

# Consistencies Between New Teachers' Beliefs and Practices and Those Grounding Their Initial Teacher Education Program

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*This paper discusses the experiences of beginning teachers as they navigated their first seven years in the profession. Drawing on data from a research study that charted these teachers' experiences during and after their initial teacher education program, I reveal that although the participants' teaching contexts varied considerably, patterns emerged in the ways in which they articulated their roles, practices, commitments, and identities as teachers, and these were consistent with the grounding philosophy and principles of the participants' initial teacher education program. The findings suggest that some new teachers can and do resist the discursive pressures of the field (e.g., those promoting traditional, behaviourist approaches) and that connections can be made between these teachers' resistance and their initial teacher education program.*

*Dans cet article, je discute d'expériences d'enseignants débutants qui tentent de s'y retrouver dans leur profession pendant leurs sept premières années d'enseignement. Puisant dans des données d'une étude qui a suivi les expériences de ses enseignants pendant et après leur programme d'études en pédagogie, je démontre que, malgré des milieux d'enseignement sensiblement variés, il en découle des modèles similaires. Ces tendances touchent les façons dont les enseignants définissent leurs rôles, leurs pratiques, leurs engagements et leurs identités professionnelles, et elles sont cohérentes avec la philosophie et les principes de base du programme d'études en pédagogie qu'a suivi chaque participant. Les résultats laissent supposer que certains nouveaux enseignants sont non seulement en mesure de résister aux pressions découlant des discours du domaine (p. ex., ceux qui promeuvent les approches traditionnelles et comportementalistes) mais qu'ils le font en réalité. De plus, les résultats donnent à penser qu'il existe des liens entre la résistance de ces enseignants et leur programme d'études en pédagogie.*

## Introduction and Relevant Literature

While support in the literature is growing for a move towards alternative conceptions of teacher education (Darling-Hammond & Bransford, 2005; Korthagen, Loughran, & Russell, 2006), a persistent problem for the field is the widespread finding that initial teacher education efforts to promulgate reformed teaching methods typically do not transfer to the classroom setting (Allen, 2009; Kennedy, 1997; Lampert & Ball, 1998; Wilson & Goldenberg, 1998). In particular, research shows that many beginning teachers abandon research-based practices that they learned about in their teacher education programs in favour of the more traditional practices they see around them in schools (Allen, 2009). This is a finding that crosses national and continental borders. Ensor (2001), reporting on a South African teacher education program,

documents a disjuncture between the classroom practices recommended in the program and those demonstrated by the graduates in their classrooms, while Schulz and Mandzuk (2005) report that the Canadian preservice teachers they studied, while initially enthusiastic about the possibilities offered by inquiry-oriented teaching, upon graduation already had concerns about the viability of engaging in inquiry-oriented teaching in schools. In summarizing the landscape of such studies, reviews of research typically conclude that the transfer from theory presented during teacher education to practice in schools is meager (see, e.g., Wideen, Mayer-Smith, & Moon, 1998). Similarly, Korthagen et al. (2006) reflect that most studies of teacher education graduates report a washing out effect of insights gained during teacher preparation. It is important, therefore, that we consider very carefully the features of programs whose graduates report practicing, in their early years in the profession, in ways consistent with the research-based theories and practices recommended during initial teacher education. Brouwer and Korthagen (2005) report that of the 24 programs they studied, some were successful in counteracting the occupational socialization of graduates within their first three years of teaching. They attribute this success to particular program features that integrate theory and practice. They note, however, that longitudinal studies that follow particular students from their preservice experiences well into their teaching career are rare and we that still know relatively little about “the contribution that preservice...programs can make to the long-term development of teachers” (p. 217). Responding to this and other calls for research that traces teacher education program graduates’ experiences well into their teaching careers (e.g., Adler, Ball, Krainer, Lin, & Novotna, 2005), in this article I present the findings of a study of graduates from one Canadian teacher education program and show how the graduates’ discourse and practices remained consistent with the research-based principles and perspectives offered to them during their initial teacher education program. This consistency occurred in spite of the discursive pressures they encountered in the field.

Despite decades of reform around the world, many teacher education programs still reflect a hidden curriculum of beliefs about learning to teach in their practices and structures. One such persistent belief, widely discussed in the literature (Britzman, 1991; Brouwer & Korthagen, 2005; Flessner, 2012; Korthagen & Kessels, 1999), is the notion that the practicum is a space for student teachers to put the theories they have previously learned about in the university classroom into action (a theory-into-practice model). Program structures in which university coursework is offered first, followed by blocks of teaching experience, often with different teaching personnel responsible for these different components, represent this theory-into-practice mindset. A second implicit belief, also discussed in the literature (e.g., Wideen, et al., 1998), is that the teaching structures of the program do not need to match the content being promoted. Programs in which preservice teachers are, for instance, gathered in large-lecture groups to learn about the value of small-group learning and close teacher-student relationships reflect this implicit belief. One of the effects of these hidden curricula is that the structures of teacher education programs themselves may be counterproductive to preservice teacher learning (Brouwer & Korthagen, 2005; Wideen, et al., 1998). The research reported here challenges these and other persistent beliefs about learning to teach. It draws on data collected from graduates of a teacher education program that positioned the field experience as a text to be interpreted and as a form of inquiry into what it means to learn to teach rather than as a space in which to simply practice being a teacher, and in doing so actively rejected a theory-into-practice model of teacher education. It also adopted as core practices and essential teaching structures the very practices it promoted as being central to good teaching.

