

One Teacher Candidate's Experience in a Restructured Teacher Education Program

By Andrew Cotton

Andrew Cotton was a teacher education student and is now a graduate student studying with the Faculty of Education, Queen's University, Kingston, Ontario, Canada. Rena Upitis, dean of the Faculty of Education, provided the encouragement for this paper and the opportunity to present an earlier version to the annual conference of the Canadian Society for the Study of Education, St. John's, Newfoundland, June 1997.

As I peered at the children through the window of Room 4 at Lakeside Public School in early September, I became immediately conscious of how the window symbolized the uniqueness of my position as a teacher candidate at Queen's University. Although a window separates people, it does not close us off from one another, but rather invites us to witness and share in diverse experiences. Standing on the other side of the classroom window, I was separate from the students, but the clear panes allowed me to identify myself with them. As a teacher candidate, I too was a student—a student of teaching. Yet, here on the first day, from all external appearances, I would be introduced and perceived as a fellow teacher by the students and staff. As 9:00 a.m. inched closer, questions that had always been with me now seemed louder, more colourful, more urgent. "Will I be able to respond to the needs of these children?" "Have my own life lessons and experiences been of enough value to facilitate my teaching skills?" "Are my strengths great enough to

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overshadow my insecurities?" Most importantly, "Will I be able to transform my experiences in the restructured Bachelor of Education program into tools for great teaching?"¹

As a student in the concurrent teacher education program at Queen's University, I realized early in my undergraduate years that I gained more knowledge about successful classroom teaching by practicing teaching in a classroom than I did sitting in one as a student. This personal longing and enthusiasm for change within teacher education seemed to be answered for me with the call for participants for the pilot of the restructured B.Ed. program. Many aspects of the new program appealed to me. The concept of belonging to an associate school, rather than being assigned to individual associate teachers, responded to issues I had developed after two- or three-week experiences of student teaching spread over my four years in the concurrent program. Being embraced by an entire school staff, and benefiting from their cumulative years of knowledge and experience, presented greater opportunities for me to learn by example and to grow as a teacher.

Such experience included the chance to witness the process by which an entire staff prepares for the beginning of the new school year. To share in the procedures that bring a school together, academically and socially, I regarded as a tremendous advantage to teacher candidates who have rarely seen this aspect of teaching before. As well, the opportunity to observe a seasoned teacher welcome students to his or her class, to explain classroom routines, and to establish the community agreements which foster positive student behavior, I decided was an experience that I could not afford to miss.

The August orientation was an intensive week of sessions created to prepare us not only for this first day in the school but for the entire fall practicum. Throughout that week, the field-based courses were explained in both their design and purpose. The Critical Issues course (CRIT 100) and the Research, Theory and Professional Practice course (PROF 190) became essential tools in aiding me to evaluate my teaching practice. Designed to complement the practicum experience, these courses became a framework which not only provided a structure for my learning at the school, but encouraged me and my fellow teacher candidates to focus on key issues. Instead of being in a University classroom, dreaming up hypothetical situations, I was living and breathing the assignments during the fall practicum.

Being in the school on the first day of the academic year and studying its equity and inclusion policies and practices was not simply an assignment, but was a pertinent exercise to me. I had to become versed in the IPRC (Ontario's procedures for identifying learners with special needs) and IEP processes, as I needed to know the best methods to accommodate the exceptional learners in my classroom. The field-based assignments, therefore, possessed a validity and an honesty that assignments in the previous B.Ed. program did not have. Guided by these assignments, I began to examine my own teaching practice.

Issues of inclusion, which had once seemed very clear in my mind, were no

longer as defined. In my Grade 2 classroom, which encompassed a variety of learners with different abilities, I soon realized that striving to maintain an inclusive classroom led to issues of balance within the class. Increasingly, the daily job of sufficiently attending to each individual need was becoming an elusive goal for me. During such moments, I realized the disjunction between my theory and my practice. While I have always advocated inclusive practices, it was not until my extended practicum that I recognized some of my beliefs lacked validity since they had never been put into practice. Here, in this Grade 2 classroom, my confrontation with this discrepancy was both strangely dislocating and rewarding. Though I gained a greater sense of awareness about myself as a developing teacher, I soon realized that this process was not without the struggle of critical introspection.

