

Situated work-integrated learning: Exploring an additional practice model in teacher education

OLE PETTER VESTHEIM¹

NINA ROKNE BYE

VERONICA ISAKSEN

SILJE DYBDAHL

Nord University, Levanger, Norway

This article examines how Additional Practice (AP) functions as a model of work-integrated learning (WIL) in teacher education and contributes to student teachers' professional learning. Drawing on qualitative data from group interviews with student- and mentor-teachers, analyzed through reflexive thematic analysis, the study identifies three interconnected dimensions of learning: discovering the complexity of teaching, developing practice in individualized ways, and experiencing coherence between "on campus" teaching and "in practice" experiences. The findings demonstrate how AP supports key WIL principles by enhancing student autonomy, fostering professional identity development, and strengthening the integration of theory and practice. The study further highlights the importance of relational trust, situated learning, and reflective dialogue in realizing the learning potential of WIL. At the same time, the findings point to a need for stronger institutional support and more systematic feedback structures. The article concludes that AP represents a valuable approach to strengthening WIL in teacher education.

Keywords: Teacher education, authentic learning, situated professional learning, practice-based education

Practicum and practice-based learning have been an integrated and mandatory part of teacher education in Norway since the early 1800s (Skagen & Elstad, 2023). Building on this long-standing tradition, recent policy documents in Norway, especially White Paper No. 16 (2020-2021) (Norwegian Ministry of Education and Research, 2021), and White Paper No. 19 (2023-2024) (Norwegian Ministry of Education and Research, 2024) continue to stress the importance of cultivating experiential knowledge and practice-based learning across the entirety of teacher education programs.

Despite these policy ambitions, research identifies persistent challenges in aligning theoretical coursework with practical experience, particularly in the practicum component of teacher education (Darling-Hammond, 2017). International research has responded to these challenges by developing practicum models characterized by recurring and longitudinal participation in schools alongside campus-based teaching (Colonnese & Polly, 2022; Dewhurst & McMurtry, 2006). While such models are intended to strengthen coherence between theory and practice, their effectiveness appears to depend less on the organization or extent of practice alone and more on the quality of mentoring, integration with coursework, and alignment with assessment practices. For experiential learning in teacher education to succeed, campus-based teaching must strive to be reality-oriented, authentic, promote collaboration among student teachers, and consider students' own reflections (Radović et al., 2021). Complementing these principles, Solstad (2010) argues that teacher education requires both a practice-oriented theoretical foundation and a theory-oriented practical approach, ensuring that experiential learning is meaningfully integrated with conceptual understanding. Research also highlights enduring issues relating to mentoring configurations, navigating the so-called theory-practice divide (Zegwaard et al., 2023), and university-school partnership, by developing so-called

¹ Corresponding author: Ole Petter Vestheim, ole.p.vestheim@nord.no

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third spaces (Daza et al., 2021), and calls for research to explicitly address how these challenges affect practicum quality and student learning (Lawson et al., 2015). It is important to acknowledge that practicum cannot replicate the conditions of full-time teaching, however, there remains scope to reconsider how practicums are organized to more effectively prepare student teachers for the complexities and demands of beginning teaching (Grudnoff, 2011). A recent review study on work integrated learning (WIL) in teacher education indicates that students' integration of theory and practice is enhanced by their gradual participation in the school's community of practice, supported by dialogic supervision and through formative feedback. On the other hand, the same studies show that assessment pressure, unclear assessment criteria, hierarchical mentor relationships, and poor coordination between campus and the practice place can hinder this process. Long-term and formatively oriented forms of practicum seem to provide better conditions for WIL than episodic and high-stakes assessment practices (Forslund Frykedal & Zimmerman Nilsson, 2025).

While practicums are consistently valued by student teachers as the most important component of their education (Cooper et al., 2010; García-Noblejas et al., 2023; Ulvik et al., 2018), research highlights the need for a stronger coherence between theoretical learning and practical experiences (Smeby & Heggen, 2014). Recent research from Sweden further questions how the organization of WIL affects learning on campus. Students who combine paid part-time work at school with university teacher education studies often identify strongly as "finished teachers", which can further reduce their engagement with theoretical content (Jederud, 2024). This view is supported by Jackson (2015), noting that students in WIL programs often perceive theoretical knowledge as insufficient for preparing them to practice their profession in real-world contexts, leading them to place greater emphasis on practical knowledge. Emphasizing practical knowledge may explain why students in WIL programs consider imitating their supervisors' practices important and view successful learning as adapting these practices (Aprile & Knight, 2020). Such a perception can be limited for students' professional learning, as they will encounter diverse and complex situations that cannot always be solved by copying existing practices. This highlights the need for structures that promote critical reflection and professional development, as well as integration between practice and teaching on campus (Aprile & Knight, 2020; Jederud, 2024).