## Theoretical Framework

Despite the extensive efforts of preservice teacher education (Darling-Hammond & Bransford, 2005), technical modes of teaching, which valorize prediction, measurement, and control in the classroom, still dominate K-12 education in North America. This technical approach to teaching contrasts with an approach based on Aristotle's notion of *phronesis*. As Coulter and Wiens (2002) note, *phronesis* does not easily translate into English but a common translation, and one adopted by the teacher education program in which the beginning teachers featured in this writing participated, is practical wisdom. *Phronesis*, or practical wisdom, in its various forms, is now emerging as an important re-orientation for practice across disciplines (Sullivan & Rosin, 2008). While the various enactments of *phronesis* in practice differ somewhat in their emphases, they each contrast sharply with the dominant technical rationalist approach to teaching in that they emphasise the importance of judgement in context. Thus, "this is knowledge not as a possession...but as invested in action" (Dunne & Pendlebury, 2002, p. 198). In this frame, less emphasis is placed on applying generalized knowledge (such as knowledge of efficient routines for pacing lessons or managing children) and more on the ability to bring general and particular—theory and practice—"into illuminating connection with each other" (Dunne, 2005, p. 376). "This requires perceptiveness in [the] reading of particular situations as much as flexibility in... 'possessing' and 'applying' the general knowledge" (p. 376).

Flyvbjerg (2001) notes that *phronesis* is oriented towards praxis or thoughtful action, and adds that *phronesis* concerns itself with addressing three fundamental questions—Where are we going? Is this desirable? What should be done (in other words, what is best to do for these students, in this context, with this subject matter, etc.)? By embracing *phronesis*, the program studied here "attempt[ed] to prepare teachers [who] can dwell within the rough ground of experience, appreciate its complexity and deep interpretability, and respond ethically" (Phelan, 2005, p. 62).

## Methods

### Context of the Studies

This article draws on data that were collected during two connected research studies. The purposes of the first research study were to explore the experiences of preservice teachers learning to teach within an inquiry-based teacher education program and to determine how these new teachers used what they had learned in their first year of teaching. The second, connected study extended the first through an investigation of these same participants' experiences as they reached the sixth or seventh years of their practice as teachers. Its purpose was to study the enduring influence, if any, of the inquiry-based teacher education program's philosophy, structures, and practices on the graduates' perspectives and identities as teachers.

Participants in this research were initially enrolled in a two-year Bachelor of Education After-Degree program (known as the Master of Teaching or MT Program) that was founded on inquiry-based, learner-focused, and field-oriented principles and practices (see Lund, Panayotidis, Smits, & Towers, 2012; Phelan, 2005; and Towers, 2012, for broader descriptions of the semester-by-semester structure and guiding philosophy of the program)<sup>1</sup> and later were employed as classroom teachers in a variety of settings. Within the program, student teachers were taught in small groups, usually between 15 and 22, collaboration was encouraged, the entire program was non-graded, and much of the curriculum was case-based. Student teachers

completed two major field placements in school settings (each year-long experiences for a minimum of two-days per week, up to and including some periods of full 5-days per week immersion) as well as one shorter field experience for approximately 10 days during the first semester in a community or workplace setting. The core focus of the program's teacher educators was on integrating theory and practice so that each informed the other. Students were encouraged to understand their time in schools, classrooms, and alternative settings as a text to be interpreted and as a form of inquiry into what it means to learn to teach rather than as a space in which to simply practice being a teacher.

### **Data Collection**

Participants included representatives of the early childhood, elementary, and secondary routes in the program. In the first study, twelve volunteer preservice teachers were videotaped during one course in their final semester and interviewed about their experiences within the MT Program. Three of these beginning teachers were then followed as they embarked upon their first year of teaching. I and/or my research assistant interviewed the teachers, video recorded their teaching throughout the year, and also conducted task-based interviews at the end of the year with some of their students in order to learn more about the impact of the teachers' practices on student learning. Seven years later I was able to track down five of the original participants of the study, including two of the three who had participated in the segments involving video recording in their first year classrooms. I once again interviewed them about their teaching experiences during those intervening years, about their current practices, and about what they thought had influenced those experiences and practices. During interviewing I explicitly invited participants to critique the MT Program as a preparation for teaching. To better highlight the aspects of the teachers' practices and identities that have endured over time, in this article I directly cite participant comments only from the final phase of the research seven years after the student teachers graduated from the university. Data from only four participants have been included here to avoid repetition of themes.

