

**Beyond Schools:
Community-Based Experiences
as a Third Space in Teacher
Education**



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Abstract

Some teacher education programs have incorporated community-based experiences for teacher candidates. Based on the experiences of developing and implementing a community-based practicum in our teacher education programs, the authors conducted a small exploratory case study, aimed at examining and critically considering community-based experiences as a “third space;” an opportunity through which to challenge teacher candidates’ strongly held understandings of teaching. The purposes of this article are to share our literature review, to provide some key insights from the study findings, and to explore our lingering questions regarding the development and implementation of community-based experiences and to consider the possibilities of community-based experiences as a third space in which to disrupt teacher candidates’ assumptions about teaching.

Keywords: community-based experiences; third space; field experience; teacher education; practicum

Teacher education programs in Canada are typically structured to include both coursework and field experience (Falkenberg, 2010). Where coursework usually includes topics such as the context and policies of schooling and curriculum theory, field experience (sometimes called a practicum) is an opportunity to practice teaching in a classroom with a host teacher. Within this immersive experience the purpose is for teacher candidates to learn about teaching by practicing the “doing” of teaching (Burant & Kirby, 2002), and is often considered by teacher candidates to be “where the real learning happens” (Smits, 2010, p. 53). In an attempt to broaden teacher candidates’ experiences, expose students to community organizations, and incorporate more experiential opportunities, some teacher education programs have begun to augment their programs by incorporating community-based field experiences.

During a full revision of our Bachelor of Education program, the faculty created a community-based field experience course, to be offered to teacher candidates who have completed their first year of the two-year program. The course was designed as an elective to take place in the spring session (May and June). Teacher candidates are required to attend a weekly three-hour seminar (over eight weeks), as well as commit twelve hours per week (for six weeks) to a community-based organization, such as art-making centres, youth drop-in centres, or immigrant and refugee centres. Although the instructor visits each community organization during the course, there are no evaluative observations of the teacher candidates conducted by the instructor or the host supervisor. Assignments of the course include research of the community-based organization, readings and reflections, as well as a final reciprocity project designed in collaboration with the host supervisor. All assignments are assessed and graded by the instructor and the teacher candidates’ final evaluation is determined as a pass/fail.

This exploratory case study is based on the research in developing and implementing the community-based field experience course. As per exploratory research, the purpose is to examine situations in which there are no clear outcomes and therefore, it often takes “intuitive paths” (Yin, p. 29, 2012). In conducting this research, we drew on data sources that included: a description of the literature regarding community-based practicums; the analysis of two semi-structured interviews; and the reflective analysis of my (Author 1) experiences as the instructor, in order to provide some key insights and lingering questions related to developing and implementing a community-based field experience course.

We will critically examine the community-based field experience course in order to augment future offerings, as well as to contribute to the field in regard to the development and conceptualization of community-based field experience courses. We are particularly interested in the ways in which community-based field experiences might challenge teacher candidates’ strongly established understandings of teaching and of knowledge that inform their educational biographies (Britzman, 2003) as well as disrupting the related belief that teaching is a matter of technical expertise. In order to convey the epistemological and theoretical underpinnings of this research, we will begin by providing a theoretical frame and will then proceed with the descriptions of the data collected.

Theoretical Perspectives: Undoing Assumptions

When students arrive in teacher education programs, they often have deeply ingrained ideas of what it means to teach (Britzman, 2003). Their epistemological assumptions of education have long been permeated by discourses of modernism (Popkewitz, 1997), (in)forming

their understandings of schooling based on normative conceptions of knowledge, curriculum, and teaching. Yet, we consider knowledge as being socially constructed, and curriculum as having been reconceptualized (Pinar, 2004) and understood as a social practice requiring a reorientation of the teacher. Drawing on Maxine Greene, Britzman (2007) describes the teacher, “as an incomplete project, as unfinished, as in the process of becoming with others” and “as subject to uncertainty” (p. 3). We, the authors, understand the teacher as in relation with others—with colleagues, children and parents—and that teacher development is uneven (Britzman, 2007), recursive, unknown, and complicated. In part, teachers gain understandings of what it means to be a teacher through encounters with difficulty and in the fallout incurred through difficult decisions in which they are forced to respond ethically to the other and to themselves (Author, 2013). Thus, teachers are not fixed selves whose development can be plotted neatly on a continuum, but rather, teachers are always becoming complex and social beings, influenced by context and those around them.

