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Initial Teacher Education in Canada – The Practicum

Introduction

This paper uses the “case” to give a picture of the practicum, an essential and core element in initial preparation programs for teachers in Canada. The “case” is an in-depth description of one instance of a set of phenomena or class of events of which it is partly or wholly representative. As such it provides information that begins to give insight into what the larger phenomenon or the typical situation is about. The “case”, as description, as narrative or as a research tool, has been used extensively in business, law, medicine and some social sciences (anthropology, archeology) for a long time. With the development of ethnographic research as a legitimate and acceptable research paradigm in education, the case is now used frequently as an alternative research tool to the traditional survey. Case-based instruction, case-based pedagogy, case-based evaluation are now common place terms in the teacher education literature. Books of case studies that present descriptions or narratives of real life classroom situations for student teachers and practitioners to analyse are easily available (Beynon, 2001; Cooper, 1995; Elliott, 2001; Greenwood, 1997; Rand, 1999; Redman, 1999). In all of these books the “case” is used for instruction, providing “situation-specific circumstances to help students connect theory with practice in a supportive, interactive environment” (Redman, p. 2) In this paper the case, as description, is used to focus the reader’s attention on the nature and issues of the practicum in teacher education. The practicum at one university is described in detail; from this the reader can develop an understanding of how the practicum works in other teacher education programs in Canada. To provide the context for this case general information about teacher education in Canada is given. Then more detailed information about one aspect of initial teacher preparation– certification– is presented for one province. Thus the stage is set for details about the practicum at one institution. The paper is organised in three layers, moving from generality to specificity, with the last layer and core being the practicum.

Layer 1 –A Glance at Initial Teacher Education in Canada

The preparation of teachers in Canada varies from province to province and from institution to institution. Variation follows logically from the historical development of and the legal framework for education in the country. The British North America Act of 1867 (called the Constitution Act since 1982) established a federation of provinces and placed education exclusively within the jurisdiction of the province. This fact of history explains why Canada is the only industrialized country without a national department of education or any mechanism to regulate national policy for education (Scott, 2001, p.2). Each of Canada’s ten provinces and three territories has the exclusive right to pass legislation on matters of education. Each jurisdiction has its own school act defining how education is provided and how powers are delegated. The powers include the following; teacher education is among them:

- the power to tax for the support of schools and to provide provincial aid to local school districts;
- the power to set curriculum and identify curriculum materials and textbooks, and methods of student assessment;
- school funding policies and levels;
- diploma requirements for secondary graduation;
- teacher certification (although the provinces of British Columbia and Ontario have established Colleges of Teachers to regulate the profession);
- regulations for trustees and education officials of school boards, and laws for general support including libraries and transportation; and
- maintenance of schools.

Legislation and history have left Canada with a unique education system – 13 education systems but no federal government office of education. In structure, Canadian education is determined through each provincial legislature, the ministry of education, the minister of education, school boards and, in some provinces, school councils. In the case of Ontario the government has delegated its responsibility for teacher certification and for the oversight of teacher education programs to the College of Teachers but has not relinquished the power as illustrated recently by the government legislating a common entry test into the profession. This legislation has been passed and enacted contrary to recommendations by the College and all groups of teachers and teacher educators.

Across the country, the provincial government or the College of Teachers (where one exists) sets regulations for certification and universities deliver the education program. Historically there have been two program models: consecutive and concurrent. From either model students receive a bachelor of education (B.Ed.) degree in recognition of completing their professional studies. The consecutive model is a one or two year program after an undergraduate degree. The program separates professional studies from academic studies; assumes that studies in the arts and sciences provide an appropriate foundation for studies in education and provides the content background for teaching; makes it possible for mature and experienced people to enter teaching; and increases the pool of teacher candidates since, through this route, many enter teaching as a second or third career. In the concurrent model students pursue their teacher education studies alongside of their academic studies. In the most common concurrent pattern, teacher education is integrated into the first-degree program starting in the first or second year of a four or five year program. Students declare teaching as their career choice and teacher education as their program destination when they apply to university. Faculties of Education work closely with University undergraduate departments in developing the program. A second version captures various modifications of a consecutive program and allows students to opt into the teacher education component at various points during their degree program. A third variation of the concurrent model is in Quebec where there is a four-year B.Ed. program after a two or three year program at a community college. All programs, regardless of which model, require practice teaching under the supervision of experienced practitioners.