Reflecting daily upon my teaching practice through journal-keeping proved to be extremely helpful in aiding me to isolate the nature and origins of my concerns. Although finding quiet moments in a hectic day is difficult, the physical act of writing out my thoughts enabled me to diagnose the areas of my concern. My journal also proved useful in aiding me to chart my own professional development. By using my journal as a medium not only for documenting thoughts and experiences, but also for determining areas that need to be improved upon, I was able to formulate questions about my practice for action research.

Looking back upon my journal, I realized I was repeatedly concerned about my inability to respond to the needs one of particular Grade 2 student. I questioned whether or not my method of classroom management was too dogmatic. Was my insistence upon adhering to ultimately unimportant class rules perpetuating his disobedient behavior? Action research became a way for me not only to question my existing teaching practices, but also to question my motivations so as to improve the learning of my students.

However, such reflection did not occur in isolation; discussions with my fellow teacher candidates, with faculty liaison, and with associate teachers were powerful mediums for exploring issues and concerns. While the nature of the field-based courses and assignments promoted group discussion with my fellow teacher candidates, the very design of the restructured B.Ed. program facilitated communication with peers. Having first met during the August orientation, all teacher candidates at Lakeside Public School (a fictitious name) bonded through mutual experience. Together we experienced the anxiety of the first day of school, the anticipation of meeting our associates and our students, as well as the growing pains associated with developing as an educator.

With each individual teacher candidate bringing a wealth of experience and the excitement of a new perspective, it is not surprising that we turned to one another for support, feedback, and sharing. I remember vividly one particular incident where I was forced to physically separate two battling students. Although I managed to separate the two students, I later asked my fellow teacher candidates for suggestions of alternative actions I could have taken. Further reflection occurred in

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conjunction with my faculty liaison.

As the link between the Faculty of Education and the associate school, the faculty liaison played an integral role in facilitating a positive learning experience for me. Her willingness to provide both written and verbal feedback on my lessons was essential in giving me the confidence to hone my teaching skills. Ensuring constant contact with the faculty liaison, through phone calls or electronic mail, was also central to promoting a positive practicum experience. Since I was at the school for four months, it was important for me to realize that I was not simply left to my own devices, but rather could depend upon my faculty liaison to assist me if ever any conflict should arise.

This reaching out and sharing of ideas occurred to the greatest extent with my associate teachers. My first associate, a Grade 2 teacher, was an incredibly giving educator. Her willingness to share both her classroom and insights with me was central to fostering a positive relationship with me. On the first day of school, she introduced me to the class as a fellow teacher, not simply a student teacher. What music to my ears! After years of feeling like a guest in another's classroom, the expectation had already been established that I was to be treated with the same respect as a full teacher, and that I too had to fulfill these responsibilities.

For the first few days, I observed my associate introduce routines, procedures, and expectations within the classroom. I remained a silent observer, studying the students and their interactions with each other and the teacher. As I eavesdropped on their conversations, I made note of subjects that were of interest to them and anticipated using this information at a future date. I similarly noted my associate's actions, writing down her classroom management techniques which have withstood years of teaching. The following week I began to take on increased responsibility, and by the third week I was responsible for teaching the whole class for the entire morning, Monday through Friday. This schedule would rotate, with my teaching times alternating each week between mornings and afternoons.

After years of guiding preservice teachers, my first associate expressed her belief that teacher candidates can learn about teaching only by teaching, not through simply observing it. In many ways, her philosophies toward teacher education coincide with those of the restructured B.Ed. program. From the beginning, I was gaining knowledge through practical firsthand experience. Whereas the early months of the previous B.Ed. program would have focused on planning, preparing, and gathering resources, the extended fall practicum built upon these discrete elements, exposing teacher candidates to more comprehensive, holistic experiences. Practice, and more practice, became an integral factor in giving me confidence in my abilities.

With each new day presenting a different set of experiences, I learned how students will magically take a lesson in a direction you had not intended. I was improving in my ability to "read" a class, becoming increasingly aware that a class has its own rhythms, and that each child contributes his or her own special dynamic,

influencing the tone of that day by his or her presence or absence. As well, I was continually learning how to adapt my lessons to suit the varied needs within the classroom. Ensuring that all students experience success in the classroom has been both the greatest challenge and greatest reward of the fall practicum. Designing lessons, assignments, and group work in such a way as to foster and build student success has been a profound learning experience for me.