Moreover, recent Norwegian research emphasizes the multifaceted nature of practicum supervision. Bjørndal et al. (2024) conducted a qualitative review on practicum supervision and identified critical gaps across the supervision cycle, ranging from lesson planning and observation, to feedback, reflection, and collaboration. The study highlights the lack of comprehensive, sequenced models that account for all supervisory components, pointing to the need for integrative research on supervision quality.

These policy documents and research provide the foundation and legitimacy for initiatives aimed at strengthening the connection between teaching given at campus and practicums in teacher education, and for developing teacher education programs that strengthen students' overall learning and work readiness. The "Additional Practice project" aligns with these identified needs. The initiative extends opportunities for engagement beyond compulsory practicum, aiming to bolster the link between theory (teaching at campus) and school practice, improving learning quality, and fostering sustainable professional learning. Against this background, the present study aims to investigate how student-teachers' learning can be strengthened through the introduction of a weekly practicum day integrated across the academic year. To explore the potential of this approach, this study addresses the following research question: How do student teachers and mentor teachers perceive Additional Practice as a support for student teachers' professional learning?

CONTEXTUALIZING PRACTICUM IN NORWEGIAN TEACHER EDUCATION PROGRAMS

In Norway, Practicum for primary and lower secondary teacher education programs is governed by national curriculum regulations. These regulations define structures and intended learning outcomes, ensuring alignment between centralized standards and institutional implementation. Within this framework, practicum is mandatory, supervised, and formally assessed, comprising at least 110 days across five-year master's programs. According to the regulations, at least 80 days of practice must be within the first three years, and at least 30 within the final two years (Regulation on the National Curriculum for Primary School Teacher Education for Grades 1–7, 2025). However, the mandatory and regulated practicum periods in Norway are typically short and episodic, which can limit continuity and coherence in student teachers' professional learning. In most cases, the number of practice days is divided into periods typically ranging from two to four weeks distributed across the five-year study program. Furthermore, the mandatory practicum shall be adapted to the student teachers' subject choices and contribute to their ability to explore, reflect on, and develop their own professional practice (Regulation on the National Curriculum for Primary School Teacher Education for Grades 1–7, 2025). This regulatory framework is meant to ensure consistency across institutions while allowing a degree of autonomy for local adaptation. At the same time, it leaves room for local innovation. Institutions offering teacher education are required to organize and develop local guidelines that specify expected progress and learning outcomes throughout the program. The Additional Practice (AP) project emerges within this space of institutional autonomy as a supplementary initiative designed to enhance continuity and depth in student teachers' work-based learning.

THE ADDITIONAL PRACTICE PROJECT MODEL

The AP project model is implemented as a supplementary and additional component to the formal, nationally regulated practicum. AP provides first-year student teachers with one mandatory practicum day each week throughout the academic year, which constitutes a total of 23 additional days of practicum. These extra days come in addition to, and on top of the ordinary first-year practicum, which is seven weeks. The primary goal of AP is to create opportunities for students at an early stage in their education to continuously acquire hands-on practice experiences, and integrate these into campus-based teaching, and vice versa. This approach acknowledges that experiential knowledge and experiences gained in the field contribute significantly to students' professional learning and the development of a teacher's identity (Simon, 2024). Furthermore, this experiential knowledge is enriched by the theoretical perspectives offered through campus teaching. A key component of the project is fostering reflective discussions on these experiences, which are crucial for professional learning (Salo et al., 2024; Schön, 1991).

The AP model is characterized by an open, site-based design, meaning it is not governed by strict regulations or prescriptive guidelines. Rather than imposing a detailed checklist of tasks or experiences, the approach deliberately minimizes formal requirements to allow flexibility and responsiveness to local contexts. Inspired by scholars like Lave and Wenger (1991) and Kemmis et al. (2014) this design is grounded in the understanding of practicum as a situated and contextual learning process, emphasizing professional learning through authentic engagement rather than adherence to a predetermined script.

During AP, student teachers typically shadow an experienced teacher, observing and engaging in daily activities. The experienced teacher, in turn, serves as an expert who possesses and generates advanced practice knowledge for the less experienced student (Cooper et al., 2010, p. xii). The framing of AP is

weak and based on trust in the students and teachers to adapt and grasp opportunities that occur in practice situations. This is based on the recognition that experienced teachers have a central and integrated role in teacher education, and that their practical experience and classroom expertise are acknowledged as valuable knowledge within an integrated teacher education. In this way, they are empowered and regarded as qualified to make decisions that can promote learning for student teachers, considering situational and contextual conditions based on authentic situations that arise in practice. This weak regulation and trust-based organization of AP challenges a predefined and learning goal-oriented practicum, which research suggests can be beneficial for students' professional learning (Buchanan et al., 2022; Loughland et al., 2021).