We aim to (re)consider how we might support teacher candidates in conceptualizing teaching “practice” in ways other than the normalized practices in/of schooling (Smits, 2010). Moments that disrupt teacher candidates’ educational biographies (Britzman, 2003), that disturb or unsettle their normalized understandings of teaching, might open up possibilities for teacher candidates to confront their assumptions about teaching. Zeichner (2010) argues that a “third space” has great potential for teacher education programs in which to disrupt binary and hierarchical thinking such as: teacher-learner, theory-practice, and university-community.

Theorizing the Third Space

Zeichner (2010) engages Homi Bhabha’s (2004) hybridity theory which recognizes the multiple discourses that are required for individuals to understand the world around them. Zeichner argues that the creation of third spaces in teacher education programs would have the potential to disrupt the pervasive campus-field binaries that have “plagued” teacher education (2010, p. 480). As mentioned, binary thinking, which has beleaguered teacher education, is found in dichotomies such as: theory-practice, teacher-student, and university-school. These dichotomies demand either/or thinking and are rejected in third space, where instead both/also thinking is valued. Both/also approaches provoke “new possibilities and spaces for meaning-making” (Hallman, 2012, p. 244). Thus, all spaces—not just classroom spaces—become construed as being spaces for interpretation and learning (Hallman, 2012). Additionally, binary thinking interprets the dichotomous concepts hierarchically. In teacher education, this has traditionally meant valuing academic/university knowledge over practical/community knowledge. Third space thinking seeks “an equal more dialectical relationship between academic and practitioner knowledge in support of student teacher learning” (Zeichner, 2010, p. 486). It questions traditional roles of teacher-as-expert and student-as-learner, privileging reciprocal relationships instead (Hallman, 2012).

Community-based field experience might be an opportunity to foster third space; to challenge teacher candidates’ strongly held assumptions of knowledge, teachers, and teaching. Alternatives to traditional practicum experiences, where teacher candidates experience teaching and learning in a non-classroom setting, might have the potential to disrupt teacher candidates’ assumptions. In addition, experiences with a community setting have the potential to disrupt the hierarchical positioning of university knowledge over community knowledge and could become transformative opportunities where the (co)construction of new knowledge becomes possible.

Importantly, the concept of the third space provides a theoretical and conceptual lens through which to consider the emerging case study. A question that loosely guided this study was, in what ways can a community-based field experiences—as a *not-school* space—be a third space, a space of unfamiliarity and strangeness, requiring the teacher candidates to “learn to see” what they once assumed was so familiar? Third spaces have the potential to foster an *aporia* (Derrida, 1990); a space of undecideability provoked by the unfamiliar, that is, differing purposes, authority structures, and functions. Perhaps unfamiliar, third spaces might challenge teacher candidates to confront strongly established understandings of teaching and of knowledge and to disrupt the belief that teaching is simply a matter of technical expertise.

Community-Based Experiences in Teacher Education Programs

Some teacher education programs offer various forms of community-based or field-based experience for teacher candidates, in addition to their school-based practicum (Falkenberg, 2010). The structures of these vary, and according to the literature there appears to be three distinct purposes for offering community-based experiences including: building awareness of diversity and multiculturalism (Burant & Kirby, 2002; McDonald et al., 2011), broadening and challenging the understanding of teaching and learning (Anderson, Lawson, & Mayer-Smith, 2006; Gallego, 2001; Hallman, 2012), and making community connections outside of school, with students and families from the school placement (Burant & Kirby, 2002; Jurow, Tracy, Hotchkiss & Kirshner, 2012). The limited body of literature in the area of teacher education encourages further exploration into the consequences and benefits of these community-based practicum experiences.

