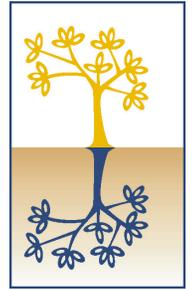Initial Teacher Education Program

Characterizing Initial Teacher Education in Canada: Themes and Issues

Mira Gambhir
Kathryn Broad
Mark Evans
Jane Gaskell

UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO
OISE | ONTARIO INSTITUTE
FOR STUDIES IN EDUCATION

Contents

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Mira Gambhir, Kathy Broad, Mark Evans, Jane Gaskell

Recent research literature suggests that what teachers know and are able to do is one of the most important factors influencing student learning. Research also suggests that the act of teaching is becoming increasingly complex and that highly competent teachers apply a range of practices for varying purposes, incorporate and integrate different kinds of knowledge, build up a sophisticated pedagogical repertoire, and adapt to learner diversity and shifting contextual forces.

Yet, recent contextual forces have further complicated the educational landscape. Increasing cultural, linguistic and religious diversity within Canadian borders has influenced education. For example, of the 31.6 million total population in Canada there are over 200 ethnic origins and 19.7% of people whose mother tongue is a non-official language (Statistics Canada, 2006). In addition, the speed and pervasiveness of information and communication technologies, an increasingly interdependent global economy, issues of inclusion, a dominating neo-liberal discourse, and challenges in human rights and social justice, for example, are prompting what Young and Hall (2004) refer to as "a deeper exploration of fundamental questions of purpose – teacher preparation for what?"

Not surprisingly, there has been increasing attention to, and debate about, the critical ingredients of a high quality initial teacher education (ITE) program within the broader context of lifelong professional learning. This paper maps out some of the key characteristics of initial teacher education in Canada and addresses various themes and issues related to:

  i)   educational context;
  ii) the location of ITE within broader professional development frameworks;
  iii) characteristics and challenges of ITE programs; and
  iv) insights gained, associated issues and future directions.

It should be noted at the outset, however, that a comprehensive understanding of ITE in Canada is complicated by a certain patchiness of data on this subject and a rather complicated governance system. While some provinces have conducted reviews of teacher education, and universities systematically review their own programs, there has only been modest pan-Canadian study of the structure and context of teacher education programs, despite the potential for a variety of interesting research questions (Tardif et al., 2000). A recent survey, *Teacher Education in Canada*, undertaken by the Society for the Advancement of Excellence in Education (Crocker & Dibbon, 2008) is turning more empirical attention to the issues, and an "Accord" signed by the Deans of Education across the country is an attempt to collectively emphasize the complexity and importance of the issues that teachers face. In order to discuss this complexity in Canada, one must begin with an understanding of the educational context and the governance system.

The Educational Context in Canada

In Canada, responsibility for education falls at the level of the provincial, not the federal government. Canada spends about 7% of its GDP on education and universal publicly funded schooling is available from Grades 1 through 12 (Statistics Canada, 2003). Attendance is compulsory up to the age of 16 in every province in Canada, except for Ontario and New Brunswick, where the compulsory age is 18. Education in Canada is generally divided into Elementary (Primary School, Middle School), followed by Secondary (High School) and Post Secondary (College, University). Education and instruction is available in both official languages (English and French) in most places across Canada where the population warrants it. The school year usually begins in September and extends to the end of June.

Beyond this foundation, each of Canada's ten provinces and three territories has a somewhat distinct system of education. Curriculum is developed and supervised by the provinces. District school boards within these regions administer the educational programs under an education ministry. In certain provinces (Ontario, Alberta and Saskatchewan) and the territories (Yukon, Northwest Territories and Nunavut), conditions have been established for denominational minorities to run separate school systems, the majority of which are Roman Catholic. In addition, there are a number of independent (private) schools (these are attended by only a small fraction of students), as well as schools which operate under the jurisdiction of the Aboriginal bands in the provinces and territories. The range of schools, provinces, and regulations make it difficult to provide a simple review of education and teacher preparation in Canada. Moreover, Canada frequently does not show up on international comparisons of education because it is difficult to aggregate statistics across the country. The information that is available gives us a snapshot of how education and teaching are valued within the country.

Learning to learn, preparation for work, responsible citizenship and instilling values tend to underpin the broad purposes of education in Canada, yet the emphasis varies from province to province (Leithwood, Fullan, and Watson, 2003). By most accounts, Canada's education system is a strong one. Canadian students score well on PISA, TIMMSS and other international rankings of student achievement. Educational attainment levels of the population are relatively high. Recent surveys have shown that 91% of 25-34 year olds have obtained senior secondary education, which is above the Organization of Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) world average of 77%; 54% have tertiary education, compared to the 32% OECD average (OECD, 2007a). In comparison to other countries, the gradient of inequality in attainment is relatively low (OECD, 2007b). The prioritization of education is evident when considering that government funding for the system is a relatively high percentage of GDP, and teachers' wages, while not as high as Korean or Japanese wages, are higher than in the US. Investment in the system has led to moderate satisfaction with education in the country and areas for improvement.

Canadians are more satisfied with their teachers than they are with the system as whole. Seventy percent of Canadians express a high level of satisfaction with the jobs teachers are doing in elementary and secondary schools (Canadian Education Association [CEA], 2007). Despite this significant support, only 45% have a great deal or quite a lot of confidence in provincial public schools. Satisfaction with public schools is highest in Quebec (61%) and lowest in Ontario (36%). This understanding of the system has begun to influence provincial reforms in curriculum as well as school structures (e.g., schedules). As mentioned previously, Canadians have historically expressed a high level of satisfaction with their teachers. Teachers are viewed as playing a critical role in student learning and in the implementation of the government's provincial policies.

The demand for teachers is robust, but it has varied over time due to both demographics and educational policy. As governments put resources into the system, reduce class sizes, provide mentoring, and specialized teacher positions, the demand fluctuates. The number of students under the age of 18 is declining, but retention is increasing. It is difficult to obtain reliable data on the employment prospects of graduates from teacher education programs. In Ontario, a survey is done every year by the Ontario College of Teachers (OCT, 2006a, 2006b). It states, "the avalanche of teacher retirements form 1998 to 2002 had school boards in Ontario in full speed hiring mode in 2001…the 2005-6 school year was an entirely different entry time for the graduates of 2005." It goes on to describe that there is only selective demand in areas like math, physics, technology and languages. It also points out that "the job market for immigrant teachers is dismal-even if they are experienced and have high-demand qualifications." In contrast, government statistics show that Ontario is still producing fewer graduates than it needs, and that this gap is being met by graduates from programs outside of the province.