The teachers in additional practice participate voluntarily and do not have the role of official supervisors like they would in the formal and nationally regulated practicum. This means that they are not supposed to formally assess students, however, they are supposed to act as learning guides and mentors. The level of student assessment and mentoring is determined collaboratively between the student and the teacher. However, student teachers are expected to participate in classroom activities and may also teach if they want to. This set-up acknowledges the importance of students' needs to be supported, but also that students must be challenged by their values and behavior as the number of practicum days and classroom experiences increases. Grossman et al. (2009) suggest that student teachers can benefit from gradually involving themselves into practice activities. As a result, AP allows both teachers and students greater flexibility, enabling them to focus on what is perceived as relevant and meaningful in the context in which they operate.

To ensure quality, the AP has a formal project leader. To support both students and teachers, the project leader conducts regular visits to the schools where their practice takes place. Furthermore, the collaboration between the university and participating schools is maintained through regular meetings between the project leader and the principals, as well as through sessions where all engaged teachers are invited to share their experiences and reflections about the project. This part of the intervention is considered important to strengthen shared understanding of the project between university, students, and school staff. Differing interpretations can be a hindrance regarding the purpose of the project, which is also pointed out by Allen and Peach (2011). Together, these conditions position AP as a complementary practicum model designed to strengthen coherence, progression, and professional identity formation in Norwegian teacher education.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The theoretical framework for this study draws on the concepts and definitions of work-integrated learning (WIL) emphasizing key elements of quality practice. These include engagement with external stakeholders, participating in authentic and relevant work-focused tasks, and active involvement of student teachers in activities that serve a meaningful purpose for a workplace community (Zegwaard et al., 2023), as well as the integration of theoretical knowledge with professional practice (Cooper et al., 2010), and professional learning theory (Salo et al., 2024). These two perspectives are brought together because WIL provides the structural context for learning, while professional learning theory explains how student teachers develop knowledge, identity, and judgment within that context. WIL is internationally recognized as a key component of higher education across professions (Rowe et al., 2021), and it emphasizes experiential learning, enabling students to apply theory in authentic contexts, to develop professional identity, competence, and work readiness (Aprile & Knight, 2020; Jackson, 2015). However, WIL also raises questions about the transferability of knowledge and the blurred boundaries between university-based and workplace learning (Brennan & Little, 2006). Critiques of

the traditional theory-practice dichotomy argue for a more integrated approach and perspective, acknowledging that both campus teaching and school-based experiences contribute to professional knowledge. Expanding on this integrated perspective, Raaen (2017) identifies three dimensions of professional knowledge: knowledge for practice, which involves applying knowledge learned through teaching at campus; knowledge in practice, which encompasses skills developed through hands-on experiences, reflection, and adjustments; and knowledge about practice, which emerges from gaining an “inside perspective” through immersion in authentic practice setting. This aligns with research that claims that many student teachers find their on-campus learning to be useful and closing the gap between theory and practice (Allen & Peach, 2007, pp. 31–32). This conceptual combination is particularly suited to understanding AP, which operates at the intersection of campus-based instruction and situated school-based participation.

Practice provides valuable opportunities for students to apply theory in authentic settings, learn from observing a more experienced practitioner, and develop their professional awareness. However, Aprile and Knight (2020) point to limitations associated with practice, which in turn can be an obstacle to students' professional learning. In practice, students' learning outcomes are influenced and limited by factors such as their relationship with the supervisor and the pressure of being assessed as part of their education. Moreover, contextual conditions beyond the students' control can restrict their learning. These include whether they are allowed to teach relevant subjects, the structure of the timetable, different activities that the school carries out during the practical training period, and the composition of the class. Given these factors, students' outcomes of practice can be highly unpredictable (Aprile & Knight, 2020). These limitations underline the need for practicum models that support continuity, responsiveness, and relational learning rather than episodic exposure.

This unpredictability aligns with Schatzki's ontological theory of practice, which views all practices as situated in time and space, unfolding within specific site ontologies (Schatzki, 2005). As Kemmis et al. (2014, p. 33) explains, understanding Schatzki requires recognition that practices are not predetermined scripts; they are shaped by the conditions present in a particular site at a particular time. From this perspective, it becomes clear why student teachers' outcomes of practice cannot be fully anticipated, because practices are inherently situated and contextual. There is a growing critique of the emphasis on traditional standards of teacher professionalism, which are often articulated through a 'dot-point' and audit approach to teaching practice. This critique posits that such an approach may potentially undermine teachers' professional judgment, professional community, and professional practice. Professional learning is increasingly acknowledged as a vital component of educators' professional lives and a critical element of quality education (Biesta, 2015; Mockler, 2022). From a WIL perspective, such forms of situated and reflective engagement constitute essential mechanisms for bridging theory and practice. The perspective of professional learning is a holistic and integrated approach, recognizing the complexity and diversity of professionals' experiences. It conceptualizes professionals as engaged, self-directed learners. This emerging discourse suggests a reconceptualization of knowledge, transitioning from professional development to professional learning. This shift challenges the prevailing “training” model, contending that learning cannot merely be transferred, and advocates for prioritizing active learning over passive development.