Benefits of Community-Based Practicums

Our analysis of the literature reveals limited research on community-based practicums, which became even more limited once the search was focused specifically on faculties of education. Of the research available, benefits of community-based practicums in teacher education programs were found to include improvement of teacher candidates’ understandings and abilities in regards to teaching practice, their planning and delivery of lessons, as well as their flexibility, decision-making and initiative (Brooker & Service, 1999). Much of the literature also argued that due to the more informal settings, candidates who participated in a community-based practicum had opportunities to apply course theory of teaching pedagogies, such as inquiry, in less threatening environments (Cartwright, 2012).

Aside from practice, some research indicated that these teacher candidates learned to develop content in a manner that met the needs of the youth, particularly in terms of classroom management, while other authors asserted that teacher candidates improved their confidence in their teaching (Anderson, Lawson, Mayer-Smith, 2006; Brooker & Service, 1999). The literature also indicated that community-based learning opportunities have the potential to challenge teacher candidates’ beliefs and stereotypes and could create opportunities for them to better understand students from diverse settings. Similarly, it was demonstrated that community-based experiences created opportunities for teacher candidates to understand children and develop deeper understandings of diversity (Adams, Bondy & Kuhel, 2005; Burant & Kirby, 2002; McDonald, Bowman & Brayko, 2013; McDonald et al., 2011; Potthoff et al., 2000). The research conveyed that community-based experiences helped teacher candidates to develop their awareness of multiculturalism and “multicultural education” (Barton, 2000). Importantly, it was

argued that community-based experiences might also provide opportunities for candidates to have better understandings of issues of diversity, and furthermore to reflect critically on issues of social justice while invoking engagements with one's own privilege and identity (Lund, Bragg, Kaipainen & Lee; 2014; Wade, 2000).

Notably, there is a virtual absence of research that tends to the experiences, opinions or perspectives of the community members participating in the community-side of the community-based practicum (Vernon & Ward, 1999). There are a few exceptions that are found in the *service learning* literature (which was not fully reviewed for this study), including d'Arlach, Sanchez and Feuer (2009) who consider Spanish-speaking Latino immigrants' perspectives of their work with English-speaking university students. In addition, Stoecker, Tryon and Hilgendorf's (2009) edited collection illustrated research-based collaborations between community organizations, university students and faculty, that attempt to address common problems and lessons learned from their experiences. A final example is a recent Canadian study that describes an education course that was enhanced by a service-learning component and unlike most models, illustrates an approach that was community-led and collaborative (Lund, Bragg, Kaipainen & Lee, 2014). Overall, there remains an enormous gulf within the research that speaks to community members' interests, involvement and experiences in such endeavours.

The literature provides a glimpse into the ways in which community-based practicums can provide opportunities for teacher candidates to enhance their pedagogical practices and enliven their experiences and understandings of diversity. However, much of this research is based on the presuppositions that knowledge can be transferred unproblematically from the academy to the community. The epistemological underpinnings of this research reflect technicist assumptions of teaching. In the technicist conception, successful teaching is determined by the effective transmission of knowledge and the compliance of students, rather than by a consideration of what is considered good teaching where content and pedagogy must be morally defensible (Fenstermacher & Richardson, 2005). Although much of the literature referenced seeks to challenge teacher candidates in alternative settings, the richness and possibilities of challenging normative understandings of teaching, practice, and perhaps even education, remain unchallenged.

The Interviews: Shifting Perceptions?

In the first year of the pilot offering, we conducted semi-structured one-on-one interviews, one with a teacher candidate (Shelby) and one with a community host (Pat).¹ The interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed, the transcripts were then developed into narratives representing each participant's experience. We sought to identify themes across the transcripts, specifically seeking moments of disruption or dissonance particularly in regard to participants' perception, and shifts in perception, of teaching, knowledge, and curriculum. We then clustered these themes, reflective of third space theorizing. Although there were only two participants in the pilot study, the interviews provided rich insights into the experiences of the participants.