The extended practicum provides teacher candidates with great opportunities to explore these issues in detail. My experience when I moved to a Grade 4/5 class during the latter part of the fall term provided an example of this. In this class of 34 students, Paul (not his real name) repeatedly challenged my authority through acts of disobedience toward myself and others. Before this experience, I believed that educators should and could treat all students equally. My experience with Paul, however, forced me to reconsider and re-evaluate this very perception. From the moment I arrived at the class, he was disrespectful; if I asked for quiet, he would be the first to continue talking. If I requested that the class line up at the door, Paul would be sure to strike the piano keys in the process.

The class rules, as established by the teacher, explicitly stated that any rudeness to teachers or other students resulted in a two day in-school suspension to another classroom. Although Paul's repeatedly rude behavior justified such repercussions, I felt that this method of behavior modification would be less than successful. How could he work on his social skills, and improve upon his behavior with me, if he was in another room for two days?

This hesitancy to send Paul away initiated a crisis of conscience and conduct within me. Clearly, I was making exceptions for Paul, and this did not seem to me to be equal treatment. Even though no students in the class indicated they were aware of Paul's seemingly special treatment, I nevertheless felt I was not fulfilling my duty to treat all students equally. Although I spoke with him many times about his actions and their hurtful impact upon others, I now recognize that had I sent Paul to the in-school suspension room immediately after his first "offence," perhaps his undesirable conduct would have ceased.

Though my issues with Paul remained unresolved at the end of my placement, I nevertheless felt confident knowing that I acted in ways which I believed were in his best interest. From this experience, I have confirmed my belief that a class is a group of individuals, not just a class of students. Although Paul may never realize the motivations for my behavior, such an experience has enabled me to arrive at the philosophy of "fairness, not sameness of process" among students. Having the time to arrive at such realizations is the defining characteristic of the extended practicum. In cultivating any skill, teacher candidates benefit from the increased time to improve classroom management techniques and refine lesson and unit preparation, as well as cultivate listening skills and patience. However, I am nevertheless conscious of the double-edged nature of the extended practicum. While the fall practicum provides a wonderful opportunity for the teacher candidate to learn from

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an associate teacher's years of experience, there similarly exists the opportunity to embrace inappropriate teaching techniques and attitudes.

From the outset of the pilot program, one particular question remained with me: "How do I avoid being co-opted into the existing teaching system?" Without formal teacher education preceding my practicum, I wondered if the absence of theory would be an invitation to adopt poor teaching habits. Like many teacher candidates, I had fears of losing control in the classroom. In struggling to contain this fear, it might have been easy to embrace techniques modeled before me. By seeking to avoid costly mistakes that could impede a child's learning, I welcomed the feedback and advice offered by my associate teachers. Even though I was aware of the co-opting issue from the beginning of the school year, I think these thoughts were tempered by the realization that I had a lot of learning to do.

It became apparent to me midway through the fall practicum that I had to balance my need to learn from my associate teachers with my expectations of myself as a teacher. Looking back, I am unaware of cultivating any specific strategies to avoid adopting poor teaching practices. Rather, like many other teacher candidates, I developed a critical perspective from my earlier and short-term experiences of student teaching and from volunteering and brought diverse experiences to my teaching placements. I used this critical perspective during my teaching in the fall. This stepping back from the situation, combined with the field-based course readings and assignments and the creation of a safe learning environment for me by my associate teachers enabled me to avoid, I believe, being co-opted to the status quo.

In many ways, my fears about co-option, combined with my entire fall practicum experiences, were about finding my own voice as a teacher. Though I made efforts to ensure that I did not lose my own voice in the classroom, I was equally concerned that the voices of all students were heard. While the field-based courses and assignments encouraged critical examination of my own teaching practice so as to ensure all students were receiving equitable treatment, my Program Focus course, "Teaching Exceptional Children," provided me with further opportunities to learn about inclusive classroom practices.

Based on a workshop format, the Program Focus course became a vehicle for teacher candidates not only to explore issues of exceptionality they found important and interesting, but for them to present this information to the entire class. Strategies for teaching exceptional children, as well as collaborative and global education practices, became even more pertinent through the February alternative teaching placement. My experience in a classroom specifically for students with severe multiple disabilities at an inner-city school was both troublesome and oddly rewarding.

While it was rewarding to work with students with severe disabilities, my personal philosophies toward teaching exceptional learners came into conflict with my associate teacher's own teaching practice. As a teaching assistant for this three-

week practicum, my role was to provide support for one student who worked most days within a mainstream classroom. Yet by the end of the first week, it became apparent that our interpretations of support differed. It became increasingly difficult to follow through with her expectation for me to follow the child's every move. While this student required assistance for academic success, he was more than capable of accomplishing other tasks on his own. The purpose of education is to equip students with skills to make them as independent and self-reliant as possible, and I viewed this constant hovering over the student as impeding this outcome. While the information I learned from the Program Focus course enabled me to arrive at this perspective, the February placement, ironically, solidified this outlook. Though our differences were never resolved, I nevertheless learned much from this placement. Not only did I gain more experience in working with someone who shares a different attitude, but more importantly, I continued to find my own voice—and use it!