Some changing trends

Boote and colleagues (1997) have documented some changing trends in teacher education programs in Canada, in part as a response to changing societal, intellectual and economic pressures. They identified five trends in the 1990's and all of these are continuing into the present decade:

- replacing disciplinary lecture courses with workshops and general seminars that enable student teachers to integrate research and field experience;
- focusing programs on the needs of student teachers, rather than on the interests of teacher educators;
- changing program structure and length, and admissions requirements to attract and graduate more mature and experienced teachers;
- shifting teacher educators' focus to use research to inform their practice and practice to inform their research; and,
- using teacher education as a site of social and professional change and renewal.

Some changes are: a shift to extended consecutive programs beyond eight calendar months (one academic year) or to two year graduate level programs; increased emphasis on volunteer experience; extended practica; time spent in community organizations; more focus programs (a specialization in an area such as native education, multiculturalism, literacy, science and technology); and the elimination of direct entry into teaching programs from high school. However any one of these changes tends to be institution specific and not provincially mandated or national in scope. Without provincial legislation to change the traditional, these changes tend to be isolated in alternative programs at universities as directed by the interest of the teacher educator, the leadership of a dean, the inspiration for a research project, the outcome of research findings or the challenge of a societal pressure. Some changes are structural only. Grimmett (1995) makes the point that restructuring without purposeful reconceptualization of teacher education issues is unlikely to bring about significant and lasting change.

Some examples of concrete changes are: the University of Western Ontario (Ontario) has a Masters level teaching program; the University of Saskatchewan has eliminated entry into teacher education directly from high school; all the Maritime universities (except Memorial, Newfoundland) and the University of Calgary, (Alberta) have a two year consecutive program; Brock University (Ontario) is collaborating with the Faculty of Social Sciences and the Faculty of Humanities in developing a generic concurrent model; Brock University (Ontario) is experimenting with a ten-month consecutive program in partnership with a private educational institution that includes enterprise studies and an internship in a community (non school) or corporate setting. While all of the above examples involve some degree of restructuring, some also are the result of a reconceptualization process. The last mentioned example is intended to provide teacher candidates with opportunities to create a community network to support teaching, facilitate learning in an organizational environment and relate teaching skills to alternate career paths and self employment (Wilson, 1999). It grew out of rethinking a teacher's career path in the current fast paced, high mobility, and market driven society. One observation that can be made about trends and program changes is that they seem to ask for more - longer programs, more faculty/school collaboration, more time for course work, more time for teaching practice. Boote (1997) claims that part of the reason for extending teacher education programs is "to

increase the amount of time teacher candidates spend in classrooms observing and practicing teaching.” (p.13). Such a claim is strongly supported by student teachers, practicing teachers, the public and many teacher educators.

Despite the lack of a national direction for teacher education, some differences in the certification process, diversity among institutions, and changing trends in program structures and offerings, there remains a fundamental consensus around the curriculum of initial (pre-service) teacher education programs. All programs include knowledge 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).

The knowledge base for teacher education

Many academicians continue to argue that there is no firm knowledge base for teacher education, therefore the curriculum is not informed by systematically developed and well-articulated theories. Some teacher educators agree; others dispute the assertion and point to a growing body of literature that is based on research on teaching and on teacher education. There also is a strong knowledge base established by agreement among propositions made by many theorists; by agreement of legislators on what is important to be included in certification requirements; as well as by abundant data from practitioners over many years. According to Grossman (1990), supported by Wilson and Boak (1996) an initial teacher education program must include:

Subject matter knowledge - knowledge of the content and structure of a school curriculum area (e.g. History, Mathematics) so that the teacher can select what are the facts, concepts and principles of the subject that should be taught. Knowing the structure of the discipline (subject) helps the teacher understand what are productive inquiry strategies for leading learners into gaining and engaging with the subject.