The number of women in the profession continues to be high, despite the increasing availability of other jobs for educated women. In Ontario, a recent report lamented the decline of men in teaching, arguing that diversity in the teaching profession and role models for boys were reasons to recruit men aggressively into teaching (Bernard, Falter, Hill & Wilson, 2004). The male proportion of the full time educator workforce nationally dropped by 41% in 1989 to 35% in 1999, and is lower among younger educators. However, over longer time frames, the percentage of men in teaching has gone both up and down; women were a higher percentage of educators much earlier in the century. And there is continuing concern about the ability of women to play leadership roles in teacher education (Acker, 1997) and in the profession (Gaskell & Mullen, 2006).

For Canada, the question of linguistic, cultural and racial diversity in the teaching force has particular salience because the demographics of the school system are changing more rapidly than the demographics of the teacher workforce. A rapid increase in immigrant families, in internal migration, and in the Aboriginal population is changing many school systems (Harvey & Houle, 2006). Since the early 1990's, Canada has welcomed approximately 225,000 new immigrants each year and this constitutes 0.7% of the total population (Statistics Canada, 2007). Seventy five percent of new arrivals move to Canada's three largest cities: Toronto, Vancouver and Montreal. Twenty percent of new immigrants are children and nearly 80% are members of a visible minority (Citizenship

and Immigration Canada [CIC], 2006; Statistics Canada 2008). More than forty percent report that they do not know either of Canada's official languages, English and French (CIC, 2006). While Canada's overall birth rate is low, the rate among the Aboriginal population is higher, and as a result, the Aboriginal population, which experiences severe socio-economic disadvantage, is predicted to grow from 5.6 to 6.6% of the population in the next few years. This is an environment which places critical demands on teachers to work with cultural and linguistic diversity, and much of the educational scholarship on teacher education in Canada deals with how the programs attempt to introduce an understanding of racism, diversity and social justice.

It is this dynamic context and governance structure which initial teacher education attempts to both respond to and serve. Initial teacher education is also part of a continuum of professional learning for teachers. Before examining the structure and challenges of ITE, it is important to understand the guiding principles and values that frame the professional development of Canadian teachers.

The Location of Initial Teacher Education within a Broader Professional Development Framework

In Canada, professional learning to support teachers' work is most often located within a "professional growth" paradigm rather than the more traditional "deficit" paradigm (Broad & Evans, 2006). Initial teacher education programs are more often viewed as the first stage in a longer professional learning process where certain knowledge bases and practices (e.g. subject knowledge, curriculum knowledge, general pedagogical knowledge, knowledge of learners, knowledge of educational contexts) are introduced and practiced in a rudimentary manner, rather than programs targeted to compensate for a lack in skills or knowledge that view beginning teachers as empty vessels to be "topped up".

This notion of ongoing professional growth tends to underpin established ITE programs across Canada. Through on-going professional development, teachers refine competence in areas such as: planning, instruction, assessment, the understanding of youth development and student learning, effective communication skills, the understanding of professional and ethical characteristics, and interest in on-going professional learning. Literature suggests that an articulated set of professional development standards is helpful in guiding ITE program design and implementation. Most of these standards place student learning at the core and outline some form of quality teaching.

In Canada, provincial and territorial education departments/ministries most often establish appropriate goals and standards for teaching in relation to the broad educational goals of the region and tend to work co-operatively with the various stakeholders in their design (e.g. Colleges of Teachers, District School Boards, Federations, Faculties of Education, Professional Associations). In Alberta, for example, the Teaching Quality Standard Ministerial Order (TQS) and the Teacher Growth, Supervision and Evaluation Policy have been established to guide teachers' preparation, certification, career-long professional development, supervision, and evaluation. British Columbia and Ontario

each have their own College of Teachers that have established professional standards for effective teaching practice to guide continuous professional improvement. The Ministry of Education in Ontario is also currently developing a continuum of ongoing professional development for teachers throughout a teacher's career (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2004).

There have been certain issues associated with the identification and use of standards. Concerns have been raised that delineating standards may reduce teaching to a checklist and/or a narrow set of technical skills if care is not taken when considering standards so that the potential for depth and complexity in understanding and practice is not restricted. Ongoing review and assessment of ITE programs is recognized as a critical formative piece of information in order to develop effective programs. Current literature recommends that assessment or evaluation practices, based on solid principles of assessment, need to be used to determine the quality of ITE programs. Literature further recommends that a comprehensive design approach be used that aligns with identified standards and that reviews become a standard and regular part of the ITE review cycle.

Many complexities are associated with the assessment and review of initial teacher education programs around identified standards. Some concerns relate to ensuring measures align to different purposes (e.g. maintenance, improvement, change). Other concerns emphasize that measures consider locations (e.g. on/ off site), and impact of the delivery models used (e.g. didactic, collaborative). Perhaps the most significant recommendation is a call for more explicit attention to indicators that link initial teacher development to student learning (e.g. assessment results, portfolios, marks or grades, retention and participation). Guskey (2003) emphasizes that evaluation of professional development must be ongoing, systematic, informed by multiple data sources and multiple kinds of data. It must also be understandable to a variety of stakeholders if it is to have power.

Initial teacher education programs in Canada tend to be viewed as a first, foundational stage in this professional development process. They are expected to provide an introduction to critical knowledge bases, skills, and practices that assist prospective teachers to develop a fundamental understanding of high quality student and teacher learning and performance. Reflective of this attention to an ongoing professional development process, most provinces have also introduced induction programs to follow a teacher candidate's first year of preparation. Induction programs include information sharing and mentoring with a more experienced colleague. They have been designed to assist beginning teachers make better transitions into the classroom and to support the next stage of their professional development, whether it be identified as meeting the needs of diverse learners, establishing and maintaining effective environments for learning, or negotiating the many non-teaching administrative tasks associated with the role of teaching (OCT, 2006a).