Professional learning is increasingly conceptualized as a holistic and ongoing process rather than a linear accumulation of skills (Biesta, 2015; Mockler, 2022). It emphasizes active, situated engagement and challenges traditional “training” models, advocating reflection and professional judgment over compliance with standardized checklists (Mockler, 2011; Salo et al., 2024; Webster-Wright, 2009). Within this perspective, professional identity develops through interaction, reflection, and

participation in professional communities, shaped by personal, professional, and political dimensions (Butler, 1990; Heggen & Smeby, 2012; Mockler, 2011).

Relational conditions are central. Relational trust and recognition enable dialogical interaction, collaboration, and risk-taking that support individual and collective learning (Francisco et al., 2023; Wenger, 1998). Professional agency, which is teachers' capacity to act based on experience, skills, and judgment, emerges through the interplay of personal resources and contextual affordances (Salo et al., 2024). Agency is strengthened by environments that support participation, listening, and critical questioning, while hierarchical or opaque cultures can undermine trust and restrict both agency and learning (Francisco et al., 2023; Mockler, 2011). The preceding theoretical discussion emphasizes the situated and contingent nature of practice, highlighting how contextual conditions shape professional learning. These insights informed the design of the present study, which seeks to capture the complexity of student teachers' experiences within specific school settings. Accordingly, the following section outlines the methodological approach adopted, detailing the research design, data collection strategies, and analytical procedures used to investigate how these theoretical principles manifest in practice. Taken together, these theoretical perspectives highlight why student teachers' learning within AP must be understood as situated, relational, and shaped by contextual conditions—an understanding that informs our methodological choices in the present study.

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

This study is grounded in a moderate social constructivist epistemological position, which acknowledges social structures and patterns as influential, yet locally situated and subject to change (Burr, 1995). This stance aligns with the study's theoretical perspectives, where learning is understood as a practice-oriented and relational process (Cooper et al., 2010; Salo et al., 2024). This orientation underpins our attention to how participants make sense of experience in and through practicum settings. We employed an exploratory qualitative design to investigate how weekly, site-based practicums support student teachers' professional learning. This design foregrounds participants' lived experiences and local meanings, providing depth and context over representativeness. An exploratory qualitative design was chosen because AP is a relatively new practicum model, and little is known about how it is experienced by those directly involved.

Two participant groups were included; student teachers, and teachers (mentors). Including both student teachers and teachers allowed for triangulation of perspectives and strengthened the study's capacity to capture relational aspects of learning. The dataset comprises nine group interviews with a total of 38 of 42 student teachers participating in the AP project. The group size ranged from one to six participants, allowing for both individual reflections and group dynamics during the interview. Additionally, five semi-structured group interviews were conducted with a total of 10 teachers involved in the project. All interviews were audio-recorded, then transcribed verbatim. This approach enabled the researchers to explore shared experiences while also attending to divergent viewpoints. Qualitative orientation is well-suited for exploring and directing attention to the cultural, everyday, and situated aspects of human thinking, learning, knowledge, action, and our ways of understanding ourselves (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, p. 31).

Analytical Approach

The analysis followed an inductive and reflexive thematic approach inspired by Braun and Clarke (2006, 2019). This involved repeated readings of the transcripts, coding individual interviews, and conducting comparative analysis across the empirical data. Reflexive thematic analysis positions the

researcher as an active participant in meaning-making and theme development, emphasizing interpretation and creativity throughout the process. Initially, the data were read and interpreted individually, then discussed collectively within the research team. Recognizing the active role of the researcher in meaning-making, the team engaged in ongoing reflexive practices, including analytic memos, peer debriefs, and explicit discussions of theoretical assumptions (e.g., views on situated learning, supervision, and coherence). Our analysis led to a wide range of themes reflecting diverse perspectives and experiences among both the student teachers and the teachers. Early themes included “continuity as a source of security”, “relations as a key to learning”, “freedom and flexibility”, “theory-practice integration”, and “perceived usefulness”.

Through iterative interpretation and consolidation, these were condensed into three overarching themes that illuminate different dimensions of the Additional Practice arrangement and its significance in student teachers' learning. The first theme concerns how AP fosters a holistic understanding of the complexity of teaching. The second theme focuses on the students' need for individualized practice development. Finally, the third theme highlights the importance of coherence between “on-campus” and “in-practice” teaching.