### **Data Analysis**

The majority of interviews conducted during the research reported here were video recorded. In order to work with video interview data I adapted the approach described by Powell, Francisco, and Maher (2003), which begins with an iterative process of viewing and reviewing the video data and supporting evidence (such as fieldnotes) and proceeds through writing brief, time-coded descriptions of each video's content, then identifying critical events from which themes are derived. The critical events I documented were those instances where participants spoke directly about the philosophy, practices, and structures of the MT Program as well as those instances where participants' comments reflected the language or ideas promoted within the program (such as ideas about inquiry, reflective practice and journaling, practical wisdom or judgement, ethics of teaching, etc.) either positively or negatively. The documented critical events were then clustered into three groups—(1) those that were consistent with the teacher education program's grounding philosophy, (2) those that reflected consistencies with core practices experienced during the teacher education program, and (3) those that reflected particular structures of the teacher education program. After clustering, each critical event was re-viewed in the context of the full videorecording to ensure that its meaning had not been taken out of context.

## **Participants**

Deepak had a background in law and had lived and studied abroad before settling in Alberta and entering the teacher education program. Within the program he enrolled in the secondary Social Studies route and upon graduation took a position as classroom teacher at a designated special needs private school—one of a small cluster of schools all run by the same organization. By the time of his seventh year in practice, Deepak had taught students spanning grades 4 to 12 and had recently moved into a leadership role with the organization.

Elle entered the elementary route of the teacher education program with a Bachelor of Arts in general studies with a minor in communication studies. Upon graduation she first took a position teaching pre-school children at a private school and then was hired by a public school division as a substitute teacher for a year. She had completed some short-term contracts and for the last four years had held a permanent full-time position at a rural elementary school where she had taught multi-aged classes, mostly in the early grades.

Hannah had a background in dance studies and completed the elementary route of the teacher education program. After graduating, she had been engaged by a local public school board and had spent a couple of years substitute teaching and completing short-term contracts. She then secured a continuing contract with the school board at an elementary school and had been teaching at that same school for several years, though she had also taken a maternity leave in her fourth year of teaching. At the time of her final interview for this study, Hannah was nearing the end of a second maternity leave and expecting to return to her teaching position very soon.

At the conclusion of his teacher education program, Daniel, an elementary-route student with a background in theatre arts, secured a one-year position in a multi-aged Grade 1/2 classroom. By the time he had reached his seventh year of practice, Daniel had moved on through several teaching positions, primarily in high-needs schools, and most recently he had been asked to take a “learning leader” position within his school board—a role that included educating other teachers about innovative classroom practices.

## **Findings**

The data reveal consistencies between the particular grounding philosophy of the teacher education program, as well as its core practices and structures, and the expressed practices, commitments, dispositions, teaching identities, and intentions of its graduates. For presentation, these findings have been clustered into three groups that match the framework that emerged during the analysis.

### **Consistencies with the Grounding Philosophy Experienced in the Teacher Education Program**

Each of the participants reported holding true to beliefs about good teaching that were consistent with those promulgated during their initial teacher education experiences. Analysis indicates that the element of their education that made the most significant difference in this respect was the core grounding philosophy of the MT Program. Here, Daniel explains why this grounding philosophy was so important:

I think...the program sort of set...the seeds of thinking of learning and teaching as the foundation of the classroom....They set you on the right path I would say. I understood that...the *learner* is the focus....The MT [Program] is really clear about that in your very first year.

Hannah reflected that the philosophical aspect of the program had the most impact for her: “There are some classes that I remember, that stand out, but I would say overall it’s more the philosophy.” Deepak offered the perspective that a phronetic grounding philosophy is important in working for change in the educational system. He noted that changing the status quo in schools requires a different way of thinking: “Because we’ve all been acculturated. Most of us have gone to similar kinds of schools....If we’re trying to do something different, not more of the same, we have to create different kinds of people, right?” Deepak continued, noting that the means to change how teachers teach is through changing how they *think* about teaching. He sees having teachers explore their identities—a key feature of all experiences within the MT program—as central to this process:

I would...suggest that we should be more demanding—to force people to question who they are, what they stand for...their ‘who am I?’....I believe that model: ‘If we change the way a person *thinks*,’ right? I believe that if I could orient a person in terms of their philosophical orientation, surely they’re intelligent enough to pick all the skills up?

