

CONFLICTING PERCEPTIONS OF PARTICIPANTS IN FIELD-BASED TEACHER EDUCATION PROGRAMS

CHERYLL DUQUETTE *University of Ottawa*

ABSTRACT. This report presents an analysis of seven studies on field-based teacher education programs. The conflicting views of multiple participants are described. It was found that the six groups had different perceptions of the course work, field experiences, and beliefs about personal professional competence. The report underscores the importance of a strong theoretical component in school-based programs, the boundary-spanning role of the faculty, and the need for the student teachers to learn how to learn from their school experiences.

RÉSUMÉ. Ce rapport propose une analyse de sept études de programmes de formation des enseignants sur le terrain. Il décrit les points de vue opposés de nombreux participants. On a constaté que les six groupes avaient des perceptions très différentes des travaux de cours, des stages pratiques et des croyances sur les compétences professionnelles personnelles. Le rapport souligne l'importance d'un solide volet théorique dans les programmes scolaires, du rôle élargi du corps enseignant et du besoin pour les professeurs stagiaires de tirer des leçons de leurs stages pratiques.

Student teachers report that the time spent in schools is the most relevant component of their preservice program (Britzman, 1991; Housego & Boldt, 1984; Tardif, 1985; Wideen & Hopkins, 1984). Since the mid-1980s the academy has also developed an appreciation for school-based experiences. Beginning with the first report of the Holmes Group, *Tomorrow's Teachers* (1986), the importance of establishing school-university partnerships that focus on teacher education has gained much credibility. In North America these partnerships usually take the form of professional development schools (PDS). The goal of the PDS is clearly to improve the education of teachers and of pupils. In a PDS, practitioners and professors create a learning community with multiple functions: preparation of preservice candidates, induction of new staff, inservice of experienced teachers, the development of new forms of practices, and the creation of new knowledge

about teaching and learning (Ross, 1995). In parts of Great Britain and Canada field-based programs, also involving a partnership between schools and faculties, have been viewed as a means to improve teacher education. In these programs student teachers spend approximately two-thirds of their time in the schools and the remaining portion on course work. Student teachers and first-year teachers report that the benefits include sufficient time to develop practical skills, many occasions to observe and work with pupils, and provision of ample time to gain a realistic understanding of life in the schools (Duquette, 1996b, 1996c). Associate teachers indicate that mentoring a student teacher has its rewards: professional development, assistance in planning and implementing new programs, and opportunities to share their expertise with someone so enthusiastic (Dann, 1995; Duquette, 1996c, 1997).

A distinguishing feature in both of the above program models is that student teachers are educated in the milieu in which they will eventually function (Murray, 1996). Moreover, field-intensive programs involve the integration of the student teacher's school experience with the disciplined knowledge of the academy and the wisdom of the practitioner (Ross, 1995). As well, these programs require that associate teachers and faculty adopt new roles and new ways of interacting. In both PDSs and school-based teacher education programs associate teachers take on the role of mentors, and professors provide regular in-school support for the student teachers and the associate teachers.

While these programs represent a change in the delivery of teacher education programs, there is little support found in the literature that shows they are linked with improved pupil performance or to changes in teachers' instructional practices (Ross, 1995). Moreover, there is little evidence that relates field-intensive programs to improved preparation of student teachers (Duquette, 1996). However, studies of perceptions of participants do provide some indication of the strengths and weaknesses of these new models of teacher education. The present study is concerned with the perspectives of student teachers, first-year teachers, and associate teachers involved in field-based teacher education programs. The findings of this research do shed some light on the issue of field-intensive teacher education programs and the professional preparation of student teachers.

Much of the literature on teacher education programs is based on the perceptions of student teachers or graduates. Few studies examine the multiple perspectives of the participants involved in preservice programs. There is one notable exception: a study conducted by Grimmett

and Ratzlaff (1986) in which the perceptions of student teachers, university advisors, and associate teachers are examined. But little has been published on the conflicting perspectives of teacher education programs as held by student teachers, first-year teachers, and associate teachers. This is an area of importance as it permits a broader understanding and a more balanced view of preservice programs. Therefore, the purpose of this paper is to examine the conflicting perspectives of multiple participants of a field-based teacher education program.

THE ON-SITE PROGRAM

For the last seven years a large university in Ontario has offered a post-degree, one-year field-based teacher education program (on-site program) in partnership with the local boards. The student teachers spend approximately two-thirds of their preservice year in the schools. Most of the course work is delivered through survey sessions and professor-led seminar groups. Associate teachers are responsible for teaching many of the practical aspects of running a classroom, for marking some assignments, and for evaluating the practicum. At the secondary level the associate teachers also teach the pedagogy of their particular discipline. Associate teachers apply to work in the program and are selected by the boards. The faculty provides them with training on the program and on their role. Student teachers who volunteer for the program are chosen on the basis of their proximity to the schools (elementary program) or their subject disciplines (secondary).

