their placement school supervisors. At the same time, the contributions in this issue show that many aspects of the practicum still require further research.

This complex melting pot of institutional logics and practices, where school and academia sometimes diverge and sometimes converge, emphasizes the need for continued research into the practicum. With this special issue of *Educare*, we aim to address that need. It comprises seven articles based on empirical data from early childhood, primary, secondary, and vocational teacher education in Sweden. The contributing authors represent a range of institutions and academic disciplines, but they share a common interest in the practicum component of teacher education.

In the first article, Ilona Rinne, Charlotte Nilsson, and Frida Siekkinen examine how student teachers develop a professional identity during their practicum. Drawing on interviews with six

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student teachers and analysis based on Kelchtermans' personal interpretive framework — where personal and professional traits are intertwined — the authors find that the relationship between the teacher supervisor and the student teacher is central. Teacher supervisors who succeed in establishing supportive relationships are viewed as role models. Balancing personal qualities such as kindness and tolerance with professional traits like clarity and structure emerges as a significant challenge in the teaching profession, one that demands a renegotiation of personal qualities in a professional light. The article concludes with a discussion of both the pedagogical and professional implications of the student-teacher supervisor relationship for the formation of professional identity.

In the next article, Rimma Nyman, Christina Skodras, and Susanne Frisk continue the theme of practicum contexts for student teachers in primary school, focussing on research-based mathematics teaching abroad. Twelve student teachers' experiences of teaching based on the Context for Learning (CL) model are examined through classroom observations, surveys, and focus group interviews. Findings indicate a clear alignment between the student teachers' learning experiences during the practicum and CL principles, as well as a perceived link between university coursework and practical teaching. The authors relate these findings to long-term professional development.

The third article, by Elin Eriksson, Maria Fredriksson, Jörgen Dimenäs, and Sofia Walter, investigates how teacher supervisors define and report professional competence in the preschool teacher education practicum. Data consist of teacher supervisors' written assessments of student teachers' professional competence in 62 final practicum placements. The analysis is guided by Ball's theory of policy enactment. The results show that teacher supervisors present professional competence in four distinct ways: by observing student teachers' development over time, interpreting competence through personal judgement, aligning with learning objectives and assessment criteria, and describing how student teachers demonstrate the competencies outlined in these frameworks in practice. The authors emphasize that policy is enacted differently by teacher supervisors, resulting in variations in how assessment practices are applied and the degree to which they meet standards of consistency and legal certainty.

The fourth article, authored by Kristina Henriksson and Dragana Grbavac, also focuses on assessment, specifically, how feedback is constructed and communicated to preschool student teachers during the three-way practicum conferences involving the student teacher, their school-based teacher supervisor, and their university teacher. The content and focus of the assessment feedback are analyzed in relation to three-way conferences as communicative activities. Eighteen such conferences are qualitatively analyzed using Hattie and Timperley's feedback model, supported by Darling-Hammond's views on teacher and instructional quality and Linell's theory of communicative activity types. The analysis identifies four types of feedback: general summaries, feedback on personal disposition, feedback on professional disposition, and feedback on pedagogical competence. The authors note that while feedback addressed personal role and task-related activities, it did not appear to meaningfully support student teachers' reflections on their own or children's learning.

In the fifth article, Susanne Gustavsson, Ingela Gyllspång, Helena Hellgren, and Gunilla Ståhlfors continue the discussion on the importance of assessment discussions. Based on eight three-way conferences, analyzed through critical hermeneutics, the authors examine how observed teaching is represented and used during the conversations and whether it serves as a basis for assessment or as an example for analysis. While the observed teaching is referenced, the authors find that the assessments tend to emphasize relational and leadership competencies, while deep didactic discussion is often absent. The article concludes with a discussion of the implications of these findings.

The sixth article, by Helen Winzell, explores the value of giving student teachers the opportunity to take full responsibility for teaching during their final practicum to help prevent so-called "praxis shock" when they begin working as fully autonomous teachers. This is investigated through qualitative interviews with student teachers. The findings show that when student teachers take sole responsibility for classroom instruction, they report a stronger teacher identity, greater agency, and deeper subject-matter insight. The author argues for differentiated supervisory support across practicum periods and recommends that the final placement include opportunities for independent teaching. Such experience is considered crucial for developing the autonomy required in the teaching profession.

The seventh and final article, by Carina Peterson, examines student teachers' experiences of temporarily changing preschool workplaces during their practicum as part of a validation of prior learning process in preschool teacher education. Through interviews conducted before, during, and after the transition, the study investigates how student teachers position themselves, how knowledge is transformed, and what conditions shape these changes. The results show that student teachers often act as intermediaries in practical arrangements and that the validation process tends to reinforce divisions between academic and active professional knowledge cultures rather than integrate them. The author calls for a continued discussion of the principles and structures of validation to strengthen collaboration between academia and professional practice and to better understand the relationship between theoretical and practical knowledge.

Together, these articles reflect several dimensions of the ongoing conversation on school-based teacher education during the practicum. As previously mentioned, the authors share a strong interest in the practicum, as well as a critical perspective on the complexity of the practicum as a professional and educational setting.

We hope that readers of *Educare* will find the articles both insightful and useful for further research, policy development, and the advancement of educational practice within schools and universities alike.

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