The idea of learning to teach as a process of becoming rather than the gathering of a toolbox of skills is central to the grounding philosophy of the MT Program. The program located learning to teach as identity work. Each of the teachers seemed to have embodied this understanding in their practice and each referred to teaching in terms of their identity and beliefs. For example, Deepak recognized the intertwined nature of knowing, doing, and being in the identity of a teacher: “Who I am as a teacher is who I am as a person.” Daniel also described the importance of this focus on identity: “[Awareness of one’s identity] is one of the benefits and the strengths of the MT Program....I’m glad that I had...two years to really ground what I believe in because now...I need to really have those strong beliefs.”

Though all five participants of the second phase of this study were uniformly positive about the philosophy of the MT Program, this is not to say that a focus on a phronetic philosophy was embraced immediately by all students. In the following excerpt, Daniel explains why some of his peers struggled to understand the program and its intentions. He proposes that he, too, initially expected a transmission experience where he would simply be given the skills to be a teacher:

When you go into teacher preparation college you’re kind of thinking you’re going to be given skills to be a teacher, right? And [instead] it was a lot of philosophical....I mean, I understand *now*, but I know going through it a lot of people [didn’t].

A related criticism of the program was the impression that it focused on the philosophical to the detriment of the practical. Here, Deepak articulates how he understands the critique and then speaks to the particularities of the special needs students in his teaching context that have helped him understand why an attunement to the student-teacher relationship is so important and why a technical focus on skills is not the piece of the teaching puzzle that should be valued the most:

People may say that [graduates of this program] don't have enough methodology. But...all I want you to do is get close to the kid and then beyond that, it's going to happen. These guys are usually running away, so just by sitting with you, you've made it. They're listening to what you're saying, okay? If they can argue with you respectfully, you've done it, you've done it!

When I played Devil's advocate and pushed the alternative perspective that what new teachers really need are the skills because that will help them to survive their first few years in school, and then later they can think about "all of that philosophical stuff," Deepak held fast:

I don't believe that. I think that it's not that, it's the other way around. You have to think right and then you do the right things....The thing that the teachers who have difficulty all possess is that their thinking is wrong. And wrong thinking leads to wrong acting. That's why this program is important, because I think you focus on the thinking part, like the philosophical, the orienting, the ideal of what it should be....The philosophical orientation of the program [first] and then comes the shape of the thing, alright?

Hannah agreed. She reflected on the challenge of her first year in teaching, noting that the temptation to have a set of technical skills that can be applied to any situation is compelling yet embracing instead the phronetic notion that the acquisition of a (supposedly) generalizable set of skills is not adequate to the particularity of teaching contexts:

In that first year...I felt like, "oh, I wish I could just have something; somebody tell me how to do this!" But that's not the way; like I don't actually really believe that that's good, as much as it would be easier or, you know, maybe save your sanity sometimes....In the end, that's not going to make you a better teacher or it's not really going to help you that much because...that's just not the way it is, you know? Each group of kids is different; like already I've had quite a lot of different experiences...in five years they've been quite different from each other....And that's just a small, very small amount of time, right?

The participants believed that they did know how to teach, but that their approaches were often so different to those around them in their schools that others assumed they lacked the "basics" (e.g., of good classroom management). Here, Daniel comments on how he began to question his practice when other teachers around him started to raise questions about the way he was "managing" the children in his Grade 1/2 classroom:

I sort of questioned my own practice. Like really, I knew that philosophically that it's possible to have kids really involved in...really neat, in-depth type questioning and trying to figure out things, but I was trying to question, like "maybe I didn't give them enough background" or "maybe I didn't approach it the right way," or "maybe it's not the best approach for that type of demographic," which I don't really believe deep down, but I was questioning those things.

He started to adopt the other teachers' "behaviourist" approaches, then realised that the kind of assistance he was receiving from other teachers sat uncomfortably alongside his already established pedagogical beliefs:

And then...you get people saying, “you know, I’ve got this binder, here you go, it’s about how to manage your classroom”...and it’s all really behaviourist type stuff from the seventies...like “this is how you deal with this type of kid,” you know? But I didn’t find that very helpful....It’s a good way to manage these kids, but I don’t know if it’s the best way to engage them. I was trying to sort of get them engaged. I still do have that view—that if you can get the student really involved and engaged then those behaviour problems really start to decrease.

He also showed that his overall orientation to the work of teaching was consistent with the guiding inquiry-based philosophy of the MT Program when he noted that: “Teaching’s about...being creative....It’s not about just administering behaviour-structured programs to make sure that they’re all compliant.”

### **Consistencies with Core Practices Experienced in the Teacher Education Program**

A number of core practices were valued, expressed, and practiced extensively within the teacher education program. Key among these were a focus on (1) reflective practice, (2) collaborative practice, and (3) inquiry-based learning.