Despite the similarities in the general framework there are differences in the organization of the elementary and secondary programs. The elementary student teachers work mainly with two groups of pupils throughout the year, whereas the secondary students teach up to six different groups. The elementary student teachers are taught by retired practitioners or by part-time professors who are employed by the boards. The course work consists of short, practice-oriented sessions that have been developed specifically for the elementary on-site program. On the other hand, the course work for the secondary program is a distilled version of that offered by the traditional campus-based program. The foundational courses are given by a full-time professor who requires student teachers to do much the same readings and assignments as those in the traditional program. The third difference is that the professor assigned to the secondary program visits the associate teachers each week to address concerns. Whereas in the elementary on-site program the frequency of liaison varies from once a month to once a semester.

Previous studies on the on-site programs

There have been a total of seven studies done on the on-site program. Three have been on the elementary program in which the following were studied: the institutional constraints and role expectations (MacDonald, McKinnon, Joyce, & Gurney, 1992), perceptions and attitudes of student teachers and associate teachers (Duquette, 1993), and the role of the associate teachers (Duquette, 1994). A fourth study reported the perceptions of first-year teachers who were graduates of the elementary program (Duquette, 1996a). The fifth study was a comparison of perceptions of elementary and secondary advisors (Duquette, 1997). Two studies on the secondary on-site program (Duquette, 1996b; Duquette, 1996c) were also included as data sources.

Methodology

An analysis of the seven studies on the on-site program was conducted. The perceptions of the student teachers, associate teachers, and first-year teachers of elementary and secondary programs were listed and categorized according to a typology consisting of three dimensions: course work, field experiences, and professional outcomes. These dimensions represent major elements in teacher education programs. The category of course work refers to the courses and assignments that comprise the teacher education program. The term, dimension of field experiences, refers to the in-school component of a preservice program. The final category of professional outcomes refers to the personal perspectives of teachers about their practice and themselves as teachers. The data were arranged in matrix form as described by Miles and Huberman (1984) to show the perceptions of participants. Within each dimension differences in perceptions of the same phenomenon were studied.

FINDINGS

Coursework

For the dimension of course work a single conflicting perspective emerged (see Table 1). Student teachers and first-year teachers from the elementary on-site program expressed a need for more theory. They would have liked more program hours devoted to course work, particularly in the foundational areas. On the other hand, this was not a concern of those students or graduates with the secondary program. This may be attributed to the different content of the course work. The secondary

Conflicting Perceptions of Participants

TABLE 1. Differing perceptions of course work

Group	Perceptions
Elementary student teachers	• Insufficient theory (Duquette, 1993)
Elementary first-year teachers	• Insufficient theory (Duquette, 1996)
Secondary student teachers	• sufficient theory (Duquette, 1996b)
Secondary first-year teachers	• sufficient theory (Duquette, 1996c)

on-site foundations courses were closely aligned with those offered by the traditional program in terms of content, readings, and assignments. Whereas foundations courses in the elementary program took more of a workshop format, with fewer readings and assignments.

Field experiences

Three conflicting perspectives were noted in the dimension of field experiences (see Table 2). The student teachers and first-year teachers commented on the importance of being placed with a good associate teacher. One of the elements of "goodness" appears to be linked to being able to get along with one's partner. Novice teachers reported personality and philosophical conflicts with their associate teachers, which may have reduced their opportunities to implement their beliefs about teaching and limited their overall development. Associate teachers at both the elementary and secondary level did not report any conflicts, and did not appear to be aware of any problems either in teaching styles or personality.

A second conflicting perception within the dimension of field experiences related to the desire to make changes in the associate teacher's classroom. Student teachers at the elementary level perceived inadequacies and were eager to introduce new practices that would address

TABLE 2. Differing perceptions of field experience

Group	Perceptions
Elementary first-year teachers	• potential problems with associate teachers (Duquette, 1996)
Secondary first-year teachers	• potential problems with associate teachers (Duquette, 1996c)
Elementary associate teachers	• no conflicts (Duquette, 1994)
Secondary associate teachers	• no conflicts (Duquette, 1996c)
Elementary student teachers	• want to make changes in the classroom (MacDonald, et al. 1992)
Secondary student teachers	• want to maintain status quo (Duquette, 1996c)
Elementary associate teachers	• lack of support (Duquette, 1994, 1997)
Secondary associate teachers	• sufficient support (Duquette, 1997)

the problems. However, the secondary on-site student teachers made no such comment. A few indicated that they preferred to maintain the

status quo to avoid the discipline problems that arose among pupils when changes in routine or teaching style were made.