Shelby and Pat

Shelby was a senior teacher candidate who grew up and lived in the suburbs. Her major was in math, and she had just completed her first year of the two-year program. Shelby was

placed (along with one other teacher candidate) at a youth drop-in centre located in the heart of the city. The centre is in a low-socioeconomic neighbourhood with a high Indigenous population and has a long and positive history in the community. The centre grew out of a need for the community's children and youth to have a safe place to go when not in school or at home. It currently benefits from a strong board of directors and various sources of private and government funding. Fortuitously and by coincidence, Pat, the host supervisor who volunteered to participate in this study, was one of Shelby's supervisors at the same centre. Pat lived in the community where the centre was situated, and having grown up in the neighbourhood Pat had attended the centre as a youth. Although unplanned, this has allowed for a more robust accounting of their experiences in that both participants spoke of some similar experiences in the same context but from their unique perspectives. Following a brief theoretical grounding, we will discuss the participants' experiences in relation to understandings of knowledge and identity.

“It Opened My Eyes”: Community and Knowledge

Consistent with the literature, the interview transcript indicated that Shelby's experience in the community organization had a positive influence on her in a variety of ways. Specifically, Shelby (who was placed at the youth drop-in centre with another teacher candidate), noted that she developed a greater understanding of the role and importance of community organizations in children's lives. In addition, Shelby noticed that there were ways in which the children engaged in learning at the centre that occurred both outside of the school and in a different manner than what she recognized from schooling. She said that the children were “learning about their community, and their city, in a completely different way. It's not sitting in a desk and learning from like a textbook or a lesson in school about the place they live.” Shelby explained that:

especially because my focus was senior years, so it's pretty curriculum—like content—focused and it definitely opened my eyes to how many people contribute to raising a child and educating a child and how important that community involvement and all those people outside the school are to education.

These comments illustrated the ways in which Shelby was beginning to see that students' learning, or knowledge (co)creation, does not just occur at school, but that it also occurred in and was informed by the greater community.

Shelby also recognized the expanse and importance of community-held knowledge. She stated that she believed that the staff and youth at the centre, “know their community... their needs, like the needs of the people who go there, their community, and their culture.” She was certain that the staff held a particular collection of knowledge that she simply did not have access to. It seemed that Pat, as the host, had intentionally privileged experiences and experiential knowledge. Since Pat worked and lived in the community, she had a wealth of knowledge about the centre, its context, and the people who attended. Pat holds vital knowledge in regard to the particularities of the centre: its history, the children and youth who attend there, their experiences, their families, and the greater community. Pat gave little credence to the knowledge that the teacher candidates might have had and could offer. Pat conveyed no disrespect for the knowledge held by the teacher candidates, but she did not see them as a source of knowledge that might inform her or the other staff. It appeared that Pat saw the candidates' job as to learn from their experience at the centre, and that the purpose of their presence at the centre was to inform their own understandings of the children and youth at the centre.

“Getting the Job Done!”: The Role of Teacher

Because of Shelby’s feelings of being an outsider, it took her a while to determine her role at the centre. She was cautious as to how to proceed when she first began her placement, saying repeatedly that she did not want to “step on others’ toes”. Shelby explained, “...to come as an outsider... um, we felt like it just took me a long time to feel comfortable...we were very cautious in the beginning.” Over time, Shelby and her partner decided to support the youth group who were in a program designed so that they would be mentors to the younger kids. Together they sought to help the older kids in developing ways to work with younger kids, providing the youth with activities to do with the younger ones, helping them to organize and schedule activities, and as their final reciprocity project, developed a binder of resources for the youth group, which included activities, supply checklist, and guidelines. Shelby explained that, “I didn’t feel like I was offering a lot to them until it was more about the teaching the teenage staff [about mentoring]...That’s where there was value.” This notion of *doing*, *contributing*, and *getting the job done* illustrate Shelby’s desire to apply knowledge, to enact her understandings and her overfamiliarity (Britzman, 2003) of the role of teacher. That is, her frustration with a lack of *doing* might have signaled Shelby’s presumptions of what it is teachers *do*, reflecting a modernist understanding of teaching and of knowledge.