Teacher remuneration is frequently tied to continuing professional learning and different jurisdictions recognize different kinds of experience and education for salary purposes. Ontario has a complex, home grown system of "additional qualifications" which are

tightly regulated and transfer to no other jurisdiction. In BC, individual school boards define their own incentive schemes. Unions are wary of hierarchies that might differentiate the profession. The result is an uneven and sporadic investment in professional development, often largely dependent on investments by individual teachers.

Although there has been increasing attention to ongoing professional learning throughout one's teaching career, coherence remains a critical challenge within and across various institutions providing teacher education support. Goals and standards, processes and practices, and assessment approaches need to be clear, meaningful, and sustainable and connect with student and societal learning needs and purposes. At the same time, a fine balance between cohesion and differentiation needs to be kept in mind. Teaching and learning in schools varies in context, composition, and needs, and teacher education programs need to be purposefully flexible to allow options for individualized, grade-level, subject-area/thematic, context-specific professional learning. Aiming at greater coherence, while also maintaining a commitment to differentiation and innovation, requires ongoing attention.

Additional forces, both local and global, are raising issues about *what*, *how*, and *where* initial teacher education should be located and represented in the educational landscape. Worldwide issues of diversity and inclusion, rapid shifts in information technology, the expansion and deepening of a global economy, issues of civic governance, for example, have prompted discussion about the complexities of these issues in relation to teaching and learning, and in particular, the implications for initial teacher education programs. A variety of issues (e.g., regionalism, French/English relations, Aboriginal self-governance, Canadian/American relations, increasing immigration, concerns about a growing 'democratic deficit') within Canada further complicate this dialogue (Sears, 1999; Osborne, 2001). Young and Hall (2004) have indeed suggested the need for "a substantial restructuring of both teachers' work and their preparation within a general discourse of "globalization", "a knowledge economy", and, "the emergence of "postmodern" social, economic and cultural conditions" given the variety of emergent issues and tensions. The negotiation of these many tensions and the paradigm of on-going professional learning are evident in the design of Canadian ITE programs.

Initial Teacher Education Programs in Canada

The following section outlines the parameters for teacher preparation and characteristics of programs in Canada. It also explores issues such as the governance of ITE, Canadian orientations to program pathways, admissions policies, course work, teacher education pedagogy, and practical experiences. Highlighted throughout this discussion are the challenges that face Canadian initial teacher education programs as we progress into the 21st century.

Initial teacher education is embedded in a complex network of regulatory bodies, which include provincial governments, accreditation agencies, and universities. Provincial legislation sets out the content of teacher education in very broad terms in most provinces. It generally includes orientation toward curriculum and pedagogy, a

practicum in the schools, and some discussion of child development, law and social issues. Provincial legislatures also provide funding for teacher education in the envelope that is allocated to universities. Again, provinces differ in how they allocate funding and whether they leave it to the universities to allocate the funds internally or target some funding specifically for teacher education programs. In general, teacher education is funded at a level somewhat higher than humanities and social science undergraduate programs, but lower than the sciences and health professions. In addition to funding from the government, tuition for teacher education is paid by the students, and varies between 2 (in Quebec) and 10 (in B.C.) thousand dollars a year, depending on the length of the program and the jurisdiction. The number of places in teacher education remains fairly stable from year to year, because of the government funding available.

In most provinces, universities are accredited, and the provincial government licenses any teacher who graduates from an accredited university. Ontario introduced a standardized test to certify teachers for a few years, but it was withdrawn owing to major concern within the profession, and a change of government.

In two provinces, British Columbia and Ontario, a College of Teachers, elected by and responsible to the teachers in the province, accredits teacher education programs. These Colleges are relatively recent institutions: the BC College was started in 1987; the Ontario College was started in 1997. Both have been controversial, and were started over the objections of the teachers' federations. The BC Teaching Profession Act, the composition of the college and the criteria for accreditation of teacher education in BC have been revised several times after the teachers refused to cooperate with some decisions, and the deans took the College to court (Young, Hall & Clarke, 2007). In Ontario, a recent review of the College's accreditation process (Grimmett & Echols, 2006) concluded that there was substantial dissatisfaction with it, and discussions about changes continue.

All initial teacher education in Canada is currently university-based and takes place in faculties of education. More than 55 universities graduate 18,000 new teachers each year. They tend to be research based academic programs of learning complemented with mentored field experiences in schools and the community. Teacher preparation moved gradually to the universities from teachers colleges and normal schools that were directly controlled by the Ministry of Education (Stamp, 2004; Ontario Institute for Studies in Education [OISE], 2007). Secondary level teacher preparation programs moved before elementary education, with the major shifts taking place in the 1970's.

For the most part the greatest control of teacher education rests with the universities and their governing bodies. What Labaree (2006) describes as the progressive views and romantic rhetoric of teacher education is widely shared in Canadian faculties of education. A concrete expression of this is the accord that was approved by the deans of all faculties of education in 2006 (Collins & Tierney, 2006). The accord outlined a pan-Canadian commitment to principles for teacher education. For example, the recognition that an effective initial teacher education program "promotes diversity, inclusion, understanding, acceptance and social responsibility in continuing dialogue with local,

national and global communities." In addition to these commitments, the deans also recognize the benefits of having a variety of programs and pathways in initial teacher education.

Program Models and Pathways

One study of mission statements of institutions offering teacher education concluded, "a striking feature of the mission statement is that their greatest commonality is their diversity." (Crocker & Dibbon, 2008). Despite this variety, there are common implicit and explicit beliefs and practices that guide the structure and design of programs in Canada. Wilson (2003) suggests that indeed there has been a fundamental consensus across initial teacher education programs despite a lack of national direction for teacher education, differences in certification processes, and diversity among institutions. The majority of ITE programs at faculties of education focus on preparing teachers for the Kindergarten to Grade 12 school system. Canadian teachers are initially prepared for one or two divisions at the primary, middle, and/or secondary level(s). The knowledge required and role of teachers is slightly different depending on the Grades taught thus influencing elements of initial teacher education.