General pedagogical knowledge - knowledge and beliefs about how people learn and how teachers teach; about the development of learners; about the principles and codified practices of instruction; about classroom management; and about the ends and means of education.

Pedagogical content knowledge - specific knowledge of what to teach and how to teach it Monday morning; what the learner brings to the classroom; what materials and resources are available and appropriate; and what instructional strategies to select.

Context knowledge - knowledge of the particular local context of the school and classroom; what is the wider social, cultural and political context from which learners come to school and how developments in the community affect what they do in the classroom.

In his prescription for a teacher education program, Churukian (1993) describes the minimum for a professional program in five categories of knowledge and practice. The similarities with Grossman are transparent:

Foundational studies in education - designed to apply the knowledge base of the underlying subject areas to education. The focus is on learning and human development, and on social, philosophical, historical, and economic policy studies in education.

Generic teaching knowledge and skills - include pedagogical elements common to instruction, regardless of subject field, grade level, school size, or student population.

Specialized pedagogical knowledge and skills - relate specifically to the subject or content to be taught and to the age and/or grade level of the learner; also includes those skills needed to meet the individual needs of students from different ethnic and cultural backgrounds and with exceptional children and youth, including the learning disabled and the gifted.

A series of field and clinical experiences - should be part of the professional studies component throughout the period of professional study. These experiences should be designed to integrate theory with practice, and college/university and school experiences. These experiences are to allow the teacher education candidate to master pedagogical knowledge and skills to a level which allows them to enter the classroom with confidence of knowing how to cope with planned and unplanned events.

All of these knowledge areas are identifiable in the curriculum of both concurrent and consecutive teacher education programs in Canadian universities. The same can be said of post-secondary teacher education programs worldwide (Wilson & Boak, 1996). In a concurrent program students engage in studies in all of the knowledge categories at the same time and spend increased time on pedagogical content knowledge and field/clinical experiences during the last year. A consecutive program assumes that students are adequate, if not proficient, in subject matter knowledge and context knowledge; so the program compresses studies in these knowledge areas and devotes more time on general pedagogical knowledge, specialized pedagogical content knowledge and skills and field/clinical experiences.

Congruence between the two knowledge prescriptions above, legislation governing program, requirements for certification, and studies in a selected teacher education program is illustrated in Figure 1 below. Information about program is from one province (Columns 3 and 4) and from one university (Column 5) and so may not be entirely representative of Canada. Details in the next two sections of the paper expand on the information in the grid.

Figure 1: Congruence between teacher education knowledge areas

Grossman's* Knowledge base	Churukian's Knowledge base	Government Legislation-Ontario	Standards of Practice – Ontario	Sample from a program-Brock University
subject matter knowledge	foundational studies	concentrated study of a subject, review of curriculum guidelines	professional knowledge	curriculum studies (study of subjects)
general pedagogical knowledge	generic teaching knowledge and skills	Study of a grade level, study of learning, study of teaching methods	Professional knowledge	Teaching techniques for the classroom, classroom dynamics
Pedagogical content knowledge	Specialized content knowledge and skills	Teaching methods to meet individual needs of pupils	Professional knowledge	Curriculum studies, special education
Context knowledge	Foundational studies	Acts and regulations respecting education	Leadership and community	The education enterprise, social issues series
*Grossman sees his knowledge categories as the base for practice teaching.	Field /clinical experience	Minimum of 40 days practice teaching	Teaching practice; Commitment to students and student learning	Observation days + eleven weeks of practice teaching

Layer 2 –Looking in on one Province –Ontario

In Ontario all ten Faculties of education offer consecutive one or two-year programs leading to the B.Ed degree and the Ontario teaching certificate. One university also has a two-year M. Ed. program. Several Faculties offer concurrent four or five year programs as well, from which students graduate with the bachelors' degree plus the B.Ed plus the teaching certificate. In some cases there are partnership programs with universities that do not offer education programs. For example, Brock University's Faculty of Education collaborates with Waterloo University (that does not have an education program) in offering a concurrent program that prepares teachers of French. A few Faculties collaborate with local Colleges of Applied Arts and Technology in technology programs and in early childhood education. Other target programs prepare teachers in native education, Hebrew education, enterprise education, equity education, and special education.

