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Essential Elements in Teacher Education: Preservice Student Perspectives

Using focus groups and individual interviews, student teachers' perspectives on their program's design and delivery were examined. Data analysis using constant comparison revealed a set of 10 essential elements for effective teacher education programs: diverse student bodies, effective program faculty, useful curricula and pedagogy, theory into practice orientation, program coherence, small class sizes, cohort class structure, supportive associate teachers, prolonged practicum experiences, and ongoing program review. The discussion underscores the value of studying student teachers' perspectives, particularly when contemplating programmatic changes and reforms in teacher education.

Nous avons examiné, par le biais de groupes de consultation et d'entrevues personnelles, les perspectives qu'ont les stagiaires quant à la conception et la prestation de leur programme. Une analyse des données reposant sur une comparaison constante a révélé un ensemble de 10 éléments essentiels au succès d'un programme de formation des enseignants : une population étudiante diversifiée; un personnel enseignant efficace; des programmes d'études et une pédagogie utiles; une orientation visant l'application de la théorie à la pratique; un programme cohérent; de petits groupes d'étudiants en classe; une structure de classe reposant sur les cohortes; l'appui des enseignants associés; des stages prolongés; et un examen continu des programmes. De la discussion ressort l'importance d'étudier les perspectives des stagiaires, surtout quand on envisage des changements aux programmes et des réformes dans la formation des enseignants.

Introduction

In Canada, student teachers obtain their Bachelor of Education (BEd) degree primarily through the completion of either a consecutive or concurrent program. The consecutive model requires a one- or two-year program of study after an undergraduate degree. Conversely, the concurrent model entails a four- or five-year undergraduate program with education as the focus of study. Regulation for both types of programs is managed by individual provinces or a college of teachers (where one exists, Wilson, 1999). The latter is in sharp contrast to the United States, which has the federal Department of Education (DOE) and the National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE). Given the absence of a national regulatory body, it is not surprising that Canadian teacher education programs vary significantly from province to province. Even in individual provinces, faculties of education decide the nature of course work and practice teaching assignments within relatively broad guidelines.

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Despite significant program diversity, some common changes have occurred in faculties of education in Anglophone Canada. For example, there has been a shift to extended consecutive programs beyond eight calendar months or to two-year graduate level programs; increased emphasis on volunteer experience; extended practicum experiences; time spent in community organizations; programs that focus on specialization areas such as native education, literacy, and science and technology; and the elimination of direct entry into teaching programs from high school (Boote, Wideen, Mayer-Smith, & Moon, 1997). Other change efforts have focused on school-university relationships; program coherence; conceptual reorientation; program duration; curriculum; and the working conditions of faculty (Cole, 2000). Unfortunately, many of these efforts have been negatively affected by cost-cutting government policies. For example, financial cut-backs have forced faculties of education across the country increasingly to rely on sessional instructors to deliver courses. Collectively, underfunding along with the steady deprofessionalization of teachers threaten the capacity of universities and K-12 schools to engage in meaningful renewal (Cheng & Couture, 2000; Peters, 2001). Mechanisms to accomplish teacher education reform seem to be particularly important at present.

Changes in faculties of education are largely directed by provincial legislation, the interests of teacher educators, leadership of a dean, inspiration for a research project, outcome of research findings, or the challenges of a societal pressure (Wilson, 1999). Unfortunately, the competing views of policymakers and faculty in teacher education institutions have left little room for the incorporation of student teachers' opinions. The present study seeks to address this issue by examining student teachers' perspectives in an alternative intermediate/senior program. The aim is to provoke a dialogue and provide a voice to a primary stakeholder that has been noticeably absent from this important debate. The rationale for this study follows from a longstanding belief that if student teachers are to be actively engaged in their own learning, their voices must be heard (Cook-Sather, 2002).