To illustrate the point further, using contrast, Pat spoke of how she felt a need to help orient the teacher candidates to the particularities of the children and youth at the centre, explaining how she would share sensitive information about the kids to help the candidates better understand the needs of these young people. Pat was determined that the teacher candidates understood who these children were and the importance of developing strong and respectful relationships with them. This difference in perspective seems noteworthy because, as Shelby says repeatedly, she was an outsider, and yet her outsider status did not seem to play into her descriptions of her experiences at the centre other than in regard to what to *do* with the children. Her sense of how to *be* with the children seemed to persevere on the *doing* as expressed both in her frustrations with finding what she should do and then in her pleasure in the actual doing, the organizing events and scheduling activities which defined her role as contribution. This notion of teaching as focused on *doing* rather than *being*, as relational, reflects Shelby’s focus on teaching as role-oriented, that of the task master. Conversely, Pat was concerned with helping Shelby to understand, engage with, and relate to the children more so than completing tasks. In these examples, we see that Shelby has difficulty in re-imagining the binaried and hierarchical roles of teacher-student.

“Lots of Activities”: The Love of the Lesson Plan

As mentioned earlier, the knowledge that Pat relied on was experiential and relational. She drew on her own experiences to empathize with the youth and engage with newcomers, visitors, and others who would come to the centre; providing emotional supports that responded to the particularities of the needs of the youth. Although Shelby recognized the limits of the institutional knowledge she brought, acknowledging the importance of community knowledge and the ways in which the kids engaged in knowledge-making while at the centre, she maintained a strong identification as a “senior years math teacher.” She had a definitive perspective on math and its curriculum, and described it as being, “pretty content focused.”

Pat noted that the teacher candidates placed at the youth centre “have a lot of ideas! ...activity ideas—a lot of those!” She explained, “they came up with this binder, which they kept filling with more activities!” Pat laughed at this, as if she could not see its value. Yet, here we see again, Shelby’s focus on contributing knowledge through activities and illustrating her love of the lesson plan. Shelby even stated that she believed that activity planning was something she taught to those who worked at the centre. Yet, when Pat was asked what candidates contributed, she again spoke of the relationships and she felt that the teacher candidates developed lovely relationships with the children, noting how much the kids cared for the teacher candidates, how they looked forward to them coming to the centre, and how the “kids just loved them.”

Potentials in the Third Space

It is important to note that these little narratives are not Shelby’s personal shortcomings, as they are not intended to be illustrative of faulty characteristics of Shelby or of other teacher candidates. What these narrations demonstrate are the ways in which the discourses of teacher candidates are symptomatic of the practices (or the disorders) of teacher education. Teacher candidates have a predetermined understanding of what it means to be a “good teacher” (Moore, 2004). The assumptions that teacher candidates bring and that are often strongly held, position the teacher candidate as someone who already knows what the teaching enterprise is about, and as importantly, detracts from an understanding of teaching as embedded in larger discursive and material structures. These autonomous and self-determined ideals of the identity of the “good teacher,” (re)inscribe teaching as a technical engagement, relying on knowledge that is relatively static, neutral, and transferrable.

From Shelby’s narratives, it appears that within the community-based practicum these discourses of the teacher as *knower* (and therefore the *doer*) remain and appear difficult, but perhaps not impossible, to interrupt. Shelby explained that in her future role as a teacher, she could not change how she teaches math specifically, but that the community experiences from the course provided her with an “overarching” understanding, that “hang[s] over me when I think about anything. ...I try to think more ‘big picture’ now and less about specific curriculum outcomes.” Perhaps these statements indicate shifts in Shelby’s understandings of schooling, a broader acceptance of what counts as knowledge, and maybe even a movement towards a richer understanding of what constitutes curriculum.