Ethical Approval and Considerations

This study received ethical approval (Reference number 779657) from the Norwegian Agency for Shared Services in Education and Research (SIKT). Informed consent was obtained from all participants prior to their inclusion in the study, in accordance with established ethical guidelines for research involving human subjects.

Conducting research with one's own students and colleagues who are simultaneously participants in an ongoing educational relationship raises concerns related to power asymmetry and participant vulnerability (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, p. 52; Ryen, 2002, p. 89). It is therefore essential to reflect critically on how relational dynamics may shape participants' sense of comfort and openness during the research process and the interview.

In this project, one factor that helped reduce ethical tensions was that the researchers interviewing teachers were not engaged in any concurrent collaborations or supervisory relationships with them at the time of data collection. A more complex situation concerned the student interviews, as some members of the research team also held teaching roles within the program. This dual role may influence how students perceive what constitutes “appropriate” or “desirable” responses. However, our impression is that this did not significantly shape their contributions. For instance, several students offered explicit critical reflections on the additional practice project. Furthermore, all interviews began with clear and explicit invitations to speak openly and honestly. Overall, participants appeared to express their views candidly and thoughtfully, suggesting that these measures effectively reduced perceived relational pressure and enhanced the integrity of the data.

FINDINGS

The analysis of the empirical material revealed three themes that illuminate how Additional Practice contributes to student teachers' professional learning. These themes capture distinct yet connected dimensions of the practicum experience: (1) discovering the complexity of teaching, (2) developing practice in individualized ways, and (3) experiencing coherence between “on campus” and “in practice” teaching. Together, they provide insight into the multifaceted nature of professional learning during Additional Practice.

Theme 1: Discovering the Complexity of Teaching

Across interviews, both student teachers and teachers described AP as a formative arena for recognizing the multifaceted nature of teaching. Through sustained, first-hand experiences with everyday school life, student teachers moved beyond abstract expectations and began to apprehend the breadth of responsibilities inherent in the profession. As one student articulated:

It's a big job with a lot of responsibility, more than people might realize. I knew it wasn't just about showing up and doing the teaching. As a teacher, you take on many different roles, and those roles are important for the pupils. It's not just about knowledge; there's a lot more they need to learn too.

This reflection was emblematic of many students' evolving professional awareness, particularly their recognition that pedagogical work entails attending simultaneously to individuals and the collective. As another student noted:

You are responsible for the entire class. You need to see each individual while also seeing everyone. It's much more challenging than I thought, even though I expected it to be difficult.

Teachers corroborated this view, emphasizing that AP enables students to encounter the ordinary, sometimes overlooked, demands of school life. As one teacher observed:

Regular practicum placement can feel a bit artificial. In AP, they get to see what a normal day is really like. They get better insight into the everyday life of teaching, not just what they think we do, hear about or remember from being pupils themselves.

Taken together, these accounts suggest that AP functions as a site where student teachers encounter the complex intersection of instructional, pastoral, and organizational roles that constitute everyday teaching. Rather than perceiving teaching as a discrete set of classroom activities, students described developing a more holistic understanding of the profession. This broadened perspective appears to emerge not from isolated "showcase" lessons but from immersion in the mundane, routine dimensions of classroom life.

Theme 2: Developing Practice in Individualized Ways

Building on the importance of relational trust and the recognition of student teachers' diversity, this theme highlights how autonomy and flexibility enable student teachers to develop their identity and practice teaching at their own pace, according to their needs. Several of the participants emphasized the value of being able to gradually assume teaching responsibilities. As one student explained:

I've had a lot of freedom. I've been able to decide for myself what I feel confident doing. At first, I just observed. Then I had my own guided reading station. Now I've taught a few lessons by myself. I've been able to go at my own pace. ... That really helps you feel more confident in the beginning. And it's nice to still be able to challenge yourself without pushing too far.

This account illustrates how autonomy fosters confidence and supports a gradual transition into teaching. This sense of autonomy was echoed by another student, who appreciated the flexibility offered but also noted the need for clearer expectations:

I have a really nice teacher who says I can do what I want. That's great, but to really make the most of it, it might help to have clearer expectations for what we're supposed to do on the days we're there.

From the perspective of a teacher, the value of a less formal and more exploratory practice environment was similarly highlighted, as one teacher remarked:

There's something valuable about being allowed to go out and experience a less formal kind of practice than the guided and assessed placements. You get to explore the profession and ease into it gradually. You're just allowed to be in the environment and see what's going on, without anyone judging or putting pressure on you.

These findings suggest that autonomy and individualized opportunities are central to how AP is experienced. When such flexibility is coupled with trust, student teachers appear to be better able to engage meaningfully with professional learning. At the same time, the variation in how expectations are communicated points to a potential vulnerability in individualized practice formats that rely heavily on informal agreements.