Students' perceptions were examined both in terms of how they viewed their program and how it should ideally function. This distinction between *what is* versus *what should* be provided the overarching conceptual framework for the study. Whereas the first aspect was answered via the main focus group and interview questions, the second aspect was elicited from extensive probing. This approach provided an important characterization of the program, and more important, allowed me to identify a set of essential elements in teacher education. The latter provides a basis for thoughtful discourse on programmatic changes across all faculties of education, particularly consecutive programs.

Program Description and Content

This study examined student teachers' perspectives in an intermediate/senior program at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education of the University of Toronto (OISE/UT). The program was classified as alternative primarily because of its school, community, and global connections focus. Students in a cohort completed a series of three core courses that were integrated to form a program: Teacher Education Seminar, Educational Psychology, and School

and Society. Students completed their two curriculum and instruction courses, or teachable subjects as they are often called, with students in the regular secondary program. Thus it was primarily the thematic focus coupled with the cohort grouping that distinguished these student teachers from those in the regular intermediate/senior program.

Not surprisingly, other programs in Canada have elements that parallel those of OISE/UT. For example, the consecutive program at Simon Fraser University consists of several teacher education modules such as Global Communities or International Languages. Each of these modules requires completion of the same academic components, but enrolls its own small group of students. Similarly, the consecutive program at Brock University has a counseling group course section that involves cohort groupings. This component allows students to discuss issues related to classroom practice with a small group of individuals (i.e., 25-30).

The Teacher Education Seminar provided an overview of secondary education where students discussed a range of issues such as standards of practice for the teaching profession, special education, effective learning environments and classroom management, principles of assessment and evaluation, and approaches for promoting equity in school programs. This was a full-year seminar course held once per week from the beginning of September to the middle of April excluding the weeks of the practicum sessions. In the Educational Psychology course, students developed an understanding of important psychological processes in education. Student teachers attended a half-year course once per week from the beginning of September to the middle of January excluding the weeks of the fall practicum session. In School and Society, students developed a critical awareness of the intersections among schools, classrooms, communities, and society in the changing school environment. This was also a half-year course held once per week from the beginning of September to the end of December excluding the weeks of the fall practicum session.

The program was classified as field-based because of its practicum structure. Student teachers were required to spend approximately 15 days in placement schools in addition to the two regular four- to five-week placements that all intermediate/senior students complete. Both the additional days and two placements are normally undertaken in schools with a close alignment with the program's thematic focus. Unfortunately, the field component of the program was disrupted by labor unrest during the study's academic year. Various school boards in the Toronto area were unwilling to accept student teachers as part of their work-to-rule campaign. Student teachers essentially lost the 15 additional days that distinguished this alternative program structurally from more traditional forms of teacher education.

Method

Research Site

Students. Participants were drawn from student teachers in the alternative program. Students were interviewed at various stages in the academic year. In 2000-2001, 47 students were enrolled in the program: 10 men (21.3%) and 37 women (78.7%), reflecting the increasing gender disparity of secondary student teachers in recent years. Subject specialists from all areas of the curriculum

were represented in the student body. However, most students (70%) were working toward gaining credentials in social studies courses (i.e., history, politics, geography, family studies, and individual and society) as their teaching subject areas.

Faculty. Four full-time teaching members were responsible for the program during the 2000-2001 academic year. Collectively, these four members designed and delivered the three core courses, Teacher Education Seminar (2 faculty members), Educational Psychology (1 faculty member), and School and Society (1 faculty member).

Data Collection

Data collection was based on a convenience sample of students who volunteered to participate in either a focus group session and/or an individual interview. Focus group interviews were held at the beginning of the second semester. The program faculty described these group meetings as introspection sessions, a time to reflect on their first-term preservice experiences. Students had the option of signing up for one of the four 45-minute focus group sessions. They were asked to reflect on the following question before attending: "How have you grown professionally this year in the program, what personal goals still remain, and how might the program help you achieve them?" In total, 42 of a possible 47 students attended one of the four focus group sessions with a participation rate of approximately 89%.