Discussion: Insights and Questions

The purpose and potential of such community-based practicums and attempts to create third spaces, aside from exposing undergraduate teacher candidates to community-based experiences, is to challenge teacher candidates’ strongly established understandings of teaching and of knowledge; disrupting the related belief that teaching is a matter of technical expertise. Keeping with the purpose of exploratory case studies, in the following section we will draw together some illustrative results and key lessons (Yin, 2012) in order to provoke consideration for both course development and for future research. Thus, we will convey current reflections and insights gleaned from this exploration, while drawing attention to questions that have arisen.

Insight: Structure, Seminars and Instructors

In conceptualizing and planning community-based practicums, consideration needs to be given to the purpose of creating such experiences in the first place, ensuring that community-based practicums are not solely for the sake of providing community experiences, particularly in this era where universities are enthusiastic about community outreach. As Holland (2006) cautions, “too often, faculty assume that in a campus-community partnership, the faculty role is to teach, the students’ role is to learn, and the community partner’s role is to provide a laboratory” (p. 11). Relationships with community organizations must be premised on respect and reciprocity and must avoid creating scenarios for teacher candidates in which community-based experiences become tourist destinations (Burant & Kirby, 2002) or a form of charity (Wade, 2000). Entering such spaces with the mindset of it being a third space predicates the expectation of reciprocal relationships, conceptually and interpersonally. Therefore, as teacher educators we must be vigilant in engaging community sites in ways that avoid essentializing the communities, their contexts, and those who work/live there.

Furthermore, consideration needs to be given not just to the structure of the experience, where it will take place, how much time will be spent, and what teacher candidates will be charged with doing in order to challenge their assumptions; to avoid reinforcing stereotypes (Wade, 2000) and practices that are mere replications of classroom-based practicums, then consideration must be given to how teacher candidates are both challenged and supported. Articulated and critical examination of the spaces that community-based experiences open up can allow for the possibility of a third space rather than reproducing and transplanting the classroom or an exercise in “saving” others. According to Sleeter (2008), “of the various strategies that are used in teacher education programs, extensive community-based immersion experiences, coupled with coursework, seem to have the most promise” (p. 102). This insight is echoed by Phelan (2005) in her explanation of the potential of community-based practicum coupled with seminars. She explains the importance of having concrete situations from which the student can draw on, paired with spaces for deliberations about practices that are not merely about procedure, but are also about “perception and experimentation” (Phelan, 2005, p. 65). Because learning requires conflict (Britzman, 2007), instructors and seminar time are both integral in challenging students in their own critical self-reflection in regards to their identity and assumptions about social justice. Instructors are critical in this; in that they can push and support students in critical self-reflection during seminar time.

Insight: The Roles to be Played by the Community Organization

In partnering with community-based organizations, and in regards to Pat’s narratives, we see now that there can be a greater role for the community organizations’ staff in the placements. For example, they could be engaged in conversations about the specifics of what they want and need out of the partnership in advance of the candidates arriving. Consideration might also be given to how the instructor and the staff might work more collaboratively to challenge and support the candidates. A collaborative approach to working with the teacher candidates would also reflect the value of “third-space” ideals, specifically of non-hierarchical relationships between course instructors and host supervisors, and also between institutional and community-held knowledge. It is apparent, for example, that Pat’s insights could be very instructive in helping to reduce hierarchical assumptions about knowledge, through her articulations and understandings of community knowledge. Perhaps there are ways to engage the educative

guidance of the hosts in supporting our candidates. Of course, we must also be mindful of what we ask of the staff, given that they are already tasked with the requirements of their job.