The third difference in perceptions within this dimension emerged with the associate teachers. Those in the elementary program reported lacking on-going, active support from the professors. Specifically, they wanted the support of the faculty when a student teacher was not making adequate progress or was not acting on their suggestions. This was not a concern of the secondary teachers, who commented favourably on the regular opportunities to meet with the professor.

Professional outcomes

One difference of perceptions in the professional outcomes domain was found between elementary and secondary first-year teachers (see Table 3). Some of the first-year elementary teachers experienced a crisis of confidence in their abilities once they had their own classes. They perceived that the lack of instruction in theory and the nature of their practicum had not prepared them adequately for solo teaching. However, loss of confidence was not a concern of graduates of the secondary program who perceived that their course work and field experiences had prepared them to manage any situation. On this occasion the elements of course work and field experiences contributed to the personal and professional dimension of secondary novice teachers.

Finally, associate teachers with both programs reported benefiting from their involvement with student teachers. However, the elementary teachers perceived that working with student teachers had contributed

TABLE 3. Differing perceptions of personal/professional outcomes

Group	Perceptions
First-year elementary teachers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • lacking in confidence (Duquette, 1996) • confident in knowledge and abilities (Duquette, 1996b) • working with student teachers is an effective professional development activity (Duquette, 1994) • working with student teachers is an occasion to reflect (Duquette, 1997)
First-year secondary teachers	
Elementary associate teachers	
Secondary associate teachers	

to their professional development. Many felt that they had mastered some new teaching techniques, that they had benefited from the opportunity to work with individual pupils, and that they had learned more about supervision. On the other hand, many secondary teachers reported that the experience had permitted them the opportunity to reflect on the pupils and their own practice. The differences in percep-

Conflicting Perceptions of Participants

tions of what constitutes professional development or the stages of professional development are of interest.

The findings point to conflicting perspectives within each of the dimensions. The differing perspectives centred on the amount of theory offered, relations between associate teachers and student teachers, desire to make changes, support for associate teachers, confidence during the first year of teaching, and notions of professional development.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The results of this study suggest some critical components of field-based teacher education programs that will ensure a high quality professional preparation. These programs must not become so practice oriented that the theoretical underpinnings of the field of education are neglected or abandoned. Otherwise, graduates are left with a sense of the procedures but little grasp of what they are attempting to accomplish or why. Specifically, Zeichner, Liston, Maklios, and Gomez (1988) point to the need for student teachers to focus their attention on curriculum materials and goals, as well as on classroom procedures. Feiman-Nemser and Buchmann (1987) further the notion by stating that student teachers must know how to assess the value of content and the instructional processes of their lessons and to evaluate what and how pupils are learning. Hence, field-based programs must ensure that there is adequate time apportioned for theory and for opportunities to link the theory with their classroom practice. These programs should represent an integration of theory and practice so that student teachers have a sense of the how, what, and why of teaching, which will surely improve the confidence graduates have in their own professionalism.

A second element of these types of school and university partnerships is the critical role of the faculty advisor who spans the boundaries between the academy and the classrooms. In field-intensive programs the professor devotes a significant amount of time to work in the schools. Hence, he or she must feel comfortable in both the academic and school milieux (Murray, 1996). In school-based programs one of the roles of the faculty advisor is to provide support for the work of the associate teachers who are acting as mentors for the student teachers (Dann, 1995). Faculty should give initial training to associate teachers and provide on-going support for them. Training should focus on encouraging student experiential learning, interpersonal relations, and supervision techniques. Faculty must schedule regular blocks of time in

which they are present in the schools in order to converse face-to-face with associate teachers to answer questions and to address concerns.

Finally, student teachers in field-based programs should be taught how to learn from their experiences. All too often experience is viewed as separate from learning to teach; the link between experience and learning is missing (Johnston, 1994). Field-based programs are potentially rich for gaining understandings about teaching and learning. However, Feiman-Nemser and Buchmann (1987) point out that teachers and faculty do not take seriously their responsibility to help student teachers gain a practical understanding of the central task of teacher preparation. Student teachers need to know how to probe and extend pupil learning; to question what they see, believe, and do; to make classroom decisions that are justifiable in terms of theory and research instead of "neat ideas" or classroom control; and to communicate effectively and appropriately with others (Booth, Hargreaves, Bradley, & Southworth, 1995; Feiman-Nemser & Buchmann, 1994). It is important to recognize that school experiences represent significant occasions for acquiring new knowledge, skills, and dispositions (Zeichner, 1986). Therefore, faculty and associate teachers must take every opportunity to capitalize on daily events to develop the experiential learning of student teachers.