Twelve individual interviews were conducted at the end of the academic year after student teachers had completed both of their required practicum sessions. Interview participants represented a range of subject areas including science, math, geography, history, politics, English, music, dramatic arts, and individual and society. The lead question asked students "What do you consider as the main strengths and weaknesses of the program?" As suggested above, probing was used to help students explain the rationale behind their responses and explicate the utility of identified components for their professional development and teacher education in general. I was careful to not skew student teachers' responses in any particular direction. Indeed, one of the key objectives of the study was to elicit an authentic assessment of the program in a nonthreatening environment.

Although students were encouraged to participate in the focus group sessions and individual interviews, there were no evaluative component or marks given for attendance. Participation in the mid-year focus groups and interviews was completely voluntary, and no compensation was provided to participants. All research participants were required to sign an informed consent form before the focus groups and individual interviews began. Special precautions were also extended to potential focus group participants. That is, they were informed that there was a limit to the moderator's ability to ensure confidentiality for information shared during these group interviews. For example, once the focus group had been completed, individual participants might share information with others despite explicit instructions. All the student teachers were told that they could withdraw their participation at any time during the study.

Data Analysis

Analysis of focus group and interview data followed the constant comparison method (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003). The process of constant comparison is similar to the more widely recognized grounded theory approach where researchers develop an emergent fit, that is, they modify the category to fit the data and do not select data to match a predetermined category (Taber, 2000). Codes were assigned directly to the margins of each focus group and interview transcript. Entries with codes of similar meanings were merged into a new category. Transcripts were analyzed a second time to ensure the reliability of the codes and the accuracy of the merged items. This process was repeated for each set of transcripts. Codes from the first focus group transcript were applied to the second. This procedure was also used for the interview data, that is, codes from the first interview transcript were also applied to the second. This procedure allowed comparison across all focus group and interview data sources and revealed a common set of themes.

Results and Discussion

Examination of student teachers' responses suggested that there are 10 essential elements in teacher education: (a) diverse student bodies; (b) effective program faculty; (c) useful curricula and pedagogy; (d) theory into practice orientation; (e) small class sizes; (f) cohort class structure; (g) supportive associate teachers; (h) prolonged practicum experiences; (i) program coherence; and (j) ongoing program review. Students' responses underscored the importance of each of these elements for the design and delivery of an effective teacher education program.

Diverse Student Body

Student teachers repeatedly noted the importance of a diverse student body. The ability of students to capitalize on the diversity of their colleagues' experiences was viewed as critical to their own professional development. Consider the following responses.

One of the strengths of the program is that you have a collective group of students that thinks differently. You must learn how to work with different people within their approaches, but it's the same goal. So the support you receive from each other is much needed and is a strength of the program. (Interview Response)

I don't know how they chose people to come into the program. But I think that the people they did chose for this program knocked me out by what they've done, what they are doing, and what they intend to do. So I think they must have gone through all of the applicants very carefully. (Interview Response)

The strength and uniqueness of the student body did not come about by chance. Faculty made a conscious effort to select students from the broader intermediate/senior pool that possessed a diverse range of volunteer and teaching related experiences.

The above results suggest that faculties of education are well served by rigorous selection procedures that identify strong applicants. The latter might be especially important for thematic teacher education programs that typically involve a smaller group of students who operate under the umbrella of a particular focus. One way to ensure a steady stream of excellent applicants is to

make teaching an attractive profession. Unfortunately, there has been a steady decline in the value of K-12 teachers in recent years (Murrell, 2001). If not reversed, this trend will eventually lead to a steady decrease in quality applicants and eventually inservice teachers.

Effective Faculty

Many student teachers identified effective faculty members as an important determinant of a successful program. Students commented that key characteristics in program faculty were that they served as role models and were willing to provide students with personal attention. Consider the following responses.