There is a trend to increasing the number of concurrent programs as more undergraduate departments in the university become interested in teacher education. This interest can be explained more by demographics than by any superior claim of concurrent over consecutive programs. There continues to be intense debate over this issue; which of the two program models prepares better teachers. A recent study by Li (1999) and an earlier one by Miller, McKenna and McKenna (1998) both show that there is no difference between student teachers in consecutive and concurrent programs with respect to: observable teaching behaviour, student output, professional attitude, confidence and preparedness to teach by the end of the program. The present demographics scenario in Ontario is that there is a shortage of qualified and certified teachers. The Faculties of Education are oversubscribed and even with recently expanded enrolment they are still not able to accommodate all qualified applicants. The Faculties of Arts and Sciences see a concurrent teacher education program as a means of increasing and sustaining their own enrolment by guaranteeing their students entry into the pre-service teacher education program. Current changes being made in response to the above societal and institutional factors tend to be more structural than conceptual.

Program Accreditation and Teacher certification.

In Ontario the government transferred its responsibility for teacher certification and pre-service program evaluation to the College of Teachers in 1996 when the College was chartered. The College is now empowered to make and implement regulations respecting standards and procedures for teacher certification, qualifications, the accreditation of teacher education programs, examinations and experience requirements for the granting of teaching certificates. While engaged in a comprehensive revision process (OCT, 2000), the College continues to operate within the regulations set by the Ministry of Education. These are quite specific in defining a program of professional education as one “approved by the College and conducted at a college, faculty or school of education in Ontario” (Brown, p. 675). The program must include six areas of study:

- (a) a concentrated study of one level of the school system (primary/ junior divisions, junior /intermediate divisions, intermediate/senior divisions, technological studies);
- (b) studies in education including learning and development throughout the primary, junior, intermediate and senior division;
- (c) teaching methods designed to meet the individual needs of pupils;
- (d) the acts and regulations respecting education
- (e) a review of the curriculum guidelines issued by the Minister related to all of the divisions and a study of curriculum development;
- (f) a minimum of 40 days of practical experience in schools or in other situations approved by the College for observation and practice teaching

Figure 1 above shows that the legislated areas of study (Column 3) are congruent with the knowledge base for teacher education as proposed by some theorists; also with the standards of practice from the College of Teachers (Column 4). The regulations state the minimum, so universities add to these. The university is accountable to both its Senate and to the government via the College of Teachers for its initial (pre-service) teacher education program. Since 1999, universities have used *The Standards of Practice for the Teaching Profession*, developed by the College, as a guide in reviewing and planning their pre-service teacher education programs. This

makes sense since the College uses *The Standards* when it reviews the programs for accreditation. The standards are expressed through five elements:

Commitment to Students and Student Learning - Teachers demonstrate care for and commitment to students. They are dedicated to engaging and supporting student learning. Teachers treat students equitably and with respect. They encourage students to grow as individuals and as contributing members of society. Teachers assist students to become life-long learners.

Professional Knowledge: - Professional knowledge is the foundation for teaching practice. Teachers know the curriculum, the subject matter, the student, and teaching practice. They know education-related legislation, methods for communication, and ways to teach in a changing world.

Teaching Practice: - Teachers apply professional knowledge and understanding of the student, curriculum, teaching and the changing context of the learning environment to promote student learning. They conduct ongoing assessment and evaluation of student progress. Teachers modify and refine teaching practice through continuous reflection.

Leadership and community: - Teachers are educational leaders who create and sustain learning communities in their classroom, in their schools and in their profession. They collaborate with their colleagues and other professionals, with parents, and with other members of the community to enhance school programs and student learning.

Ongoing Professional Learning: - Teachers are learners who acknowledge the interdependence of teacher learning and student learning. Teachers engage in a continuum of professional growth to improve their practice.