Theme 3: Experiencing Coherence Between "On Campus" and "In Practice" Teaching

The third theme highlights how AP enabled student teachers to experience coherence between theory acquired at the university and practical experiences in schools, while at the same time supporting gradual and personalized participation in school practice. Many student teachers described moments of recognition in which concepts presented on campus became meaningful in real classroom contexts, as one student explained:

I can see how what I've learned at university can be put to use, and I can see some connections. I've had several 'eye-opening' moments in AP, such as: 'Oh, that's actually right for what my lecturer has been saying.

These moments of recognition contributed to a sense of coherence as students observed classroom situations through a theoretical lens. This was further reinforced as students began to recognize patterns of pupil behavior that aligned with theoretical frameworks introduced during coursework, as illustrated by the following account:

Now that we have learned about the stages that pupils go through and the different reactions and behaviors that they exhibit, as well as the potential causes, I feel that a lot of it makes sense and that I recognize it in AP. I see things in the classroom that we learnt during our on-campus teaching. In teaching on campus, you can draw examples and scenarios from practice.

Through such experiences, AP allowed students to contextualize abstract concepts through observation and participation in authentic classroom settings. Students also emphasized how these experiences enhanced their understanding of subject-specific pedagogy, as this student noted:

When we learned about those things, I thought, 'Why do we need to know if they use this or that strategy in mathematics?' But now I understand why. I got to see all the different ways the pupils solved it. Quite a few pupils had learned many of the methods that we had learned about, which were interesting.

Teachers recognized similar connections and highlighted the importance of anchoring practice experiences in theory. They emphasized that AP provided students with practical insight, while also pointing to the potential value of more structured, inquiry-oriented tasks during AP. One teacher suggested:

They get practical insight when they are present. For example, I think an assignment from the university where students observe certain pupils or us as teachers could have been useful. Otherwise, I think they could simply challenge us a little about the choices we make.

Another teacher highlighted the potential for deeper integration between campus-based learning and practice:

I think they can relate what they have been learning on campus to things they encounter in the classroom. It is easier to connect it, but at the same time, I think we can develop it even more and build on it even more in terms of assignments they get from the university. We probably have to encourage them to ask us questions.

In addition to strengthening theoretical and pedagogical understanding, AP also appeared to facilitate reflection on students' emerging professional identities. One student described how participation in AP contributed to a clearer sense of the teacher role and personal professional aspirations:

Even though I've worked in schools for a couple of years, I've learned so much about the teacher role this year. In AP you really get to see what kind of teacher you want to be, and what kind you don't.

Taken together, these accounts suggest that AP enables students to engage in gradual, personalized participation, where they can build confidence, experiment with teaching, and negotiate responsibility in ways that align with their readiness. In this way, AP appears to function as a boundary space between campus-based teacher education and school practice, where students translate, negotiate, and integrate theoretical and practical knowledge. At the same time, the findings reveal a tension: while flexibility is valued, some students and teachers expressed uncertainty about expectations, indicating a need for clearer guidance to ensure that autonomy does not become ambiguity.

DISCUSSION

In the following discussion, we examine how the findings address the overarching research question concerning how student teachers and mentors perceive Additional Practice as a support for professional learning. The discussion considers how the themes illuminate both the affordances and the tensions inherent in AP, including the balance between autonomy and structure, the role of authentic school experiences, and the processes through which theory and practice become meaningfully connected. We also highlight the implications of AP for the design of practice-based teacher education and for strengthening the conditions under which student teachers develop their professional judgement and identity.

The first theme illustrates how AP provides student teachers with a deeper understanding of the complexity of teachers' everyday work and responsibilities. Students described gaining insights into the multiple roles teachers take on, the demands of managing diversity among pupils, and the continuous complexity that characterizes classroom life. This aligns closely with WIL perspectives,

which emphasize the value of authentic and immersive participation in workplace practices (Allen & Peach, 2007; Simon, 2024). Rather than encountering isolated or highly structured tasks, student teachers in AP are exposed to the routine rhythms, interruptions, and relational dynamics that make up the reality of teaching. From a professional learning perspective, this finding points to the importance of early opportunities for students to encounter the profession as multifaceted and situated. As Kemmis et al. (2014) argue, professional learning unfolds through participation in locally situated practices. The teachers in our study underscored this, highlighting that students become part of the staff community and experience both significant and mundane events as they happen. In turn, such experiences appear to strengthen students' emerging professional judgement by giving them access to subtle, often invisible work that characterizes teaching. This finding can be further understood through a WIL lens, where learning is expected to emerge through participating in authentic, work-related activities that are meaningful to the learner (Cooper et al., 2010; Zegwaard et al., 2023). In contrast to more episodic practicum formats, AP enables sustained engagement with everyday practices of teaching, which aligns with research suggesting that continuity and immersion strengthen students' ability to integrate knowledge, and develop professional judgement (Forslund Frykedal & Zimmerman Nilsson, 2025).