They subscribe to what they believe and teach us and so there's the role modeling, the flexibility, the open-mindedness, and the creativity. They were very flexible, open, personable and willing to be involved in relationships. I think that the alternative program, in terms of relationships with faculty were great. I don't think they were that strong in the regular program. You could establish a more authentic learning environment. (Interview Response)

One thing that I really like about the program is how the students have such power over how the courses are run. The fact that faculty feel comfortable enough to actually ask you how we would like to run the course has allowed us a greater sense of power and let us truly communicate on an equal level. (Focus Group Response)

As indicated above, students drew a direct relationship between faculty flexibility and their growing sense of empowerment.

The recognition of the important role played by program faculty is not a surprising finding. Nevertheless, the characteristics identified in these individuals should inform how we conceptualize an effective faculty member. For example, students repeatedly underscored the importance of having "open" and "flexible" teacher educators. Interestingly, Beck and Kosnik (2002) have also noted the importance of these characteristics in associate teachers: those who supervise students during their practice teaching placements. One way program faculty can demonstrate these types of qualities is by regularly seeking and reflecting on feedback from their students. The concept of a reflective practitioner continues to attract considerable attention and is seen as a desirable orientation for teacher educators (Hudson-Ross & Graham, 2000; Mueller & Skamp, 2003).

Useful Curricula and Pedagogy

Students also commented on the strength of the content, assignments, and pedagogical approaches that were used by faculty members. Consider the following response.

The integrated assignment allowed me to look back at the practicum and actually try to put things together I was having difficulty reconciling. So I found that activity quite useful and it allowed me to reflect back on what I had learned in the classes. I could actually understand what it was we were talking about in that class and add some practicality to it, which for me was beneficial. (Focus Group Response)

Students tended to assign greater importance to course assignments that were directly related to classroom practice. Earlier research has noted the relative importance of practical assignments over those emphasizing educational theory (Jackson & Leroy, 1998; Smith & Souviney, 1997).

Learning at any level—professional or student—is more individually effective when it is situationally cooperative (Withers, 1994). One student commented, “I did like that we did more collaborative learning. There was a real opportunity to learn” (Interview Response). The fact that student teachers supported the cooperative approach further bolsters the notion that the traditional transmission model of teaching is ill-suited for teacher education. Anderson, Rolheiser, and Gordon (1998) noted that trends toward decentralization, site-based management, and collaborative work cultures are creating a context in which teachers working together is becoming the norm. In this sense, cooperative learning approaches provide a close fit with the current work environments of teachers. This continuity between preservice and inservice classrooms represents an important consideration in the delivery of academic content. Collectively, challenging curricula coupled with collaborative learning approaches were viewed as positive features.

Theory-Into-Practice Orientation

Despite the value of the integrated course assignment, student teachers argued for a stronger theory-into-practice orientation in their alternative classes. Students commented that they did not feel prepared to manage their own classroom the following year and that more could have been done to emphasize the practical aspects of the job. Consider the following quotes.

I think there was a need to also have dealt with how we would take some of what is really idealistic in what we do in the program and actually translate that into real life situations. Because a lot of us came against challenges or barriers when we were in the classroom and the faculty could have translated that better into what strategies we can actually use. (Interview Response)

I really think that was something that was really lacking. Because we all felt that way about gender issues and equity, we all had strong convictions toward that. So it's good to discuss that and to flush out more ideas about it. But I wanted something concretely laid out for us that we could use. (Interview Response)

Students' responses generally suggested that the lack of practical focus in their teacher education courses negatively affected their feelings of self-efficacy.

It has been argued that current practices in traditional teacher education programs do little to promote the linking of theory and practice (Duquette, 1997). Student teachers' responses further supported the widespread criticism that there appears to be a disconnect between preservice university instruction and the practical aspects of managing a classroom. The implication is that practical elements of teaching need to be made highly transparent in order for student teachers to feel well equipped to face the challenges of their first year of teaching. Teacher educators need to provide concrete applications in classroom contexts. Failure to do so invariably leads to teacher education graduates who are unable to connect preservice content meaningfully to the realities of daily teaching.