It has been shown in Figure 1 above that these elements are congruent with the government's legislation and selected theorists' proposed knowledge base for teacher education. The College also provides a rationale for *The Standards* in terms of the purposes that it should serve. One of the eight purposes deals with the practicum and therefore is most germane to this paper. The standards of practice will "clarify the knowledge, skills and values implicit in the practice of teaching" (1999, p.5). This clarification is provided in the detailed expectations of two elements of *The Standards*, professional knowledge and practice teaching (1999, pp. 10-12). In professional knowledge the expectations of teachers are conceptualised as knowing about; in practice teaching the expectations are conceptualised as skills or competencies and are organised in five categories: the student, curriculum, teaching and the changing context of the learning environment, assessment and evaluation of students, and reflection.

Professional knowledge of teaching practice

Teachers know ways to:

- (a) make knowledge and skills accessible to others;
- (b) shape instruction so that it is helpful to students who learn in a variety of ways;
- (c) motivate students;
- (d) establish and modify instructional settings;
- (e) manage time for instruction;
- (f) establish classroom management strategies that support learning and respect the dignity of students;

- (g) collaborate and structure interaction among students to ensure that shared learning, as well as individual learning, occurs;
- (h) assess and evaluate student learning, student approaches to learning, and the achievement of curriculum expectations; and
- (i) communicate and collaborate with parents and others involved in the education of students.

Practice Teaching

1. The student

In planning for instruction teachers:

- (a) apply knowledge of student backgrounds, experiences, and learning styles;
- (b) apply knowledge of how students develop and learn;
- (c) apply knowledge of a student's physical, social, and cognitive development;
- (d) respond to learning exceptionalities and special needs;
- (e) adapt teaching practice based on student achievement; and
- (f) collaborate with professional colleagues to benefit student learning

2. Curriculum

In planning and implementing curriculum teachers:

- (a) adapt the methods of inquiry, content knowledge, and skills required in the curriculum;
- (b) link content and skills to everyday life experiences; and
- (c) integrate a variety of teaching and learning strategies, activities and resources

3. Teaching and the changing context of the learning environment

In this area teachers:

- (a) carry out their duties as outlined in the legislation;
- (b) establish a safe and supportive learning environment;
- (c) establish and maintain standards for student behaviours;
- (d) enhance the learning environment with a variety of curriculum resources and available technologies;
- (e) organize time and space to enrich the learning environment;
- (f) develop student activities to promote social and group responsibilities;
- (g) use classroom management skills to enhance learning; and
- (g) apply teaching strategies to meet student needs.

4. Assessment and evaluation of students

In monitoring their students' growth and performance in the curriculum, teachers:

- (a) communicate clear, challenging, and achievable expectations for students;
- (b) gather data on student performance using a variety of assessment strategies;
- (c) keep a continuous and comprehensive record of group and individual achievement; and
- (d) report and provide ongoing feedback of individual achievement to students and parents.

5. Reflection

In monitoring their own professional growth and job performance, teachers:

- (a) integrate curriculum expectations into current teaching practice;
- (b) Reflect on current practice to determine if needs of individuals and groups of students are being met; and
- (c) Modify and refine teaching practice using a variety of sources and resources.

These detailed expectations now give clear guidance to all ten faculties of education in the province in working with both student teachers and associate (cooperating) teachers. At Brock they are being used currently to revise the forms that both associate teachers and faculty advisors use to evaluate the practicum.

Level 3 and Core: Looking in on the Practicum at one Institution

Everyone regards the practicum (practice teaching) as the core and climax of the initial (pre-service) teacher education program. Across the board, the intent is the same; for student teachers (teacher candidates) to acquire and practice the skills of a pedagogue under the supervision of a competent practitioner and in a real school. The ways of organizing the practicum vary considerably across programs and across institutions. Therefore a single case is used to illustrate how it is organized, supervised, evaluated and integrated into the whole preparation program. Issues are raised about each aspect of the practicum; these are not exhaustive.