This process of cultivating a greater sense of self was nevertheless accompanied by uncertainty about the nature of the education system in Ontario and my place within it. While I felt I had made great strides toward improving myself, I increasingly developed more questions about the pedagogical underpinnings of curriculum taught in schools. Though we had tackled the practical issues during the fall, the larger philosophical questions of teaching had not yet been resolved.

Questions such as “Why are we teaching one subject over another?” “What should be the motivations for evaluation?” and “How can I know that my students are learning?” became pressing concerns with me. While I anticipated that these issues were to be addressed on our return to the Faculty of Education in the Winter Term, it became apparent that faculty members had not fully anticipated the extent to which the fall practicum experiences would necessitate considerable renovation of the curriculum courses. Together, faculty members and teacher candidates soon realized that they could not simply re-position the curriculum and instruction (methods) courses from the previous B.Ed. program into the restructured one.

Unlike the previous program, where all teacher candidates were working principally from the same hypothetical outlook, the rich and diverse experiences of the fall practicum had irrevocably impinged upon the curriculum and instruction courses in their perspective and design. Many of us left our fall practicum experiences with diverse questions in mind. In my particular case, I had specific scenarios and students in mind as I studied the materials presented in the curriculum and instruction courses. While the content of these courses was still significant, it became increasingly important for the courses to respond to these questions which had been formulated during the practicum experiences.

The restructured program is based on the premise of learning from experience, and it became important for teacher candidates in the pilot program to ensure that the curriculum courses were modified to both complement and respect the significance of these experiences. The Faculty of Education's willingness to invite

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feedback and respond to our concerns facilitated the immediate restructuring of the Winter Term schedule. As teacher candidates in the pilot program, we had been introduced to this emphasis on dialogue and discussion since the on-campus weeks in October. The many debriefing sessions, open meetings, and discussions with professors and administration have been a rare privilege for me. The opportunity to shape and define the Bachelor of Education program at Queen's has been an empowering process for many teacher candidates in the pilot program. To witness our commitment to education mirrored at the Faculty of Education has been an experience I rejoice in.

I completed my May practicum in Lakeside School too. It was extraordinary to share experiences again with the students I met that first week in September. Not only had they grown physically, but they had made great strides scholastically. To see how much they had achieved in a year, and to witness the processes by which a teacher begins to draw the academic year to a close, is an experience that further enriched me. In many ways, I regard this Grade 2 class as my first class. I feel a kinship with them, knowing that I, too, join them in the learning process. In this regard, the practicum experiences have been enormously successful. Not only did I have opportunities to learn from different associate teachers, but the teaching experiences have enabled me to grow as a developing teacher. Many of the philosophies I had upon entering the restructured program have been refined or altered due to the teaching experiences. The curriculum and field-based courses, similarly, introduced me to exciting new techniques, materials, and perspectives that will give greater depth and breadth to my learning and my teaching.

While my participation in the restructured B.Ed. program facilitated the development of my own teaching philosophy, the year marked a significant transition in my life. In many ways, it was not simply my last year as a student, but rather my first year as a developing professional.

Note

1. Adapted from "Room to Grow" (Cotton, 1997, p. 63).

Reference

- Cotton, A. (1997). Room to grow. In D. Featherstone, H. Munby, & T. Russell, (Eds.) *Finding a voice while learning to teach* (pp. 63-65). London, UK: Falmer Press.

Exit Evaluation of the Pilot Project for a Restructured Preservice Teacher Education Program

**By LeRoy E. Whitehead, Nancy L. Hutchinson,
Hugh Munby, Cinde Lock, & Andrea K. Martin**

Related articles in this issue of *Teacher Education Quarterly* have described how a preservice teacher education program has been completely redesigned and pilot tested. This article summarizes findings about the pilot program that emerged from an exit evaluation survey of teacher candidates. It also documents some insights relating to the evaluation of teacher education programs which were

developed by the researchers during the process of gathering and analyzing the evaluation data.