Field-based teacher education programs present one model for the delivery of professional preparation. Attention must be paid to the course work so that it contains a substantive amount of theory and not just the technical aspects of teaching. Care must also be taken to ensure that student teachers integrate theory and practice through assignments designed to promote inquiry and reflection on classroom practice. As well, attention must be paid to the large segment of time spent in the schools. Student teachers should be taught how to question and analyze their many classroom experiences so that they gain new understandings about teaching and learning from them. Faculty and associate teachers must model and teach these skills of pedagogical thinking and acting that support and extend experiential learning. What is important in any teacher education program is that students have opportunities to construct a sense of what teaching is through their understandings about theory, research, and their own practice. Field-intensive programs in which partners work towards achieving this goal show promise as being one model of teacher education that serves to advance the professional preparation and inservice of teachers.

Conflicting Perceptions of Participants

REFERENCES

- Booth, M., Hargreaves, D., Bradley, H. & Southworth, G. (1995). Training of doctors in hospitals: A comparison with teacher education. *Journal of Education for Teaching*, 21, 145-161.
- Britzman, D. (1991). *Student makes student: A critical study of learning to teach*. New York: SUNY Press.
- Dann, R. (1995). Transition to mentoring: Issues in primary initial teacher training. In D. Blake, V. Hanley, M. Jennings, & M. Lloyd (Eds.), *Researching school-based teacher education* (59-72). Brookfield, VT: Ashgate Publishing Company.
- Duquette, C. (in press). *A comparison of two school-based teacher education programs: Perceptions of mentor teachers*.
- Duquette, C. (1996a). A field-based teacher education program: Perspectives of student teachers and first-year teachers. *Alberta Journal of Educational Research*, 42 (4), 396-399.
- Duquette, C. (1996b). *Restructuring preservice programs: Recommendations from student teachers and first-year teachers*. Paper presented at the annual meeting of the Canadian Association for Studies in Teacher Education, St. Catharines.
- Duquette, C. (1996c). Partnerships in preservice education: Perceptions of associate teachers and student teachers. *McGill Journal of Education*, 31, 69-82.
- Duquette, C. (1994). The role of the cooperating teacher in a school-based teacher education program. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 10, 345-353.
- Duquette, C. (1993). A school-based teacher education program: Perceptions and attitudes. *Alberta Journal of Educational Research*, 39, 419-432.
- Feiman-Nemser, S. & Buchmann, M. (1987). When is student teaching teacher education? *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 3, 255-273.
- Grimmett, P., & Ratzlaff, H. (1986). Expectations for the cooperating teacher role. *Journal of Teacher Education*, 37, 41-50.
- The Holmes Group. (1986). *Tomorrow's teachers: A report of the Holmes Group*. East Lansing, MI: The Holmes Group.
- Housego, B., & Boldt, W. (1984). Critical incidents in the supervision of student teachers. In P.P. Grimmett (Ed.), *Research in teacher education: Current problems and future prospects in Canada* (167-192). Vancouver, BC: CSTE/CSCI Publications.
- Johnston, S. (1994). Experience is the best teacher; or is it? An analysis of the role of experience in learning to teach. *Journal of Teacher Education*, 45, 199-208.
- MacDonald, C., McKinnon, M., Joyce, M. & Gurney, P. (1992). Institutional constraints and role expectations: Perspectives on field experiences in an on-site teacher education program. *McGill Journal of Education*, 27, 45-59.
- Miles, M. & Huberman, M. (1984). *Qualitative data analysis: A sourcebook of new methods*. Newbury Park: Sage.
- Murray, F. (1996). The narrow and broad readings of Tomorrow's Schools of Education. *Educational Researcher*, 25, 28-31.
- Ross, J. (1995) Professional development schools: Prospects for institutionalization. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 11, 195-201.
- Tardif, C. (1985). On becoming a teacher: The student teacher's perspective. *Alberta Journal of Educational Research*, 31, 139-148.

Wideen, M., & Hopkins, D. (1984). Supervising student teachers: A means of professional renewal? *Alberta Journal of Educational Research*, 30, 26-37.

Zeichner, K. (1986). The practicum as an occasion for learning to teach. *The South Pacific Journal of Teacher Education*, 12, 11- 27.

Zeichner, K., Liston, D., Mahlios, M. & Gomez, M. (1988). The structure and goals of a student teaching program and the character and quality of supervisory discourse. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 4, 349-362.

CHERYLL DUQUETTE is an associate professor at the University of Ottawa and is interested in teacher education programs.

CHERYLL DUQUETTE est professeur agrégé à l'Université d'Ottawa et elle s'intéresse aux programmes de formation des enseignants.