Teachers in the primary division are generalist teachers whose knowledge and skills span a range of subjects including Math, English, Science, Art, Health and Social Studies. In the middle division, the orientation is slightly different because teachers are generalist teachers as well as subject specialists in at least one area (e.g., History). Secondary schools in Canada offer academic courses and vocational courses. At the secondary level, there are no generalist teachers; teachers are specialists in two subject areas (e.g., Physics and Geography). Similarly, guidance counselors, resource and special education teachers complete ITE programs and are also prepared to work in one or two divisions.

The distinction of teacher expertise from primary, middle, to secondary academic/vocational means that candidates (student-teachers) in teacher education are streamed into division-specific programs upon admission. Although there is a distinction between programs, the basic architecture of Canadian teacher education pathways and models tend to be similar.

Essentially, there are four pathways of initial teacher education in Canada: the consecutive, concurrent, graduate and sole degree models. In the *consecutive model,* the Bachelor of Education (B.Ed) is earned as a second degree. Consecutive candidates must have an undergraduate degree (e.g., Bachelor of Arts) before entering the program. In this model, there tends to be a more diverse candidate population in terms of age, past careers, and expertise. Depending on the university, candidates can spend anywhere from eight months to two years earning their B.Ed degree. One of the greatest challenges of the consecutive model is the intensity of delivering comprehensive courses and practical placements in the shorter programs (e.g., Ontario's eight-month degrees). Critics feel that more time is needed for development of teaching skills and knowledge than can be achieved in a short program (OCT, 2006b; Russell, McPherson & Martin, 2001). Another concern is the limited depth and breadth of topics that can be covered.

The second model is a *concurrent* program at the undergraduate level that normally spans four to six years. Candidates earn a B.Ed at the same time as an undergraduate degree (e.g., Bachelor of Science). The benefit of many concurrent models is that candidates can be introduced to concepts early in their degree and then revisit and expand on ideas as they grow into professionals. However, this model may be challenged to provide candidates with an integrated student experience that helps them fulfill both highly demanding degree requirements in a reasonable time. Another weakness is the common practice of the segregated delivery of degrees in concurrent programs that leads to a lack of cohesion between subject knowledge and the education degree. To merge this gap, some universities have made efforts to build partnerships across faculties and offer specially designed education courses outside of the B.Ed for their candidates (e.g., Math for Teachers or Science for Teachers).

The third is a *graduate model,* in which candidates complete a Master's degree (e.g., Arts, Education, Child Study) at the same time as a B.Ed degree. Programs are approximately two years and consist of two levels of coursework, graduate and pre-service, as well as field experiences. These programs can produce highly-qualified and in some cases specialized teachers or counselors. This is quite different than the fourth pathway. Quebec and the northern territories offer teacher education as *a sole degree model*. This is similar to the United States where candidates earn a B.Ed degree over three or four years and are not required to have a second undergraduate degree. The sole B.Ed is a balance of subject specific and education focused courses.

As mentioned earlier, delivery of the consecutive, concurrent, sole, and graduate program models is primarily the responsibility of a single university that establishes field partners with local schools. In the case of unique programs, such as those that focus on international teacher education, universities work with affiliate institutions abroad (Mexico, China) to deliver courses and field experiences (e.g., Simon Fraser University; Scholefield, 2006). There has also been precedence of collaborative programs between universities and community colleges to deliver education on satellite campuses (e.g., University of Regina) or to have corridor programs in which candidates complete pre-requisites at a college with guaranteed admission into teacher education (e.g., University of Ottawa and Algonquin College).

In ITE programs, most candidates are enrolled full-time because of the demands of the programs. Some universities have begun offering alternative models of teacher education. For example, Trent University in Ontario offers part-time status for candidates who are transitioning from their careers or are in financial need. Other universities offer partial distance education models with on-line courses and mentoring. Some community-based distance ITE programs are designed to serve remote locations or marginalized groups. Several provinces have developed specialized programs for Aboriginal teacher education. These programs may include strong community-based components or protected admissions from colleges into ITE. They also offer seminars located in the remote communities as opposed to the university centres (Indian and Northern Affairs, 1996).

Alternative and traditional ITE programs have also been developed in several provinces to accommodate internationally educated teachers (IET). IETs are educators who have studied or been professionally trained outside of Canada. Many are moving from one type of education system to another and negotiating their new professional identity (Mawhinney & Yu, 1997) and facing dismal job prospects in Canada (OCT, 2006b). The process of crossing borders, recertification and teacher preparation is challenging. Many IETs are being asked to take courses in Canadian initial teacher education programs before certification. Some universities and colleges in Canada now offer specialized programs that focus on bridging knowledge of the profession across contexts (e.g., George Brown, University of Manitoba). Course content includes youth culture, intercultural education, and pedagogy in Canadian classrooms.

The number of alternative ITE models is minimal compared to traditional ones. In some cases, these programs can cost more or take longer to complete. Canada has begun to explore alternative teacher education routes, but further research is needed on the quality, effectiveness and accessibility of these models. In light of the variety of teacher education pathways that are offered in this country and the limited national regulations on consistency, it seems that these issues need to be further explored and prioritized to ensure that teachers are not being prepared disparately across the country.

Admissions, Recruitment, and Attrition

Each pathway involves the recruitment and admittance of candidates. Admissions requirements are determined individually by programs within the context of provincial ministry (and regulatory body) regulations. Thus, there are many differences with respect to prerequisites and entrance requirements (OCT, 2006b). The various programs also have differing admissions processes and entrance requirements. Concurrent or sole degree pathways require secondary school graduation and candidates can enter directly or in their first years at the university. Consecutive and graduate programs require an undergraduate degree and candidates apply upon completion of their first degree or after several years in the workforce.

Adequate academic standing is a factor in all faculties of education with minimum admissions averages ranging from below 65% to over 90% depending upon the competition for places within the programs. Demonstrated proficiency in English is also a requirement for all programs. French proficiency is mandatory in Quebec as well as French language programs elsewhere. Concentrations or specializations in particular content areas also may be required, particularly for admittance into teacher education programs focusing on secondary school education. Elementary programs generally require less subject specialization due to the generalist nature of teaching in elementary schools.