Organization of the practicum

At Brock University there are eight program streams, four concurrent and four consecutive. The practicum is similarly organized in all streams. Eleven weeks of practice teaching are divided into three blocks (3weeks+4weeks+4 weeks) throughout the year, September to April. (This exceeds the legislated minimum of 40 days – See Fig. 1 above.) In all of the concurrent programs this occurs during the last year of their four or five year program and is in line with the one-year consecutive program. These three practicum blocks in schools alternate with weeks of course work in the Faculty. This organizational pattern reflects the program department's belief in gradualism, incremental learning and reflective practice. In the first block (November) the normal practice is to introduce candidates gradually to teaching responsibilities with a single lesson the first day and with additional lessons each day as the candidates progress, until they are teaching at least one-half time. In the second (January – February) and third (April) blocks candidates' teaching load is increased progressively as their supervisors "ascertain that the program and the pupils can be served successfully." (*Notes*, p.25). Normally, the candidates assume full responsibility for the classroom and their supervisor's timetable during the third and final block (April); they get the feel of what it means to be a full-time teacher with all of the duties.

A team of two faculty advisors work with a group of 25-30 students and is responsible for placing them for the practicum. They aim to place them in a different school for each block in order to expose the student teacher to different school communities and different learning environments. So three situations are required for each student. This amounts to a huge demand on faculty's time for making placements as well as commitment from many schools to participate in the

teacher education program. Part-time faculty is hired on an annual contract to support full-time faculty in the practicum part of the program.

Three issues of organization that continue to be discussed in practice and in the teacher education literature are: Is it better to have several short periods of practice teaching (as in the case of Brock) or one long session?

Which provides a more meaningful learning experience - gradualism or immediate and full immersion into the teaching act?

Should the practicum precede or come after course work?

Supervision and communication

“ He is really a good associate; I learned so much from him,” said the student teacher to his faculty counsellor. These remarks are gems because the associate teacher is key to a successful practicum . In Brock’s case there are really two requirements for being an associate teacher that are normative, although others are desirable. One is successful teaching experience of three or more years; the other is willingness to mentor a student teacher. Unfortunately both of these requirements are sometimes disregarded under the pressure of need for places. The associate teacher is a guide, a mentor, a counsellor, a supervisor and an evaluator. Some of these roles are inherently contradictory and associates operate in different roles at different times during a block and during the year. Sometimes the faculty member (counsellor) becomes an intervenor to help to clarify a role. The role of the associate is described in the *Notes for Education Partners* in terms of the following tasks:

- guiding pre-service teachers in their choice of appropriate methods, routines, materials, and equipment;
- discussing with pre-service teachers the instructional needs of their pupils, and the required steps in planning for learning experiences;
- demonstrating specific techniques when a teacher candidate’s repertoire appears deficient;
- observing teacher candidates’ professional and ethical behaviours using criteria from the standards of practice provided by the College of Teachers;
- regularly providing honest, straightforward assessments of teaching performances at regular preset intervals. Strengths should be commended. Weaknesses should be discussed, along with suggestions for improvement;
- conferencing with faculty counsellors about the progress of their assigned pre-service student;
- submitting a formal summative evaluation report to the teacher candidate and the Faculty of Education at the close of the practicum block (p. 12).

The *Notes for Education Partners* is a very important communication piece that is given to all associate teachers. It describes the teacher education program in which they are partnering with the Faculty of Education for the development of new teachers. Members of faculty (faculty counsellors) fulfil a very significant role as liaison between the school and the Faculty of Education. They interpret the program to the principals and teachers and collect information that is useful in reviewing the program. Their responsibilities include:

- communicating with associate teachers and principals while in the school;

- providing professional guidance for the student teachers and often for the school personnel who are interested in pursuing their own professional development;
- assisting the associate teachers in their supervisory tasks;
- observing, evaluating and grading each student teacher during the practicum sessions
- determining, along with the associate/s student suitability for continued practicum placement.