*LeRoy E. Whitehead,
Nancy L. Hutchinson,
Hugh Munby, Cinde
Lock, and Andrea K.
Martin are professors
with the Faculty of
Education, Queen's
University, Kingston,
Ontario, Canada.*

Gary R. Galluzzo and J.R. Craig (1990) argued that effective program evaluation of a teacher education program is best conceptualized as a collection of loosely coupled studies conducted by a variety of faculty members, all designed to gain clearer understanding of contexts, inputs, processes, and outcomes of teacher education. The exit evaluation reported here was one part of such a collection of loosely coupled studies. The collection also included

two sets of focus groups with teacher candidates: one midway through the field-based term, and one at its conclusion. The outcomes of these interviews are reported elsewhere in this issue. In addition, there were focus groups with administrators and teachers of the pilot associate schools after completion of the field-based term, and individual interviews with a sample of the pilot teacher candidates at about the same time as this exit survey was conducted. While the general findings of the latter two studies are known, and are consistent with findings reported here, detailed analysis of the transcripts is still in process at time of this writing.

Some researchers in teacher education have lamented that in order to change teacher education what is needed is not tinkering, but completely redesigned structural arrangements (Clift, Veal, Johnson, & Holland, 1992; Zeichner, 1992). Because the new program represented such a complete restructuring, the researchers felt that in the exit evaluation it was necessary to ask "high risk" questions, thus offering teacher candidates an opportunity to render a clear and unequivocal summary judgment regarding their experiences in the pilot.

Method

Teacher candidates who were members of the 1996-1997 pilot class for the restructured preservice teacher education program of the Faculty of Education, Queen's University, were invited to participate in an exit evaluation of the pilot program. Of the total of 62 members of the pilot class, 53 (85 percent) responded, of which 27 were elementary teacher candidates and 26 were secondary teacher candidates.

The evaluation instrument was a questionnaire which presented 19 statements, to each of which the teacher candidates were invited to respond by indicating either "yes," "not sure," or "no." In addition to this standard response set, the questionnaire provided a place for written comments next to each item. An additional six items called for written responses without a standard response set being provided.

The questionnaire method was chosen because representatives of the teacher candidates suggested that the group interview format had already been used too much, and that the candidates would prefer another method for this occasion. This also helped to satisfy the researchers' desire to test for agreement of results using a variety of data gathering modes.

The questionnaire was administered in selected classes during the last week of formal classes in April 1997 before candidates left for the May practicum. The classes chosen were ones in which only pilot candidates were registered. (Two candidates were missed by this method, and they were notified by electronic mail how to obtain a copy of the questionnaire, and where to submit it if they wished to participate. One of the two did participate.) Responses were anonymous and the questionnaire forms were not coded in any way, except for a notation that they came from either an elementary class section or a secondary class section.

General Satisfaction

One group of questionnaire items was intended to elicit information about the respondents' feelings of general satisfaction toward the pilot program. This set of items provides good examples of what the researchers consider to be "high risk" questions. The summary of responses to these items is as follows:

1. I think Queen's Faculty of Education should retain the new program.
Yes: 49 (92%) Not Sure: 3 (6%) No: 1 (2%)
5. I would encourage others to enroll in this new B.Ed. program.
Yes: 46 (87%) Not Sure: 6 (11%) No: 1 (2%)
11. Knowing what I know now, I wish I had enrolled in the old program.
Yes: 0 (0%) Not Sure: 1 (2%) No: 51 (96%) No Response: 1 (2%)

The responses indicate a high level of general satisfaction with the pilot program, though the respondents tempered their approval with written comments encouraging program organizers to continue working to refine the program. For example, many of those who said that they would encourage others to enroll said they would do so when the "bugs" are worked out. Some of those who said they would not encourage others to enroll, or who were not sure, indicated that their reticence was temporary—until the "bugs" were worked out. "Field-based is the way to go! No going back!"