In many programs, strong consideration is given to non-academic factors such as background experience and evidence of interest in or disposition toward teaching, in addition to academic requirements. Frequently, applicants are required to provide written statements, letters of reference, proof of relevant work or volunteer experiences, and

participate in interview processes in order to attempt to determine readiness or propensity to teach (Casey & Childs, 2007). Recently, there has been a movement toward recognition of non-classroom based experience in the admission process. It is believed that non-formal system experiences such as community service or leadership are as relevant to candidate preparedness for ITE. Programs weight the academic and non-academic factors quite differently, depending upon their admissions policies and program goals. Despite the fact that standardized admissions tests are not used in Canada, admissions requirements here appear to be significantly higher than has been reported in other countries (OECD, 2007).

Canada, unlike other jurisdictions, does not face widespread challenges in attracting applicants to the profession. The teaching professional is generally held in positive regard. Teachers' salaries are comparable to those of other public servants, such as librarians. In Ontario, there are more applicants for teacher education programs than there are places in programs. In fact, institutions from around the world have become engaged in training and certifying teachers to teach in Canada resulting in an increase in certified teachers that has in turn significantly impacted the labour market (OCT, 2006a). At the current time, there is need for additional teachers in some jurisdictions and ITE programs in British Columbia and elsewhere have increased their offerings in the past five years (Grimmett & Echols, 2006). As well, teachers for particular subject areas are in demand. Although we have a federal requirement of mandatory French education in schools, qualified and proficient teachers are in short supply across the country.

Significant challenges do arise however, in attracting a diverse population of applicants that reflect and serve the increasingly diverse population of students in schools. Recent survey data indicate that 70% of the school-aged population in Toronto is non-white (TDSB, 2007) yet the teaching population continues to be predominantly white. Another factor which impacts ITE admissions is the deep commitment to inclusion that is evident in school systems across Canada, resulting in an increased numbers of learners with accessibility needs and learning differences in both urban and rural classrooms. There is a call for programs to make concerted efforts and recruit candidates that are representative of all backgrounds.

Aboriginal students in urban, rural and remote settings are particularly poorly served by education systems in Canada. The 2001 census reveals that 42% of the Aboriginal population has less than a secondary school education. This is particularly striking as almost half of the Aboriginal population is under the age of 25. The federal auditor general's 2005 report indicates that it would take 28 years for secondary school graduation rates within the Aboriginal population to equal that of the Canadian average. The need to attract, prepare and retain teachers with strong understanding of the social and cultural context of learning for Aboriginal students and communities is evident (Wotherspoon, 2007). As illustrated in pathways section of this report, it is in the area of Aboriginal teacher education that alternative routes to the profession have been given strongest attention, however, these programs tend to be small and there continues to be serious shortcomings in attracting and retaining teachers to serve these communities (Sorenson, Young & Mandzuk, 2005). Strategies designed to improve educational

prospects for Aboriginal communities include recruiting more Aboriginal adults into teacher education and preparing all teachers with more knowledge and skill in working with Aboriginal students.

To increase the participation of under-represented groups in teaching and to better serve students in schools, teacher education programs in Canada have utilized equity or access policies that ask applicants to self identify as members of particular access groups; institutions then employed procedures that allocate spaces to these populations such as people with disabilities, and racially or other minoritized peoples (Cook, 2001). Outreach activities that are geared to attract diverse applicants have also been employed such as information sessions in community centers. These activities are designed to encourage a wide range of students and adults to consider a career in teaching. Additionally, requirements for some programs have also been adjusted to target knowledge bases and experiences rather than academic attainment of applicants, for example community experiences or work experience in technological studies and other high skills areas of learning in secondary schools.

As admission to initial teacher education is very competitive in most programs, in some jurisdictions, students who are not admitted in Canada go to programs outside of the country, in Maine or New York for example, where more spaces are available. A few of these programs have accreditation or affiliation with provincial regulatory bodies. The more adventurous may go to Australia or Europe. Graduates can then return to Canada and apply for certification as teachers. However, mobility for teachers across jurisdictions can be difficult. And as internationally qualified teachers arrive in increasing numbers, they are faced with restrictions and significant wait periods before employment. On some level, Canada needs to engage these populations to create a more diverse teaching force that links our local schools with developments around the world. Individual faculties and regulating bodies such as provincial ministries and colleges of teachers also need to continue to study ways to develop greater capacity and diversity of applicant pools in teacher education programs.

Enrolments in teacher education programs declined slightly from the early 1990's to the late 1990's, but they have increased recently (Crocker & Dibbon, 2008), as new universities open and offer teacher education programs. Graduation rates in ITE programs across Canada have been relatively stable over the past 15 years, with a slight increase since 2000. Approximately 3 times as many females enroll in, and graduate from, initial teacher education programs than males. The number of graduates per capita in each province varies. Many graduates begin their careers as non-contract occasional teachers and eventually secure more permanent employment.

Canada has never faced the drastic kind of attrition from teaching in the first five years of the profession that has been evident in other nations, particularly the United States. Teacher retention rates are reasonably high and have stabilized, as induction into the profession has been given much greater attention and resourcing. As in the practicum placement, induction programs rely upon experienced teachers in the schools to provide the mentoring support for their junior colleagues. Mentoring skills are not necessarily

part of a teaching repertoire, resulting in a need for additional training and time for experienced practitioners to learn about effective ways to provide support. It is through these collegial relationships with more experienced colleagues that beginning teachers are able to contextualize their learning and gain information about administrative aspects of teaching, district policies and practices and be supported in the implementation of evaluation and reporting practices in their settings (Ontario Teachers Federation [OTF], 2007).

Program Features

The Society for the Advancement of Excellence in Education (2008) study concludes that the most frequently mentioned theme in ITE program statements was some variation of "producing competent professionals" with an emphasis on knowledge and skills along with specific competencies, as well as references to social justice and equity: "respect for diversity" and producing "reflective" teachers (Crocker & Dibbon, 2008). The following section highlights some of the core and distinctive components of teacher education courses, pedagogy, and field experiences.

Course Content

 A survey of programs across the country and regulatory literature indicate that there is a level of consistency in the programmatic emphases of initial teacher education programs in Canada, which have been derived from research on the knowledge-bases of effective practitioners (Darling-Hammond & Bransford, 2005; Murray, 1996; Turner-Bisset, 2001). Through course work and field experiences, initial teacher education programs explore themes and issues related to curriculum and instruction, school law, classroom management, educational psychology, the sociology of schooling, and professionalism. All programs tend to include knowledge through course content about who is to be taught (learners), what is to be taught (subject matter and curriculum), how to teach (principles and practice of teaching), where the teaching takes place (context), and why teach (foundations of teaching).