Program Coherence

Many student teachers felt that there were poor connections between the three alternative program courses. Consider the following quotes.

I can only mention that School and Society and Educational Psychology work together in some ways. But I envisioned that we'd take issues from class to class. A conversation begun in one class would be continued in another class in a different context. But that didn't happen. The Teacher Education Seminar seemed like an administrative shelf where we stuck everything. We had great guest speakers through that forum, but otherwise it just seemed like bits and pieces and no connection at all I think with the other two courses. (Interview Response)

In terms of what we're covering in our alternative program courses, I wondered where the communication is happening between those three components. It's a little frustrating sitting in class. (Focus Group Response)

Greater coherence and continuity across courses was noted as a desirable element for a significant number of students.

Teacher educators provide more than a collection of separate courses and experiences. Ideally, programs are integrated to represent a consistent vision of teaching and learning. Tobias (1999) asserted that program coherence along with higher standards should represent the two main goals for teacher education. Indeed, teacher education reform literature suggests that a clear shared vision of good teaching coupled with coherence among program elements is a central feature of successful programs (Russell, McPherson, & Martin, 2001; Zeichner, Miller, & Silvernail, 2000). The ability to maintain program coherence has even been related to a number of positive outcomes for student teachers. For example, Fradd (1995) noted the importance of a coherent program for the development of teacher leadership. The fact that student teachers addressed this issue further underscores the value in designing integrated programs with sufficient coherence.

Small Classes

Student teachers also voiced concern about the size of their alternative program classes. Many felt that classes were too large and that a smaller group of students would have been more personal and better able to tackle difficult issues. Consider the following quotes.

I see an alternative approach to education as involving smaller classes and more of an emphasis on the whole student. You can't emphasize the whole student when there is too many people in a class. It becomes just a matter of administration and getting things done. So that's why I felt the program was at odds with what it was teaching. (Interview Response)

There were a few times when we were divided into two groups in the Teacher Education Seminar. I thought that that size was really good. I think there is a larger comfort level. I don't know exactly what the right number is between feeling comfortable and not being comfortable but I think smaller groups helps to create a better dialogue among the students. (Focus Group Response)

Thus the size of the alternative classes conflicted with both the stated focus of the program as well as one of its main teaching philosophies, namely, to be an effective educator, teachers need to address the individual interests of their

students. The latter is particularly difficult with a class size of almost 50 students.

Schoolteachers often have strong views about class sizes. Most draw a direct relationship between reduced sizes and a corresponding increase in student learning and enhanced teaching effectiveness (Reynolds, Reagin, & Reinshuttle, 2001). Research generally supports these beliefs by demonstrating improved student achievement (Addonizio & Phelps, 2000; Nye, Hedges, & Konstantopoulos, 2000) and a greater focus on individual instruction when reductions are made in class sizes (Betts & Shkolnik, 1999; Haughey, Snart, & da Costa, 2003). It is surprising that this factor has not been a central focus of reform in faculties of education. Class sizes of 40 and 50 students continue to be the norm in many Canadian teacher education programs. The financial considerations that dictate the realities of preservice class sizes have come at the expense of both student teachers and preservice faculty. As in the above case, faculty might be placed in the awkward position of espousing a particular philosophy of education that they cannot model in their own classrooms.

Cohort Structure

Student teachers' responses suggested that the cohort structure was instrumental for their professional development. This enabled students to form relationships with individual colleagues and made it easier for them to complete group activities. Consider the following quote.

Because we all have the same classes, and we often meet together, that full year of constantly having to interact with the same people, it builds a sort of community. If you're working with other people that are not in the alternative program, you're not in the same frame of mind. You have to take longer to finish a project with goals that you want to implement because those people don't have those goals. It's not that they're incapable of thinking that way. They weren't trained to think of them immediately. (Interview Response)

Indeed, students lamented that they could not take their curriculum and instruction courses (i.e., math, science, history, etc.) in the structure of the alternative program.