Supervision of the student teacher during the practicum is a shared responsibility between the Faculty of Education and the associate school. While the associate teacher has the daily responsibility, the faculty member has the overall charge and final accountability for what happens in the practicum situation. The most general, persistent and critical issue of supervision is about the role of the associate (cooperating) teacher. Is it primarily counselling, mentoring and being supportive of the student teacher or is it evaluative? Two other issues are maintaining effective communication between the two partners and rewarding the associate teacher adequately. Yet a fourth issue that is exacerbated by the current situation of teacher shortage, fed partly by early retirement, is the availability of enough qualified and willing associate teachers.

Evaluation of the Practicum

“I can’t believe he did that!” said Mary to her faculty counsellor, referring to the second block evaluation from her associate teacher.

“ I won’t sign that,” said an adamant John, disappointed in his report.

“Have you received my report yet?” asked an anxious Deirdre about her first block report three months after the block was finished.

“Can I use both of these reports?” asked Peter who is gratified by the reports he received from both of his associate teachers at the end of the third block.

“Can we all do one report for him, or do you prefer that we do separate ones?” asked Mr. Kebler who is one of three associate teachers working with Gord during the block.

All of these are typical inquiries about and reactions to the practicum evaluation process and outcome. The report that is spoken of in the above utterances is the evaluation form that associate teachers complete for their student teachers at the end of each block. This is a formal document that becomes part of the student teacher’s permanent record. It is their prized possession, especially if they have done well. It is valued highly because it carries the power of determining whether or not they get a job teaching. It affirms those who believe they can teach; challenges those who think they can but yet have to demonstrate that; infuriates those who cannot but are not ready to quit; and confirms those in doubt about their choice of teaching as a career. It is indeed a powerful document and creates varying degrees of angst in some student teachers, some associate teachers and some faculty members.

There is no standard evaluation form across institutions. The form that Brock uses reflects its conceptualization of the teaching process as found in the handbook for education partners (*Notes*, pp. 3-6) and the handbook for teacher candidates (*Notes for P/J/I*, pp.3-6). It is a checklist with 32 items grouped in four categories: professionalism, pre-active skills, interactive skills and post-active skills. There is also space for comments. At this time of writing the categories and items are being aligned with those from *The Standards of Practice*. Example of a pre-active skill is, “ maintains a complete, current, and functional plan book” For each item there is a detailed

behavioural descriptor. For example, for the pre-active skill above, the descriptor reads, “The teacher candidate’s plan book contained the following elements: lesson plans, seating plan, class schedules, and any other items and materials required by associates or counsellors” (*Notes*, p. 26).

The checklist is in the form of a three point rating scale, needs improvement, satisfactory and excellent. Throughout the block associate teachers are encouraged to use the checklist for their daily observation and comments. This then provides information for debriefing sessions with their student teachers. The emphasis is on working for growth over the period. However at the end of each block the associate teacher must give a grade. The points on the rating scale are equated to the points of the reporting scheme used throughout the program: P3 – marginally successful; P2-successful and P1-highly successful. Students who receive consistently a P3 in practice teaching in the practicum are not recommended to the College of Teachers for a teaching certificate, although they may qualify to receive the B.Ed. degree. Students who receive a failure in any of the blocks are strongly recommended to withdraw from the program.

Faculty members visit each student at least once during each practicum block and evaluate the student teacher using the same checklist. However they have the option of omitting the grade from their report. While their visit is a very important part of the supervision and evaluation processes, their observation of one lesson is an inadequate sample of the student teacher’s work on which to base a grade. But at the end of the program, all pieces of information from the faculty and the associate are considered in determining a final grade. By then the student’s file will have completed checklists and comments from at least two faculty members and three or more associates teachers for three blocks. Taken together these provide reliable evidence of the student’s performance over the eleven weeks of the practicum.

Integration

A fundamental objective of the pre-service program at Brock is to integrate the practicum with course work in pursuing the elusive goal of bridging theory and practice. Four strategies are used to achieve this objective: the counselling group, the internship centre, a generic teaching methods course (didactics) and the timetable. These are issues of both conceptualization and structure. All students in the program are divided into cohorts of 25-30 and they form a counselling group supported by two faculty members. Group membership is determined according to geography (where students live), teacher federation affiliation (public school or Roman Catholic school) and program level (elementary or secondary). Once formed the group remains together for the duration of the consecutive one-year program. When concurrent students enter during the last year of their program they are integrated into counselling groups according to the same three guidelines.