Notions of teaching excellence in relation to student learning and contextual pressures have prompted debate about what a beginning teacher ought to know and be able to do (Fullan, Hill & Crevola, 2006; Leithwood, McAdie, Bascia & Rodrigue, 2006). There has been increasing recognition, as research deepens in relation to teacher expertise, that core subject matter in ITE programs needs to be attentive to real themes and issues in the day-to-day work of teachers yet grounded in certain key knowledge bases (e.g. substantive subject knowledge, syntactic subject knowledge, curriculum knowledge, pedagogical knowledge, knowledge of learners, knowledge of educational contexts) that help inform instructional decisions about student learning.

Given Canada's changing demographics, there has been increasing attention to inclusive practices in ITE programs in past decades (Conle et al., 2000; Coelho, 2004; Solomon, 1997; Wane, 2003). There exists a tension for what is classified as part of the core ITE curriculum (e.g., English language learners, gifted learners) in one institution and

considered as elective course offerings in another. In some cases, discussions on topics like anti-racist education (Wane, 2003), conflict resolution, environmental sustainability, intercultural education and the use of information communications technology sit on the periphery of core programming. There is a call from educators and schools, for ITE courses to give a more systematic and explicit attention to these subjects as opposed to their current ad hoc inclusion.

In some cases, the classification of topics as core content is a reaction to the changing educational context. New teachers need to have the knowledge of culturally relevant pedagogy and skills in differentiating for learners with varied backgrounds, strengths and needs (James-Wilson, 1999). For example, in Ontario, a recent report from the College of Teachers has recommended that a course in special education be considered an essential element of initial teacher education for all teachers (OCTb, 2006).

A promising feature of Canadian ITE programs is that many institutions, both urban and rural, have diversified their offerings so that candidates have a program focus or lens in teacher education beyond the division specialization (e.g., primary). These lenses include but are not limited to areas such as literacy, inner city, gifted, and arts-based education. These value-added programs are one way of addressing both candidates' interests and beginning teachers' needs for effective teaching in today's classrooms.

The debate of core and periphery course content exists at the divisional level as well. In elementary programs, there is call for stronger literacy and numeracy fundamentals in teacher education and more class hours in ITE devoted to these subjects. At the same time, educators lament the limited time allocated and near elimination of subjects like the arts, physical education and character education. As in other countries, Canadian ITE programs find it difficult to prepare generalist teachers adequately when they enter without a strong foundation in subjects such as math or science. The question then arises as to how much subject knowledge should be required or included in ITE in light of a crowded timetable. At the secondary level, programs struggle to prepare teacher candidates to respond to the wide diversity of learners in their classrooms (Coelho, 2004; Dei, 2005) and to foster greater collaboration across subject specializations (Hargreaves & Fullan, 1992).

Also impacting ITE course content is the fact that several provinces offer both secular and denominational schooling. Therefore candidates wanting to work in the Catholic system (e.g., Ontario) are required to take a qualifying course in Catholic education that is usually offered in partnership with or with the approval from leadership of the church. At this time independent schools (private) or other denominations do not have additional course requirements.

Many competing agendas in ITE programming present an on-going challenge in Canadian teacher education for determining the core subject matter required for induction into the profession. An extension of this problem is that the space for teacher candidate voices is lost in the shuffle of trying to make sure that programs deliver the 'right curriculum' within the allotted time. If candidates move from course to course without

some kind of community network, then initial teacher education can also feel very fragmented. Another issue is the struggle for programs to bridge the theory and practice gap through coursework. There appears to be a discontinuity between the theoretical work which candidates are taught and their observations of practices in schools (Russell et al., 2001). In addition, there is a disparity in how candidates are supported to apply the theories they learn to their future practice in meaningful, critical and explicit ways.

Discussion persists about what ought to be considered core program subject matter, ways of improving connections between theory and practice, and the appropriate duration of ITE programs given the demands and complexity of teaching. In Canada, there is increasing attention to issues of equity, inclusion, and social justice within ITE. Various programs are making more explicit institutional commitments (e.g. established equity policies, curriculum infusion, conferences, university/field enquiries) and taking more deliberate steps to consider different aspects (e.g. recruitment, admissions, hiring) of ITE programs through this lens. Providing ongoing professional learning opportunities for teacher educators to deepen their knowledge of learner diversity and differing contexts as well as their capacity to critically respond in sensitive ways is paramount to more effective preparation of teacher candidates. It continues to be a challenge for teacher educators to incorporate new understandings of responsive pedagogy and practice in an ever changing and overloaded educational landscape. Lastly, attention to broader program elements such as admissions processes and hiring of faculty need to be heightened in explicit ways to ensure individual, institutional, and systemic barriers in ITE programs are challenged.

Program Delivery and Teacher Education Pedagogy

In the last forty years, there has been a shift in the Canadian perspective of ITE. This shift is from the traditional skill-based transmission and training models to more holistic views of teacher preparation. A holistic orientation uses social constructivist approaches of learning that focus on the development of the individual while fostering awareness and understanding of education in the broader context – community and world.

Teacher education pedagogy builds on this broader perspective of the "whole teacher" and emphasizes reflective practice, critical inquiry and the engagement of candidates in learning communities (Sleeter, 2004; Taylor & Sobel, 2001). Through mentored course assignments and class discussions, candidates are asked to deconstruct their ideas and question assumptions about teaching and the profession. University partnership and practicum offices and schools try to work closely to ensure consistency and coherence between what is taught in classes and what happens in candidates' school placements. Some universities like the University of Toronto have also implemented cohort-based learning where candidates complete foundation courses through their program with a small group and team of instructors. The relationships that the candidates build through their community have a positive emotional impact on their experience in ITE (Beck & Kosnik, 2001).