The second theme concerned how AP emphasizes diversity and individual needs. Offering autonomy and trust to students and mentor teachers, AP gives students the opportunity to develop their practice gradually and at their own pace. Many students described AP as allowing them to move from observation to participation and, eventually, more independent teaching. Such progression reflects Lave and Wenger's (1991) notion of legitimate peripheral participation, where newcomers learn through increasing engagement in practice activities supported by the community of practice.

Professional learning literature emphasizes that trust is central to meaningful development (Salo et al., 2024). The findings in this study show that relational trust between the student teachers, mentoring teachers, and the university plays an important role in enabling autonomy. When students felt supported, they were more willing to take risks, experiment with more advanced teaching tasks, and to reflect critically on both their own and mentor teachers' practice. At the same time, the findings reveal some tensions. While some students and teachers appreciated the freedom provided, others expressed uncertainty about not having clearly defined learning outcomes. This underscores the need for balancing autonomy with appropriate support, ensuring that weak framing does not become a lack of direction. The project leader played an important role in maintaining communication and shared understanding across sites. On the other hand, teachers' reflections also highlight the value of AP as a less formal, low-stakes learning environment compared to assessed and formal practicum placements. Such environments may reduce performance pressure and enable exploratory forms of learning that support development and self-confidence for the student teachers. Engaging in additional practice provides students with opportunities to immerse themselves in more work-integrated learning situations. The development of a culture that acknowledges and supports individual agency while fostering mutually respectful interactions is essential for promoting the asking of critical questions (Francisco et al., 2023). Furthermore, it is imperative that teachers in AP assist students in reflecting upon and articulating their professional identity by facilitating the establishment of connections between their moral purpose and their professional practice (Mockler, 2011). This pedagogical approach serves to bridge the gap between theoretical knowledge and practical application, with practical educators playing a pivotal role in this process through the provision of additional practice opportunities. From a WIL perspective, this tension reflects a well-documented challenge: while autonomy and authentic participation are central to meaningful learning, insufficient structure may limit students' ability to recognize and articulate what they are learning (Buchanan et al., 2022; Ferns et

al., 2025). The findings therefore support earlier research suggesting that the quality of WIL is not determined by the amount of practice alone, but how participation is pedagogically supported by feedback, reflection, and alignment with academic learning (Forslund Frykedal & Zimmerman Nilsson, 2025).

The third theme highlights AP as a potential integrative space where connections between campus-based knowledge and school-based experience are actively produced rather than assumed. Such coherence is not an automatic outcome of participation in practice, but a pedagogical achievement that depends on how experiences are connected, interpreted, and reflected upon (Cooper et al., 2010; Jackson, 2015; Schön, 1991). The “aha moments” described by students illustrate how theoretical concepts gain meaning when anchored in concrete practice situations, supporting the idea that professional knowledge develops through iterative movement between experience and conceptualization (Allen & Peach, 2007; Raaen, 2017).

At the same time, the findings reveal that this integrative process remains uneven, and at times, fragile. While AP creates the conditions for boundary crossing between campus and schools, the responsibility for establishing these connections is often left to the students themselves. This aligns with previous WIL research showing that without explicit structures for reflections, feedback, and academic integration, workplace experiences risk remaining tacit and under-theorized (Ferns et al., 2025; Forslund Frykedal & Zimmerman Nilsson, 2025). In this sense, the AP functions as a potential boundary space, but one that requires stronger institutional mediation to fully realize its learning potential.

This tension also reflects a broader challenge identified in WIL literature; the balance between authenticity and intentional design. While the open and flexible structure of AP enables responsiveness to local practice and supports individualized learning trajectories, it may simultaneously weaken the alignment between learning arenas. Strengthening this alignment does not necessarily require more control, but rather more explicit pedagogical strategies that might help students translate experiences into professional knowledge. Seen through the lens of professional learning theory, this suggests that coherence emerges not simply from exposure to both arenas, but from guided participation in the process of interpretation, questioning, and meaning-making (Salo et al., 2024).

We have shown that the conceptual framework of professional learning emphasizes the holistic and complex nature of teachers’ development of competence, belonging, and identity. The theory highlights the importance of professional judgment through relational trust, recognition, and the value of open and systematic reflection on one’s own practice. By applying this framework, we aim to explore how additional practice can serve as a meaningful arena for student teachers to engage in situated learning, develop their professional identity, and participate actively in professional communities. This perspective allows us to interpret professional learning not as a linear acquisition of skills, but as an ongoing, reflective, and relational process shaped by context, experience, and interaction.