**Reflective practice.** To support reflective practice, students maintained a field journal throughout the two years of the program—a document that was intended as a three-way conversation between the student teacher, the “partner” teacher in the school, and the faculty member designated as Field Advisor. In addition, reflection on practice was encouraged throughout the campus-based class experiences, with discussions about field experiences regularly spilling over (intentionally) into all elements of the program. Reflective practice was an integral part of each of the participants’ identities as teachers. Daniel noted: “When you are teaching you need to be reflective,” and Hannah noted, “The journaling and all that, really that has stayed with [me]...the kind of reflective part of that has really stayed with me.”

**Collaborative practice.** To model and support collaborative practice, the MT Program was structured around small-group experiences and assignments that fostered collaboration. Significantly, the entire program was ungraded—a feature that students also noted was important in removing competition and encouraging collaboration. In the next excerpt, we hear from Daniel about why the small-group collaborative structures of the MT Program were important and how a preparation for collaborative practice has helped him to “stay true” to himself and his ideals:

I think teachers really need to have somebody to talk to about [what’s making a difference in the classroom]...because I think when you are brand new you really are in tune with your pedagogy...because you don’t have all of those outside influences yet, right? You sort of have the ideal, right?...[Then] as your pedagogy evolves, it’s important to have supports...to make sure that it’s evolving in a way that’s true to yourself as a teacher.... “Am I doing this in the best [way]—best for me as a teacher and best for my beliefs and best for the students—or am I just doing it because it’s the easiest way to do things?” So there needs to be that support.

For Daniel, this impulse to build a collaborative support structure around himself was no mere theoretical ideal. In the next excerpt he describes how he had put into practice these beliefs:



We have an inquiry network of teachers that we just kind of meet once a month and have coffee and talk about [the] sort of projects we're doing, or inquiry work, and just share ideas. It's...all [former] MT students....There's about ten to twelve regular members. We have a D2L sort of shell [an *online forum*] where you can post items...and have discussions.

He also reflected on a desire for collaboration between himself and the more traditional teachers he found surrounding him in his school. Explaining why he found their well-meaning efforts unhelpful, he noted: "It would have been more helpful if the teacher came in and said, 'okay, let's talk about this' instead, or 'let's figure this out together' instead of 'here's a binder on how to do it, here's the how-to manual.'" Elle also recognised the value of building a support network through collaboration. Here, she is referring to the collaborative experience of the MT Program: "I felt that it was helpful talking to other teachers when we'd come back in here [*the university*]...you'd talk about what a lesson might look like once you've got the experience....You'd come back and talk with colleagues." Hannah noted that the collaborative practice fostered by the MT Program had tangible benefits in the everyday work of schools:

I think the small group collaboration is important, because I think that does translate to what you're actually doing when you end up...working in a school with a team....Having that time to talk to other teachers and to plan together and...bounce ideas off not just yourself, you know?...That is so, so important.

**Inquiry-based learning.** One of the three core principles of the MT Program was a commitment to inquiry-based learning and over time this principle became perhaps the defining feature of the program. All of the teachers reported teaching practices consistent with good inquiry-based practice but several also discussed the difficulties they faced in schools while trying to initiate, enact, or sustain inquiry-based approaches to teaching.<sup>2</sup> For example, Elle reflected that she was teaching through inquiry in some areas of the curriculum (her areas of comfort, such as Social Studies) but that initially her practice was traditional for some disciplines, particularly mathematics: "I knew it was also my first year [of full-time teaching], so I didn't let myself feel bad about it, but I knew I wasn't doing what I wanted to *be*." Participants also reflected on the compatibility of the inquiry-based content and inquiry-oriented structures of the MT Program: "It [would be] kind of weird to have a traditional program when you're trying to teach about inquiry-based learning" (Elle). Participants also commented on the compatibility of the program's inquiry-based curriculum and philosophy with the general trend towards inquiry in professional development activities and in the curriculum mandates in Canada, particularly many of Alberta's curriculum documents (see, e.g., the revised Programs of Study for Social Studies and for Mathematics (Alberta Education, 2005, 2007): "I think the inquiry-based program is very good, because...that's really what's being advocated out there" (Elle). However, Hannah also reflected on why it is difficult for a first-year teacher to trail-blaze inquiry-based practices that seem out-of-step with the norm:

I was on probation, so I had a bunch of evaluations...and the administrator at the time was, had certain ways of,...were maybe not exactly the way that I [did things]. So I did stand up and I did do some things that I knew she wasn't going to immediately like [that] I knew I would have to have to justify to her. But I did [them] anyway, because that's what I felt most comfortable doing and if I was going to be evaluated, then I might as well do something that I; you know, that made sense to me, right? Not try to be something I'm not.

Expanding on this theme of the discrepancy between the inquiry-based teaching practices advocated by the program and the more traditional practices prevalent in schools, Hannah also offered a critique—the proposal that perhaps instructors could have been more deliberate about suggesting teaching practices that would actively bridge these two worlds.