There is a general understanding that ITE programs need to introduce and model

powerful forms of instruction, collaborative inquiry, and the infusion of research for teacher candidates and be responsive to ongoing change. Professional learning literature supports this notion and encourages a more constructivist orientation that includes a rich repertoire of professional learning practices for all teachers, from the beginner to the experienced (General Teaching Council for England, 2005; Lieberman & Miller, 2000; Warren-Little, 2001). Programs are structured so that these practices are grounded in real issues in teaching and learning and involve some level of collaboration and professional inquiry. For example, lesson study and action research are strategies that allow contextualized, collaborative and individual inquiry into areas of professional interest and need.

Different researchers make the case for heightened attention to pedagogies for beginning teachers' that enhance teacher educators' capacity for critical inquiry, professional collaboration, and the use of research to improve student learning and teacher performance (Bransford, Brown & Cocking, 2000; Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2001; Fullan, Hill, & Crevola, 2006; Katz, Sutherland & Earl, 2005). An inquiry orientation allows teacher candidates' and faculty to investigate issues of concern and learn to critically use high quality research to inform their professional practice over time. Building capacity for collaboration in its many forms (e.g. structured professional dialogue, shared planning as a learning activity, cohorts/ communities of practice, online professional networks) provides opportunities for beginning teachers to come together to discuss ideas and issues related to aspects of classroom practice, student learning, and their roles as educators. An ongoing challenge for ITE programs is finding ways to build in opportunities for professional inquiry and collaboration in teacher candidates' everyday experiences that inform personal practice and program improvement.

Questions arise regarding program delivery in relation to the choice of professional learning practices within the program, the location and duration of delivery (in schools, online, and/or at universities), and the importance of community specific contexts (e.g. inner city, rural, Aboriginal, elementary). Central to this discussion is a focus on job-embedded learning, or "learning in school" through peer coaching, mentoring, action research, and planning teams that offer strong opportunities to implement and practice, while "learning out of school" through networks, school-university partnerships and visits to other settings (Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 1999).

Another emerging issue concerns who teaches in initial teacher education programs. In Canada, most faculties of education incorporate a differentiated staffing model. Differentiated or complementary staffing models attempt to bridge research and practical expertise by involving tenure track professors, contract instructors who have been hired from the field such as curriculum designers or retired program leaders and seconded instructors such as experienced classroom teachers who are released from the board for this purpose. Teams of instructors, with varying types of expertise, work with candidates over the course of their program. However, recent studies are suggesting that more and more ITE programs are being staffed primarily by school-based teachers and contract faculty. This raises questions about the extent to which new research is finding its way into initial teacher education programs. A challenge for programs with differentiated

staffing models is ensuring that ITE faculty represent an appropriate balance of expertise. Most often this balance is ensured through the engagement of core staff as well as practitioners in initial teacher preparation. One place in which this partnership is most evident is the practicum.

Field Experiences and the Practicum

The quality of field experiences has a direct effect on the quality of teacher candidates' learning experiences within the program. Professional initial teacher education programs require deep and ongoing links among various school, university, and community stakeholders to ensure relevance, currency, and the inclusion of varied expertise (Rolheiser, 1999, 2004, 2005, 2006, 2007, 2008; Wilson, 2003). Strong relations with the stakeholders strengthen the conditions for deepened understandings, improved skill development, and the integration of theory and practice.

All initial teacher education programs in Canada, regardless of their length or structure include a field experience, called a practicum, where teacher candidates engage in supervised evaluated teaching in classrooms under the guidance and direction of qualified host teachers. The practicum is provincially regulated through faculties and is seen as an important site for synthesizing connections between the theoretical and research-based pedagogical concepts presented in the academic program and the actual practice of teaching. Some programs have also incorporated non-evaluated field experiences in school or community settings with individual learners or groups in recognition of the value of learning about the contexts in which students learn and come from.

Host teachers have extensive experience and are normally recommended by the principals for this role. Candidates work intensively with these teacher mentors during the practicum and teach in their classrooms. Host teachers are vital to ITE programs and are charged with the duty of observing practice teaching, sharing observations, giving suggestions, introducing resources and supporting the teacher candidate to work through problems of practice. The host teacher may also be the evaluator, although some programs require the faculty advisor, who visits from the university, to conduct the evaluation. The faculty advisor also plays an important role in the provision of feedback and in making the connections between the academic program and the field experience more explicit.

The duration of the practicum varies from 8 – 22 weeks in Canada. The design and structure of these placements range from days or partial days to blocks of weeks in classrooms and schools. Quebec has one of the largest number of days in the field, whereas Ontario has the shortest program and requires only 40 days of practice teaching (OCTb, 2006). This short period creates a very compressed and intense learning situation that can be viewed as limiting the deep reflection on practice needed to ensure development of sound pedagogical knowledge. However, it is recognized that length alone is not sufficient for nurturing professional knowledge and that the structure and design of the practicum experience is pivotal to the teacher candidate's development (Darling-Hammond & Bransford, 2005). Some programs may provide multiple settings

and experiences while others may emphasize more focus on a particular school or classroom. The timing, concentration and distribution of these experiences vary widely with the institution, the program goal and the particular pathway. As concurrent and sole degree programs are longer, they tend to have a greater number of experiences and placement models within one program. Graduate program models often incorporate an extended placement in one school within their design (Ewart & Straw, 2005).

The commitment to providing field based experiences as part of ITE is built upon a belief that teacher candidates must have opportunities to practice, take risks and explore their learning in a safe environment that is rich in feedback and support. Factors in a practicum experience that lead to deeper learning are the connections between the field experience and the learning in the academic program, as well as the supervision, feedback and mentoring provided by the host teacher and teacher educator (Schulz, 2005). The host teacher who indicates a willingness to work collaboratively with the teacher candidate on planning, instruction and assessment is pivotal to the learning process. Most importantly, the host teacher supports learning by connecting the classroom experience to theory and research, by promoting reflection that helps candidates' think about practice through questioning and feedback (Beck & Kosnik, 2000).

Issues in the practicum arise from dissonance between knowledge developed in the academic program and candidates' experiences in the field placements. If there are not strong efforts at building coherence and consistency in concepts and emphasis between the university and the sites of practice, the theory-practice disconnect can be increased and the development of research-informed practice is lessened. Also, associate teacher qualifications and skills in mentoring, inconsistencies in practicum expectations between the university and the practicum site, difficulty in locating sites as well as the power differential in the relationship between the host teacher and teacher candidate all impact the potential for learning by teacher candidates in the practicum.