More conventional teacher education programs generally have students encounter faculty in independent courses from a required list, where each course had a different topic and emphasis, and then assigned individually to available field placements (Peterson et al., 1995). The latter typically results in few student teachers being able to have extended experiences with their student colleagues. Cohort grouping seems to be an essential programmatic change if teacher educators are to facilitate meaningful conversations among students. The latter seems especially important for brief one-year consecutive programs. Research indicates that this delivery model has enhanced collaboration, inquiry, and reflection among student teachers (Melynychuk, 2001; Potthoff, Batenhorst, Fredrickson, & Tracy, 2001). Faculties of education are increasingly organizing their students into cohorts to take many if not all their courses together (Mandzuk, Hasinoff, & Seifert, 2002).

Element 8: Supportive Associate Teachers

Student teachers repeatedly cited the important role played by associate teachers. Consider the following quotes.

My associate teacher was really happy to have me there. He was really busy with everything he was doing. I mean he was swamped with work. He even changed his whole program half way into the semester. But he still took the time to give me feedback and was a real role-model for being a good teacher. (Interview Response)

One of my associates didn't actually spend a lot of time in the classes when I was teaching. She kind of disappeared off and did other things, and I thought it was kind of good that I got a chance to work with students ... I enjoyed that. For my other practicum, which was an English placement at a Catholic high school, I felt my associate tried to work too closely with me at times. (Interview Response)

It appears that the relationship between a student and his or her associate was an important factor that led to a positive or negative placement.

The central role played by associate teachers in teacher education has been widely acknowledged (Awaya et al., 2003; Beck & Kosnik, 2002; Bennett, 2002; Clarke, 2001). Ideally, selection standards should be set for associate teachers so that student teachers have effective role models for classroom instruction. Unfortunately, few if any enticements are provided for supervising student teachers. The current situation, which relies primarily on volunteer supervisors, provides no formal mechanism to assess the suitability of associate teachers. In a few jurisdictions that have provided appropriate training and compensation to supervising teachers, these costs have often been recovered in terms of higher teacher retention (Evertson & Smithey, 2000). Thus a significant initial investment is needed if governments and universities wish to get serious about raising the quality of student teacher supervision.

Prolonged Practicum Experiences

Student teachers reported that the duration of the practicum made it difficult to form personal relationships with students, learn the system, or get a realistic sense of the demands of teaching. In the latter case, teaching an entire unit in a class was seen as a useful experience. Consider the following quotes.

You are there in the middle of the year so it's very hard to establish a relationship in that short period of time. Learning how to teach, get the content across, and learn the system with all of those written and unwritten rules was difficult. (Interview Response)

I never really got to know the school as a whole. There was never enough time to do anything like that. (Interview Response)

The fact that these students lost the field component further underscores the value in having ongoing practicum experiences.

Research indicates that the lack of practical preparation has been an enduring concern for traditional preservice programs and that extended practice teaching experiences is a hallmark of excellent programs (Cook-Sather, 2002; Duquette & Cook, 1999; Van Zandt, 1998; Zeichner et al., 2000). Indeed, everyone regards the practicum as the core feature of a teacher education program (Wilson, 1999). Recognition of this critical role has been instrumental in the development of newer designs such as field-based programs and professional development schools. Both types of programs provide students with ongoing and extended periods in placement schools. The present results fur-

ther underscore the necessity of this shift from traditional programs to those that provide ongoing contact with K-12 students.

Program Review

Finally, student teachers credited the mid-year focus group with providing the impetus for significant reorganization of course content that occurred in the second semester. Reflecting on the year, one student commented,

I think there are a lot of strengths in the professors who are involved in this program. It really says something about them that they allowed those workshops to happen after they had the consultations with us midway through the year. That they were really listening to what we had to say and that we in a sense got to set the agenda for the rest of the year. (Interview Response)

Thus faculty's willingness to respond to the perceived needs of students was regarded as a key advantage in the program.