### **Consistencies with Structures Experienced in the Teacher Education Program**

**Small-group structures.** Within the MT Program, almost all classes were small groups. Students worked together closely and got to know one another, and their instructors, well. A sense of community was strong, according to Deepak:

I think there's a wonderful advantage in the structure of the program for the simple fact that you pick people from different walks of life...and put them into communities together....We were all different, but at the same time we knew we had to work with one another so we developed a skill set, a social skill set, to be able to do that. And at the end the result was very good.

Daniel articulated similar thoughts:

The smaller classes...for me that worked really well...not having a lecture-style program, just sort of being there and discussing things and figuring things out....You talked about case studies....That's important too, because when you get out in the field you need to be having those types of conversations....I don't think you need to be told what your topic [is]; I think just having a network of people that you can just talk about educational issues with is important.

**Structures that deliberately intertwine theory and practice.** One of the most important ways in which the MT Program challenged the traditional understanding of the field experience in learning to teach was through the explicit integration of theory and practice by positioning the field experience as a text to be interpreted, much like other texts the student teachers encountered such as case studies and research publications. Here, Elle shows that she understood her field experiences as texts to be interpreted, understood, and adapted, rather than as spaces in which she was required to 'perform' as a teacher:

Coming back to the university to reflect on it and talk about it, I think that's a very good thing. Like you shouldn't be learning about lesson planning and unit planning...unless you're out there, right?....Because then you can see different strategies and different teachers and what they do and how it works, then you can make up your mind and talk about it at university.

Hannah also pointed out the significance of the back-and-forth field-and-campus structure of the program:

Being in your practicum right away is good. At first, I felt like—I was terrified, you know? But...looking back on it, it does make sense to get in there right away...as opposed to kind of going through a year of theory, a year of, you know, thinking about it and not actually seeing; not actually being right in there.

And here, Deepak reflects on the importance of the year-long field experiences that were integral to the MT Program:

But I think what it is, when it comes to relationships, unless you spend time with people you can't develop a relationship. That's why we need more time. And that way you can see the result of your impact, because as time goes on you actually start developing the relationships instead of being there...for a couple weeks, three weeks and [then] going. You're not just a fly on the wall, you actually become part of that little group, and that can be very meaningful.

## Discussion

### Grounding Philosophy

Aitken and Harford (2011) and others (e.g., Fontaine, Kane, Duquette, & Savoie-Zajc, 2012) note that international reviews of newly qualified teachers' concerns are always remarkably similar and include challenges of classroom discipline, motivating students, dealing with individual student differences, assessing students' work, organizing class work, coping with insufficient or inadequate teaching materials and supplies, and handling communication with parents. Although the participants in this research raised several of these issues, each teacher had conceptualized these difficulties within an overall framework of teaching (phronesis) that recognizes the inherent difficulty and unpredictability of teaching as a *practice* rather than a set of techniques. Therefore, each teacher had been able to accept, theorize, and work through these challenges as part of the work of teaching rather than as something that must be overcome (see, e.g., Daniel's comments about working to "figure this out together" rather than simply applying the techniques of "how-to" manuals).

Although research also suggests that what teachers learn in mainstream teacher education, and from educational research, does not transfer to the classroom setting (Kennedy, 1997; Lampert & Ball, 1998; Wilson & Goldenberg, 1998), the teachers in this study reported holding true to their beliefs and practicing in ways commensurate with the practices they had learned about during their initial teacher preparation program. It should be noted that my observational studies documenting their actual classroom practices during the study matched these self-reported interpretations (see, e.g., documented practices in Daniel's classroom reported in more detail in Towers, 2010). Despite encouragement to move away from inquiry-based practices, and in some cases despite other teachers' complaints to school administrators about their unconventional teaching (see Towers, 2012), in each case the beginning teachers' frame of reference for judging how to act in relation to their students remained a phronetic philosophy consistent with that of the MT Program. As they navigated the landscape of teaching, they struggled to preserve a coherent sense of self. For example, Elle's and Hannah's uses of "to be" rather than "to do" when talking about this struggle (Elle: "I knew I wasn't doing what I wanted to *be*," and Hannah: "Not try to be something I'm not") suggest that they had both formulated a sense of self as a teacher that they valued. Thomas and Beauchamp's (2011) research findings indicate that "more attention needs to be paid to raising awareness of the process of professional identity development during teacher education programmes" (p. 767). The study reported here responds to this call, exploring the kind of teacher education practices and structures that are relevant to shaping a particular kind of teacher identity—one that can be sustained over time despite challenges to its legitimacy and that gives new teachers the philosophical grounding to judge the worth of, and therefore flexibly enact, the classroom practices that they learned about during initial teacher education, even in the face of resistance.