Models involving strong school-university partnerships attempt to bridge disconnect between theory and practice by promoting ongoing relationships with partner schools and teachers as well as strengthening communication between stakeholders in ITE. In an effort to strengthen these bonds, the use of a cohort organization is an increasingly popular structural arrangement across Canada (Russell et al., 2001). Cohort organization is where teacher candidates are grouped into professional learning communities for large portions of their academic program and are placed in schools that are in partnership with the cohort. Some Canadian programs have moved toward the professional development schools (PDS) model, which is popular in the United States. PDS is where there are extremely strong connections between faculties and one or more schools. These connections create a site of collaborative research and learning for novice teachers, experienced educators and ITE faculty. In Canada, these relationships have tended to be more partnership-based and fluid than the PDS model.

Different issues, however, emerge in relation to high quality field experiences and dynamic school/university/community relations. The nature and extent of the practicum is undergoing careful scrutiny. What ought to be the expectations for classroom

observation, practice, and supervision during the practicum? How much focus should be on whole school issues? How much time should be devoted to better understanding the community context? These are a few of the questions being explored in relation to the field experience. Creating effective and powerful connections with field partners requires time, attention and appropriate resource support. Practicum placements need to attend to clarity around roles and responsibilities and to what makes for a high quality teacher-mentor/teacher-teacher candidate relationships in ITE.

Concluding Reflections: Insights Gained and Associated Issues

Certain persisting themes regarding high quality ITE programs have been given special prominence in the literature in the Canadian context and have been raised throughout this discussion. Eight of these issues are outlined below. They perhaps foreshadow some of the areas to be addressed in the 21st century as we shape and revise initial teacher education programs.

Program coherence is a critical feature of high quality initial teacher education programs. However, building coherence is an ongoing challenge of institutions, particularly in large teacher education programs. Coherence encompasses all ITE programs components including admissions policies, course content, and staff composition. Recognizing that Canadian teachers span the spectrum of generalist to specialist, ITE programs must endeavor to keep the fine balance between cohesion and differentiation of program orientations. Aiming at greater coherence, while also maintaining a commitment to differentiation and innovation, requires thoughtful planning, critical awareness and ongoing attention.

Program comprehensiveness is a continuing issue. Core subject matter in ITE programs needs to be attentive to real themes and issues in the day-to-day work of teachers yet grounded in certain key knowledge bases. Discussion persists about what ought to be considered core program subject matter (e.g. use of communications technology, inclusive curriculum, special education), ways of improving connections between theory and practice, and the appropriate duration of ITE programs.

Another key issue is the challenge of constructively responding to diversity and the deepening of principles of equity, inclusion, and social justice across teacher education programs. Programs must determine appropriate ways to ensure themes like intercultural understanding, anti-racist education, and culturally relevant pedagogies impact programs at all levels and have more than a token status. In some places, there is a call for greater advocacy and leadership training so that teacher candidates are empowered to support change. Building institutional capacities through partnerships and community programming is one step in the right direction. Providing ongoing professional learning opportunities for teacher educators to deepen their knowledge and learn how to critically respond in sensitive ways is essential to achieving this goal. Diversity education is not only a goal of ITE curriculum but also for admission policies and recruitment efforts. Increasing access, attracting, and retaining a diverse teaching force, representative of the Canadian population, is an ongoing struggle.

Researchers have also made the case for heightened attention to teacher education pedagogy. Candidates make connections to the content that they explore in pre-service programs when it is presented in engaging and meaningful ways that relate to their experiences as learners and future teachers. There is a need to improve teacher educators' capacity for critical inquiry as well as their abilities to communicate the wealth of expertise they hold as practitioners and researchers. Professional learning literature supports and encourages a more constructivist orientation that includes a rich repertoire of professional learning practices for all teachers, from the beginner to the experienced. There has been a shift by several institutions to collaborative, case-study, inquiry-based programs that engage in reflective praxis, however the discussions have just begun in terms of identifying effective teacher education pedagogy in a more systematic way. Networks between innovative, experimental, and traditional programs need to be established as well as professional development opportunities for educators to rethink and revision new practices in their ITE classrooms.

Initial teacher education relies heavily on field experiences, particularly the opportunities for practice which are undertaken in schools. The quality of field experiences has a direct effect on the quality of teacher candidates' learning experience within the program. Time, resources, communication and a variety of partnership affiliations are needed to build quality placements. Partnerships between schools, host teachers, faculty and candidates must be nurtured and supported. The commitment of host teachers need to be better valued and mentorship skills need to be sustained through on-going professional development. As programs expand, the competition for placing teacher candidates in local schools becomes an issue for urban centres in Canada; transparent and mutually sustaining partnerships between all programs and with boards are needed.

Other continuing questions relate to who teaches in initial teacher education programs and who constitutes an effective teacher educator. Staffing models need to have a balance of instructors who can infuse new research into initial teacher education programs and share the realities of teaching in today's classrooms. There is a need for a reciprocal relationship in which practitioners' concerns are voiced and can contribute to research agendas within institutions.

Another tension relates to the value and use of an articulated set of professional development standards. It is vital to critically consider how the use of standards impacts the potential for depth and complexity in understanding and practice. On-going reviews of teacher education are recognized as critical formative pieces of information in order to develop effective programs. In the case of Canada, it seems impossible to include a national quality assurance mechanism when programs operate differently from province to province. Despite this jurisdictional challenge, there is a timeliness and need for discussions across the country about coherence in ITE.

Lastly, there is a general understanding that ITE programs need to be responsive to ongoing change, yet, what does this mean in an era of "globalization" and "a knowledge economy". Nationally as we struggle with pockets of economic boom and others of

disparity, teacher preparation needs to be adaptable to the contexts in which its candidates serve while providing grounding in key areas of knowledge. Increased practices of accepting teachers from other jurisdictions outside of Canada as well as teacher mobility within and outside the country are also changing the ITE landscape. It is time for a collective approach and investigation by provinces of how to best support these candidates in the transition process. Most importantly, ways of understanding the core purposes and practices (e.g., transmission, instrumentalist and transformative) of ITE programs need to be critically understood as do ways of adapting to emergent needs, of both the individual and the communities served, from the local to the global.

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