Engaging in AP fosters work-integrated learning situations and personal experiences conducive to professional learning. Professional learning requires recognition and contribution from all participants to bridge the gap between theory and practice. This involves open and dialogical interactions where ideas can be freely expressed (Kemmis et al., 2014; Wenger, 1998). Some students explicitly mention the connection between theory and practice and report that AP has made it easier to connect theory to practice. Some students wish to take on responsibility in teaching situations and, as a result, experience a sense of mastery and learning. On the other hand, some students express that they want

responsibility but decline when the opportunity arises. The students justify this with time constraints, limited knowledge of the pupils' academic abilities, and uncertainty about how to ensure continuity with previous teaching. From a theoretical perspective, referring to scholars like Lave and Wenger (1991), Kemmis et al., (2014) and Salo et al., (2024) – professional learning is strengthened when students actively participate in meaningful experiences, reflecting on their observations, and contributing to a professional community. AP facilitates this by allowing students to gradually develop their professional identity through sustained exposure to the realities of teaching. However, the findings also highlight areas for improvement, particularly in ensuring that students receive sufficient feedback, and have opportunities to contribute actively to their learning environment. In addition, the way in which educators at university engage and involve themselves in the project is considered crucial for the student teachers to achieve professional learning.

CONCLUSION, IMPLICATIONS AND LIMITATIONS

The findings of this study suggest that AP constitutes a valuable arena for professional learning by offering student teachers sustained, work-integrated learning experiences in everyday school life. Both student teachers and teachers recognize the benefits of AP in providing a more realistic and nuanced understanding of the teaching profession, fostering motivation and enabling the student to engage with the complexities of classroom practice, without the immediate pressure of formal, and dot-point assessments. From a theoretical perspective, professional learning is strengthened when students actively participate in meaningful experiences, reflecting on their observations, and contributing to a professional community (Kemmis et al., 2014; Wenger, 1998). AP facilitates this by allowing students to gradually develop their professional identity through sustained exposure to the realities of teaching.

However, the findings also highlight areas for improvement, particularly in ensuring that students receive sufficient feedback, and have opportunities to contribute actively to their learning environment. In addition, the way in which university educators engage and involve themselves in the project is considered crucial for student teachers to achieve professional learning

While AP seems to enhance students' ability to connect theory with practice, the findings also suggest that it fosters deeper critical reflections, an essential component of professional learning. Through observing, participating in, and making sense of authentic situations, student teachers appeared to develop an increasingly reflective stance toward their own emerging professional identity and practice.

Although the study provides valuable insight into how AP supports professional learning, there are some limitations in the study that should be acknowledged. First, the qualitative data are based on a relatively small number of participants from specific school settings, which limits the transferability of the findings to other contexts. Second, teachers who agreed to participate may have been particularly motivated or positively predisposed toward AP, potentially influencing the perspectives represented in the material. Third, interviews capture participants' accounts at a particular moment in time and may not fully reflect the development of their learning. Finally, the analysis is unavoidably shaped by the researchers' interpretations, even though procedures for reflexivity and transparency were applied. These limitations do not undermine the contribution of the study but should be taken into account when considering the scope and applicability of the findings.

Further studies could examine how different AP models shape students' learning across institutions, explore the long-term impact of AP on professional development, and investigate how universities can better integrate practice experiences into campus teaching.

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DISCLOSURE OF THE USE OF GENERATIVE AI

M365 Copilot was used to translate portions of the manuscript from Norwegian to English and to refine the language for clarity and readability. Generative AI was not used to create scholarly content, generate text, summarize literature, interpret findings, or develop conceptual or analytical insights, in accordance with IJWIL's policy.

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The International Journal of Work-Integrated Learning (IJWIL) publishes double-blind peer-reviewed original research and topical issues related to Work-Integrated Learning (WIL). IJWIL first published in 2000 under the name of Asia-Pacific Journal of Cooperative Education (APJCE).

In this Journal, WIL is defined as:

An educational approach involving three parties – the student, educational institution, and an external stakeholder – consisting of authentic work-focused experiences as an intentional component of the curriculum. Students learn through active engagement in purposeful work tasks, which enable the integration of theory with meaningful practice that is relevant to the students' discipline of study and/or professional development (Zegwaard et al., 2023, p. 38).*

Examples of practice include off-campus workplace immersion activities such as work placements, internships, practicum, service learning, and cooperative education (co-op), and on-campus activities such as work-related projects/competitions, entrepreneurship, student-led enterprise, student consultancies, etc. WIL is related to, and overlaps with, the fields of experiential learning, work-based learning, and vocational education and training.

The Journal's aim is to enable specialists working in WIL to disseminate research findings and share knowledge to the benefit of institutions, students, WIL practitioners, curricular designers, and researchers. The Journal encourages quality research and explorative critical discussion that leads to the advancement of quality practices, development of further understanding of WIL, and promote further research.

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Reference

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