Such flexibility in thriving in the ever-changing realities of schools is surely a “skill” required of new teachers in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century and yet, as described earlier, the graduates recognized that others misunderstood and/or undervalued their skills. In particular, their comments regarding the grounding philosophy of the program show that they knew that other teachers and some administrators had concerns that MT Program graduates had high ideals and lofty goals but did not display the expected “skill set” of beginning teachers (in terms of such practices as structured lesson planning and skills in managing students in expected ways). The question of what “classroom readiness” ought to look like for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century is a critical one. This research raises questions about whether the traditional skill set expected of new teachers (see, e.g., the skill set privileged by school administrators, documented by Pinto et al., 2012) is, in fact, still adequate to the task and also whether an alternative set of competencies, less recognizable as explicit skills and more located in a particular way of *thinking* about the work of teaching, is also a viable preparation for teaching. The fact that each of the research participants had sustained a career in teaching to this point (given what we know about the alarming rates at which new teachers typically leave the profession) and that each was not just surviving but thriving in the work (all but Hannah, whose trajectory had been interrupted by two maternity leaves within six years, had already been sought out for various leadership roles), implies that their preparation for teaching had been appropriate and successful.

This research suggests that the adoption of a phronetic approach is a viable one for initial teacher education and that further study of its affordances, and limitations, is warranted. Some of this work has already begun for the particular program described here (see, e.g., Towers, 2010 for a discussion of one such limitation, and Towers, 2008, and Towers, 2012, for accounts of the factors affecting these students’ abilities to sustain inquiry in their classrooms) but reports of other efforts to educate through phronesis would enrich this emerging literature base.

Regarding the phronetic foundation of the program, the data suggest that this theoretical framework might be a particularly important one for teacher educators hoping to help student teachers sustain inquiry-based teaching practices in the face of resistance in the schools. In a study I mentioned earlier, Allen (2009) reported on a teacher education program that attempted to disrupt conventional teaching practices but was unsuccessful due primarily to “the tendency of...beginning teachers to privilege practice observed and experienced in the classroom over theory taught on campus” (p. 647). My analysis of the difference between the lack of impact of the Australian program and the relative success of the MT Program in this domain rests on the issue of teacher identity. Allen reports that the aim of the Australian program was to graduate teachers “who have a defined repertoire of pedagogical knowledge and skills...that they can apply in any learning situation, no matter what the age of the learner or particular site” (p. 650). The participants in my study had graduated from a teacher education program that explicitly rejected the notion that the purpose of teacher education is to provide teachers with a set of essential, generalizable skills that can be “applied to the various situations and circumstances that arise in the practice, so as to meet the problems they present” (Dunne, 2005, p. 375), emphasizing instead the critical importance of judgement in context. We see in Hannah’s comment (“Each group of kids is different...”) that she had understood and embodied this phronetic orientation as she articulated why she rejected standardized “one-size-fits-all” approaches to teaching, and the same orientation is evident throughout the other participants’ comments, too. These graduates had established identities as teachers that were grounded in an inquiry *stance* rather than simply collected a toolbox of inquiry-based teaching *methods*, and this is the essence of the difference in the outcomes of the two research studies I contrast here.

Interestingly, Schaefer, Long, and Clandinin (2012) have also recently drawn attention to the significance of shaping a professional identity in relation to sustaining new teachers in the profession and reducing the alarming attrition rates in some countries and provinces (such as Alberta). The work of Schaefer, Long, and Clandinin (2012) indicates that new teachers' narratives of identity—of who they might become as teachers—strongly shaped sustaining experiences in teaching. Such findings suggest that teacher education efforts that help new teachers to develop focused professional identities, feel fulfilled in their work, and see themselves as making a strong contribution are likely to help sustain new teachers in the profession. Furthermore, the research presented here speaks to the kinds of philosophy, practices, and structures in initial teacher education that might be fruitful in this respect.

### **Core Practices**

Reflective practice, long recommended in the literature (Schön, 1983; Henderson, 2001), is a key element of these teachers' practice and several participants commented on how the MT Program had fostered this aspect of their practice. From a phronetic perspective, reflective practice supports ethical action—action oriented to the good (Coulter & Wiens, 2002; Lund, Panayotidis, Smits, & Towers, 2006; Ricoeur, 1992; Wall, 2003). Deepak encapsulated this striving in his statement, “You have to think right and then you do the right things.” The participants reported intentions that show that their thinking corresponds with the three fundamental questions central to a phronetic sensibility—“Where are we going? Is this desirable? What should be done (in other words, what is best to do)?” For example, each reported deliberating on the appropriate actions to take in complex situations and struggling to maintain what they felt was the ethical choice in the face of pressures to conform to more common practices. This shows a propensity to read teaching as discernment (Dunne & Pendlebury, 2002)—the making of good judgements in context—rather than as the technical application of learned skills.