The counselling group meets twice weekly, except during practice teaching blocks, for academic work (reflect on course work, prepare for and debrief microteaching experiences in the internship centre, prepare for and debrief from practice teaching experiences), management functions (organize practicum placements, advise on program) and some social activities. Faculty counsellors have the responsibility for monitoring their students’ progress throughout the program. The same counsellors are responsible for an internship program of at least eight days in an internship centre. The centre is located in a school where school staff, teacher candidates and

faculty members work collaboratively in developing a program that benefits everyone. The main activity is microteaching that is done in small groups of teacher candidates and pupils. Other activities include class observation, working with pupils individually and in small groups, and supporting the school staff and pupils in a variety of ways. The purpose of the internship centre activity is to gradually introduce teacher candidates to the reality of teaching in an authentic site and thereby prepare them for the practicum. Later in the year, the days in the internship centre are replaced by observation days in the school where the candidates will do the second and third blocks of the practicum.

Microteaching activities are driven by a generic teaching methods course (Teaching Techniques for the Classroom) which all students take, as well as by students' need for practice. Each week students (individually or in pairs) prepare and microteach a mini lesson on a given topic from the generic course, e.g. demonstrating an interactive instructional strategy. The critique of this exercise is done systematically by the group that often includes staff members of the school. The faculty counsellor guides the process using one or more frameworks; the one most commonly used is that of reflective practice.

The program timetable is conceived of as a cycle of inter-related activities rather than as a sequence of courses. Course work is connected through discussion and demonstration in the counselling group at the Faculty or in the internship centre at the school; issues from these discussions are relayed back to course instructors during classes. The key person in this cycle of instruction, discussion, practice, reflection, instruction is the faculty counsellor. Alternating practicum and course sessions throughout the year follows the same principle of cycling so that interplay of the two types of experiences makes it more likely that students will see connections between theory and practice. Reflection exercises in the counselling group demonstrate how theory and practice informs each other.

Some persistent issues

Connecting theory and practice continues to be a challenge in teacher education. What is very clear to teacher educators remain ambiguous, obscure, vague and unnecessary to teacher candidates whose mind set is for strategies and more strategies. "Tell me, show me how to do..." they ask, with emphasis on how to do. Understandably, this indicates a deeply felt need for competence and confidence to do a very complex job, that of teaching. This situation exerts tremendous pressure on program planners to balance a wish to satisfy students' needs with the desire to prepare teachers who are more than technicians. The pressure to achieve a defensible balance is intensified in a consecutive one-year post-baccalaureate program. No wonder then that Boote (1997) identified the trend in teacher education to longer programs and more time in the field.

In addition to the issues mentioned above in the sections, Organization, Supervision and Evaluation, Bradley (1995), MacDonald and colleagues (1995), and Duquette and Cook (1999) have named some others which fit into one or more of the three categories. The issues include: substandard qualification of associate teachers, inconsistencies in practicum experiences, inconsistent evaluation, variation in expectations among associate teachers, dissonance in

communication between faculties of education and practice teaching schools, student teachers' feeling of vulnerability in an unequal power relationship that the practicum represents, and negative influence of the socialization process in schools.

Despite these persistent issues, there is evidence that both associate teachers and student teachers value the practicum highly. MacDonald and colleagues (1995) reported that associate teachers indicated they appreciated having student teachers because they benefitted from their energy and positive attitude. They learned new teaching methods and ideas; and they were challenged to reflect and question and so felt that they grew personally and professionally during a practicum period. Preservice candidates told Duquette and Cook (1999) that during the practicum they learned from "personal reflections, mentor teachers, other student teachers, other [experienced] teachers and university faculty [who were involved in the practicum setting]" (p. 201). What did they learn? The candidates believed that they learned about curriculum planning and evaluation, classroom discipline and management, pupils and pupil-teacher relationships and the profession of teaching. They supported the belief that many hold, that the practicum is the central and most valuable component of teacher education.

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