Development of Professional Attitudes and Competencies

A second group of items was intended to elicit the respondents' views about whether or not the new program helped them develop professional attitudes and competencies. The summary of responses to these items is as follows:

2. I think the extended practicum helped me to become the kind of teacher I want to be.
Yes: 48 (91%) Not Sure: 4 (8%) No: 1 (2%)
4. I feel confident in my abilities to begin a career in teaching.
Yes: 40 (75%) Not Sure: 11 (21%) No: 2 (4%)
6. I feel the new program enabled me to learn to teach from experience.
Yes: 50 (94%) Not Sure: 3 (6%) No: 0 (0%)
7. The new program supported and guided me in learning to reflect on my teaching.
Yes: 44 (83%) Not Sure: 6 (11%) No: 1 (2%) No Answer: 2 (4%)
8. The new program helped me to retain a critical stance and to question my own assumptions as an educator.
Yes: 41 (77%) Not Sure: 9 (17%) No: 3 (6%)
9. The new program encouraged me to work with and learn from my colleagues.
Yes: 49 (92%) Not Sure: 2 (4%) No: 2 (4%)

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10. The new program allowed me to reach some of my own professional goals.
Yes: 49 (92%) Not Sure: 3 (6%) No: 1 (2%)

The high percentage of “yes” responses to each of these items suggests that the respondents do see themselves as having developed professional skills and competencies during the pilot year experience. They feel that the extended practicum did help them become “the kind of teacher I want to be,” and that they were able to learn from experience, to work with and learn from colleagues, and to reach personal professional goals. Slightly smaller majorities also agreed that the new program helped them learn to reflect on their teaching, to retain a critical stance, and to question personal assumptions as educators. Three-fourths expressed confidence in their abilities to begin a career in teaching.

Two important themes ran through the written comments for these items. One was the value of the experiential nature of the program. Specifically, respondents valued having a group of candidates in each school, having a long time with one class, and having time for observation and reflection. “Lots of time to see reality.” “It helped me gain more confidence.” “...although at times I felt I wanted to learn from profs, not just my peers.”

The other main theme was a desire not to be required to learn from experience, from peers, and from associate teachers alone. There was a frequently expressed desire for experiential learning to be coupled with more substantive “theoretical” input from faculty members, especially in the areas of curriculum planning, classroom management, discipline, and student assessment. A heavy dose of journal writing was not everyone’s cup of tea! “I do not feel I have enough theory behind me.” “... we need to learn more than simply reflect on our teaching.”

Satisfaction with Specific Aspects of the Program

A third group of items was intended to bring out respondents’ views about specific aspects of the program, especially the major, unique aspects such as the extended fall practicum, the field-based courses, and the Program Focus courses with their associated three-week alternate practicum. This group of items also attempted to look at the relationship between the field-based Fall Term, and the mainly on-campus winter term.

The two field-based courses are referred to here as PROF and CRIT. PROF is short for “Research, Theory and Professional Practice,” which emphasizes reflection, learning from one’s own practice, and action research. CRIT is short for “Critical Issues in Education,” which deals with legal issues, equity issues, and inclusion issues. The Program Focus courses are electives, and are intended to be experiential or “hands-on” as much as possible. The Educational Studies courses are electives which are typically more similar to traditional foundations courses, and are taken during the winter term.

The summary of responses to these items is as follows:

2. I think the extended practicum helped me to become the kind of teacher I want to be.
Yes: 48 (91%) Not Sure: 4 (8%) No: 1 (2%)
3. The February practicum provided me with valuable experiences.
Yes: 50 (94%) Not Sure: 2 (4%) No: 1 (2%)
12. The fall practicum helped me to formulate questions for the winter term.
Yes: 48 (91%) Not Sure: 4 (8%) No: 0 (0%) No Answer: 1 (2%)
13. The courses in the WINTER TERM helped me to address some of my questions about becoming a teacher.
Yes: 28 (53%) Not Sure: 17 (32%) No: 8 (15%)
14. The PROF course helped me to address some of my questions about becoming a teacher.
Yes: 18 (34%) Not Sure: 16 (30%) No: 17 (32%) No Answer: 2 (4%)
15. The CRIT course helped me to address some of my questions about becoming a teacher.
Yes: 32 (60%) Not Sure: 14 (26%) No: 5 (9%) No Answer: 2 (4%)
16. The CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTION course helped me to address some of my questions about becoming a teacher.
Yes: 41 (77%) Not Sure: 9 (17%) No: 3 (6%)
17. The ED. STUDIES course helped me to address some of my questions about becoming a teacher.
Yes: 20 (38%) Not Sure: 8 (15%) No: 8 (15%) No Answer: 17 (32%)
Note that the high number of "not sure," "no," and "no answer" responses is at least in part due to the fact that many concurrent pilot candidates had already completed their Educational Studies course prior to final year. If only those answering are taken into account, the percentages would be as follows:
Yes: 20 (56%) Not Sure: 8 (22%) No: 8 (22%)
18. The PROGRAM FOCUS course helped me to address some of my questions about becoming a teacher.
Yes: 46 (87%) Not Sure: 5 (9%) No: 1 (2%) No Answer: 1 (2%)
19. The WORKSHOPS helped me to address some of my questions about becoming a teacher.
Yes: 52 (98%) Not Sure: 0 (0%) No: 1 (2%)