Insight: The Role of the Institution

After three offerings of the course and Senate approval to offer the course permanently, we can see the importance of institutional support for such a course. Consideration must be given to the time required to seek appropriate placements, to develop relationships with the hosts, and to visit the teacher candidates while in the placement. In addition, there needs to be financial resources allocated in order to provide funds for students to develop reciprocity projects and to provide thank you gifts for the community organizations. All of this requires differential and additional time, support and financial resources than other in-faculty courses. We were unable to find any research about the human and financial resources required for these types of community-based courses. When working in and attempting to develop third spaces we need to consider the ways in which the institution is often at odds with these principles, and must consider how to mitigate these differences. How might all parties involved be drawn into the conversation of the “third space” in ways that may elucidate purpose and role in reciprocal relation to one another?

Question: The Tasks for the Teacher Candidates

Given the discussion regarding knowledge and a love of the lesson plan above, it makes us critically reflect on the assignments required in the community-based practicum course. In particular, the course currently requires that teacher candidates develop a reciprocity project for the host organization. The assignment, drawn from principles of reciprocity (Bortolin, 2013), is that the teacher candidate collaborates with the host to develop a useful resource for the organization. We wonder now if the requirement of a final “product” inadvertently reifies a focus on the lesson plan, and on the “doing” of teaching, detracting from the time and effort needed to create relationships, engage more meaningfully with the rhythms of the centre, and to think critically about the role of teacher. Thus, we ask how one might work with the community hosts to collaboratively establish the tasks and assignments for the teacher candidates in advance. Furthermore, how might the integration of the third space lens assist in reimaging and transforming what the teacher candidates (co)create?

Question: The Ethics of Relationships and Leaving

Because of Pat’s numerous and emotional references to the relationships that the candidates developed with the children and youth at the centre, we also argue for the need to consider, in advance of partnerships, the ethics and potential risks associated with candidates developing relationships with potentially vulnerable people and then leaving the site when the course is over. We wonder what right academic institutions have to ask this of our teacher candidates, and what right we have to ask people that we have never met, the children and youth at these various community-based sites, to engage in relationships that are inevitably terminated. How might the values of third spaces take into account the reciprocal relationships between teacher candidates and the children and youth? Being mindful that the children and youth at these centres have little to no say in the structure of the course, of the expectations of the teacher candidates, and the unforeseen emotional implications of relationships made and terminated; these risks needs to be thoughtfully considered and discussed.

Conclusion

The promise of community-based practicums is that they might act as “third spaces” in which the familiar is made strange, and thus as sites where teacher candidates are confronted by their assumptions and perhaps come to new understandings. Certainly, this exploratory study has identified similar themes emerging from the literature, specifically that community-based practicum can be a place where teacher candidates learn about the role and importance of community organizations in the lives of children, about the differences in experiences of children, and of the limitations of schools to support all kids. However, the prevailing discourses of being a teacher suggest that a subject’s notions of teacher, knowledge, and curriculum do not simply become undone through a differential experience. As Phelan and Luu (2004) state, “it cannot be taken for granted that all experiential encounters will open discursive spaces to dispute, broaden or deepen understandings of difference” (p. 188). As we see with Shelby, although there are new understandings emerging, there are some assumptions that have not (yet) been confronted, challenged, or questioned. Although the community-based experience may broaden opportunities for differential degrees of understanding, it is possible that the discourses of knowledge, curriculum and identity will remain relatively fixed, as they are pervasive and difficult to reconsider.

While the experiences afforded by a community-based practicum might disrupt teacher candidates’ assumptions, we maintain that these experiences must be carefully and ethically constructed by giving attention to the purpose and content of the course, ensuring support for teacher candidates, and constructing reciprocal engagements with the community organizations. Importantly, responsibility resides with the course instructor in the ethical development and implementation of community-based practicum courses, in the support and care for teacher candidates in potentially challenging situations, and in the ethical engagements with the community partners. As teacher educators we are reminded of our responsibility to challenge teacher candidates’ assumptions, but also to consider our own complicity and responsibility as teachers. The work to be done in community-based practicum is not solely in the hands of the teacher candidates; it is also the responsibility of those of us who initiate and construct these opportunities in the hopes that we might all be productively challenged in the third space.

¹ Because the course was a pilot offering in the first year, the enrollment was limited to six students and so the pool from which to recruit was small.

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