Formative evaluation procedures have been successful in providing positive changes to practicum components in teacher education programs (Snart & MacKay, 2001). The present finding suggested that formalized feedback measures also need to be used for course-based teacher education components. Faculties of education that rely on a traditional year-end snapshot of their programs offer their students little if any prospect for meaningful change in their own educational time frame. Clearly, in the absence of the mid-year focus group sessions, many students would have missed out on important workshops necessary for their professional development. The practice of relying on a year-end evaluation technique to receive structured feedback on factors such as curriculum, assessment measures, and teaching techniques appears to be flawed. Clearly formative evaluation of teacher education programs that are coupled with a mechanism for monitoring and responding to feedback are essential if student teachers are to be the beneficiaries of the evaluation process.

Interestingly, a close analysis of the 10 elements suggests three overarching themes in teacher education related to *structural design*, *content delivery*, and *social relationships*. All the themes are interconnected with each of the elements. For example, small class sizes, cohort grouping, extended practicum experiences, and ongoing program review elements suggest that structural design features play an important role in student teachers' perceptions of program quality. However, one could argue that small class sizes and cohort grouping also play a pivotal role in developing social relationships during the academic year. Similarly, useful curricula/pedagogy, theory-into-practice, and program coherence elements tend to underscore the importance of content delivery features. Nevertheless, facilitating a stronger theory into practice orientation has also been related to structural design features such as extended practicum experiences (Duquette, 1997; Smith & Souviney, 1997). Last, diverse student bodies, effective program faculty, and supportive associate teacher elements tend to support the importance of social relationship features. Collectively, these three interrelated constructs provide an interesting framework for future teacher education research, particularly as it based on the often neglected perspectives of student teachers. The latter is in contrast to existing frameworks

that were developed primarily from the vantage point of teacher educators (Feiman-Nemser, 1990; Hartnett & Nash, 1980; Kennedy, 1987; Zeichner, 1993).

Conclusion

Although this study confirms many of the concerns that have been raised earlier in the teacher education research literature such as the importance of extended field experiences and linking theory with practice, other findings provide something additional to think about. For example, the personal attributes of associate teachers that are pivotal for a successful practicum are the same qualities that students seek in teacher educators. Student teachers also identified the need for greater continuity across the three alternative program courses. Although the program appeared to have the infrastructure in place for achieving this goal, students did not feel that adequate connections were made. Similarly, the value in using formative assessment procedures seems to be especially important for consecutive teacher education programs that offer a program over a brief time period. These results warrant further study and consideration by faculties of education.

The present study also suggested that a framework consisting of three main constructs might be used for future research. For example, the scope of the present study could be extended to examine how a variety of primary stakeholders such as policymakers, accreditation bodies, teacher educators, administrators, inservice teachers, and student teachers conceptualize an effective teacher education program. The latter may shed light on why specific constructs and elements receive more or less attention in faculties of education and public policy. Even more important, such research may reveal factors that promote or constrain the development and maintenance of specific features. For example, it is easy to envisage how cost-cutting government policies would have a profound effect on structural design features such as small class sizes in a cohort grouping. It is less certain whether stakeholders attach the same value to these issues, how they might remedy this problem, and what is the feasibility of suggested proposals.

As we enter the 21st century, teacher education reform has become a critical topic for debate by policymakers and teacher educators (Cochran-Smith, 2002). The results of this study suggest that student teachers also deserve an important role in shaping the future of teacher education. The fact that many of the elements identified by student teachers have also been discussed in the literature, and in some cases supported by empirical research, indicates that this primary stakeholder is worthy of consideration. By not addressing student teachers' concerns, faculties of education risk the prospect of graduating teachers with low levels of self-efficacy who may eventually leave the profession. Thus allowing student teachers' perspectives to inform the programmatic changes we make seems essential. The latter represent an important mechanism for advancing meaningful reform.

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