The Fall and Winter Practica

The extended fall practicum and the winter alternate practicum associated with the Program Focus course both received very high approval ratings from the respondents. The questionnaire was administered before candidates left for the spring practicum, so obtaining a rating for the spring practicum was not possible. A somewhat surprising finding from the written comments is that many respondents appeared to value the winter term alternate practicum as much as or even more than the fall extended practicum. "Alternative settings are what made this program for me." Respondents urged maintaining flexibility in the winter practicum.

Relationship of Fall and Winter Terms

One of the assumptions underlying the design of the new program was that the extended practicum in the Fall Term would allow candidates to formulate questions which would then be pursued and answered during the winter term on-campus courses. The responses to items 12 and 13 show that the pilot program enjoyed only mixed success in this regard. Both the numerical data (above) and the written comments indicate that a high percentage of respondents did formulate questions during the fall practicum. However, only about half felt that the Winter Term courses helped them to address their questions about becoming a teacher. The comments offered some advice about where the problem might be located, and how it might be remedied; unfortunately, much of the advice was conflicting. Some respondents commented that even though some or many of their questions were answered, they still had many more unanswered questions, though this may not be a bad thing. "All of the experiences help answer some questions, but there are some lacking areas. However I feel for me, these will only be answered through more practical teaching."

Courses and Workshops

The remaining items in this group centred on whether or not respondents felt that specific courses or types of courses, and the workshop periods, helped them address their questions about becoming a teacher. In terms of this approach, it is clear that the workshops received the most positive response, followed by the Program Focus courses, curriculum and instruction courses, and the field-based course referred to as CRIT. The Educational Studies courses are next in the rank ordering; however, because of the high proportion of respondents who may have taken one or more foundations courses under another labelling system during their early concurrent years, the data for this category of courses may be somewhat contaminated. The PROF course received the lowest ranking.

In general, the written comments mirrored the statistical data. No significant themes emerged regarding workshops, Program Focus courses, or curriculum and instruction courses. There were requests for more workshops and access to the content of other Program Focus courses. The main theme that emerged with regard to the two field-based courses was that the PROF course needed significant reworking. The action research part of PROF was generally well received, even by many who were otherwise critical, and many felt that reflection, including journal-keeping, while useful, had received too much emphasis. However, the course seemed to be isolated from classroom practice, and did not provide for differences between elementary and secondary schools. In general, the number of assignments in CRIT and PROF made the Fall Term workload too heavy. Comments related to Educational Studies courses tended to focus on pluses or minuses of specific courses, and no clear themes emerged. "I received the majority of my knowledge

from [workshops] rather than from my actual classes. What does this say?" "[The workshops] reaffirmed my belief that I was in the right career for me."

Final Written Comments

In addition to the 19 items which provided response sets, the questionnaire invited written responses to six open-ended questions. In general responses to these six questions did not enter new territory, but rather tended to amplify comments already given.

1. *Of everything you have learned this year, what is the most important?* The main themes which emerged here were the importance of experience, the need to be proactive in professional development, and the respondents' growing realization of their ability to function and develop as reflective, questioning practitioners. "To stand back, think about what I am teaching, ask questions and be responsible for my own professional growth." "That I *do* have what it takes to be a teacher..., but that it will be hard work for me the first 30 years!"

2. *Of everything that makes up the new B.Ed. Program, what is most important to keep as it is?* The clear, collective response here was the fall and winter practica, including the first day of school start and the placement of groups of candidates at each school. "Being in class day one, and staying there for a long time."

3. *Of everything that makes up the new B.Ed. program, what is most important to change?* The main themes that emerged in the comments, expressed as needs were: (a) the need for a better definition of roles for candidates, associates, and faculty liaison personnel; (b) the need for better communication between the faculty and associate schools; (c) the need for improvements in the two field-based courses, especially PROF; and (d) the need for changes in the curriculum and instruction courses, including more integration of courses, new materials, and approaches better suited to the new program. "Define roles of liaisons, teacher candidates clearly—with flexibility as well." "Curriculum classes—their content (don't give us the same stuff you've been teaching for ten years—break the mould)."

4. *What is the most important addition that needs to be made to this new B.Ed. program?* The only real theme that appeared here related to a desire for more formal instruction in such "practical" areas as curriculum development, year/ unit/ lesson planning, teaching methods and classroom management. "We needed more resources from curriculum pros—more guidance and more ideas on how to actually teach our [specialty subjects]."

5. *What, in this new B.Ed. program, has helped you most in your professional development as a teacher?* The practica and learning from experience, reflecting on practicum experiences, and continual professional development were clearly at the center of the respondents' thoughts when commenting on this question. "Again, for

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me, it was the long, extended placement that helped me grow and develop as a teacher."

6. What other single comment would you like to make about the pilot program?

The major theme here was appreciation for the program. "I learned more this year than any other in my life." "It was exactly how I wanted and expected my year to be." "I would not change this experience for another; I'd do this program again. We saw the best and at times the worst in everyone." "I have thoroughly enjoyed my year here and am proud to be part of the pilot alumni." "I have no regrets." "I feel glad I was part of it. I appreciate the incredible efforts made by the faculty."

Discussion

The questionnaire results show that the overall reaction of the teacher candidates in the pilot program was very positive, though they did identify a number of areas where changes were needed. Several adjustments were made to the program prior to its general introduction in the fall of 1997. As examples, the schedule for the introductory week in late August was changed to make it a little less onerous for the teacher candidates, and the Fall Term handbook for teacher candidates and associate schools was simplified and clarified. For readers not directly associated with this particular preservice teacher education program, however, perhaps the most important findings arise from the patterns found in the responses. These findings may help to inform both the planning and the evaluation of changes in other preservice teacher education programs.

The respondents valued highly those aspects of the program which were perceived by them as being directly connected with the field and as having immediate relevance for practice: the extended fall practicum with its start on the first day of school, and the alternate practicum. They also valued highly those aspects of the program that allowed a measure of control over their own professional development: the elective Program Focus courses with their associated alternate practica, and the workshops. The other category of elective courses, Educational Studies, did not fare well. This could be because the data were contaminated, as noted above, or because these courses are more traditional in their approach. Many, if not most of the respondents showed a pattern of responses that indicated both eagerness and ability to take responsibility for their continuing professional development.

The field-based PROF course, and to a lesser degree the CRIT course, were not as well received as might have been expected. The lower approval rating of these courses, however, can be seen as part of a pattern of responses indicating respondents' strong desire for a high degree of integration between field and faculty, in terms of organizational arrangements (such as better defined roles and communication between faculty and associate schools) and in terms of connecting "practical" or field-based learning with "theoretical" or campus-based learning. Because of certain organizational arrangements, the on-campus portions of PROF appeared

particularly disconnected from the field-based portion during the pilot. The curriculum methods courses were perceived as being more closely connected to the field experience than were the Educational Studies courses. But the methods courses were conducted entirely on-campus with the majority of the class hours occurring after the conclusion of the extended practicum, and the Educational Studies courses were also conducted on-campus with all class hours occurring after the extended practicum. This response pattern is also apparent in the respondents' lukewarm approval of the degree to which winter term courses helped them to address questions that they formulated during the Fall Term.

Another response pattern goes beyond the boundaries of the exit evaluation and encompasses the results of the two sets of focus groups reported elsewhere in this issue. The most negative responses to the redesigned program came while the teacher candidates were in the early and middle stages of the program year. This may be partly because at that time the researchers were specifically looking for problem areas that needed correction, and partly because the teacher candidates did not yet understand how all of the program pieces fit together. The most positive responses came toward the end of the program year. There are two possible reasons for this: (a) at that time, the researchers were looking for the respondents' overall reactions to the program rather than for specific problems and complaints; (b) by that time, the respondents had gained a broader perspective of how the various parts of the program were intended to work together. They were focused on the opportunities afforded them by the program, on their personal growth as teachers, and on the task of presenting themselves to prospective employers as skilled beginning professionals.

The strategy of asking "high risk" questions worked well. It showed the researchers' confidence in the new program, and the significance of this was not lost on the teacher candidates. As a result, it helped to generate a sincere and helpful response from most of the respondents. A number of problems identified in the focus groups were addressed and solutions (some for the pilot year, some for the following year) were put in place immediately. These actions were communicated to the teacher candidates, and were accepted by them as evidence that the researchers' motives in conducting the evaluation were to use feedback to improve the program. This produced a climate of faculty members and teacher candidates working together to create an excellent program, and contributed to the teacher candidates experiencing a high level of ownership and involvement in the creation of the program.

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