Collaborative practices were also highly valued and actively practiced by the teachers in this study. They noted the particular significance of collaborative practices for supporting and preserving their inquiry-oriented teaching approaches in the face of challenges and showed a desire to continue to have their practice supported and challenged by a community of peers. Vescio, Ross, and Adams' (2008) review of research indicates that such desires are important to cultivate because a common feature of such communities is a persistent focus on student learning and achievement and enhanced student learning outcomes.

In the MT Program, learning was structured in such a way that student teachers learned about teaching through inquiry by learning through inquiry. In other words, the teacher education approach was itself consistent with the message being promoted about how classrooms ought to be structured for deep learning. Several participants reflected on the coherence of this approach and on its effects on their ongoing practice as teachers. This complementary approach is also a feature of other reported research. For example, lessons taught by the teacher educators in the same way that they can be taught in schools was a core element of the success of a teacher education intervention reported on by Schelfhout et al. (2006), is recommended by Lunenberg, Korthagen, & Swennen (2007), has been shown to have a positive effect on teachers' teaching outcome expectancy beliefs (Smith, Swars, Smith, Hart, & Haardörfer, 2012), and shows promise as an important feature of innovative teacher education programs (Darling-Hammond & Bransford, 2005; Korthagen et al., 2006). The research

reported here extends such studies to show that consistencies between initial teacher education program principles and graduates' practices can be maintained over time.

### **Particular Structures**

While in the broader literature there are competing perspectives on whether class size has an impact on student learning (see, e.g., Graue & Rauscher, 2009, and Biddle & Berliner, 2002, for commentaries on the controversy), in the case of the participants in this research there was agreement that the small-group structure of the MT Program was an important feature that helped them build a knowledge base. It was a structure that supported the core practice of collaboration within the program and that helped to emphasize the value of ongoing professional learning communities, a professional development structure that is now widely practiced in the field (Glazer & Hanafin, 2006; Vescio et al., 2008). The small groups also allowed for deep and meaningful analysis of the student teachers' field experiences so upon graduation these teachers were attuned to careful reflection and to dwelling within the rough ground of experience and appreciating its complexity (Phelan, 2005) without snatching at subject matter (Dewey, 1904). Their experiences had prepared them to step back from technical approaches in order to consider whether they were appropriate in the circumstances or whether, in fact, the circumstances called forth from them something other (see, e.g., Daniel's comments in the earlier section on *Collaborative practice*).

The final core structure of the MT Program reflected in the data is the integrating of theory and practice in a way that allows the student teacher to theorize and make sense of his or her field experiences. The data I have presented show that integrating theory and practice in the MT Program offered opportunities for the student teachers to formulate a personal approach to teaching that made sense to them (see the earlier section on *Structures that deliberately intertwine theory and practice*). The research participants singled out for particular attention both the program's extensive, year-long field experiences, where strong relationships could be developed between students, student teacher, and partner teacher, and the back-and-forth field-and-campus structure of the program, which enabled the field experiences to be interrogated and interpreted in the context of readings, conversations with colleagues, and independent research inquiries by the student teachers. An integrated approach such as this is widely recommended for teacher education (Brouwer & Korthagen, 2005; Darling-Hammond & Bransford, 2005; Schelfhout et al., 2006). From a phronetic perspective, such an approach places more emphasis on the ability to bring general and particular—theory and practice—“into illuminating connection with each other” (Dunne, 2005, p. 376) than on the applying of generalized knowledge across contexts. Such teaching is difficult work, as reported by the teacher educators working within the MT Program (Lund, Panayotidis, Smits, & Towers, 2012) and by each of the participants (see, e.g., Hannah's comments in the section on the grounding philosophy of the program), but each participant remains committed to sustaining it. As Darling-Hammond and Bransford (2005) note, “beginning teachers need to have a command of critical ideas and skills and, equally important, the capacity to reflect on, evaluate, and learn from their teaching so that it continually improves” (p. 3). Borrowing from Barnes (1989) they claim that this is most likely to happen when teacher education programs are *conceptually organized, represented, and communicated* so that beginning teachers construct deep understandings of teaching and learning. Such conceptual work was embodied in the philosophy, practices, and structures of the MT Program and therefore this research offers to the

field a working example of such a “conceptually organized” teacher education program together with evidence of consistencies between its philosophy and principles and the principles and practices of its graduates.

However, there is also a caution here for teacher educators. The wholesale shifts in the philosophy, structures, and practices of a program that are necessary to achieve consistency across these elements can result in widespread destabilization of academic norms and in considerable internal strife within a Faculty or department. As many readers will know, the MT Program has now been dismantled in the face of ideological opposition to its guiding philosophy, its educational practices (particularly its stance on grading), and its stance on the role of field experiences in learning to teach. Other teacher education program leaders seeking to enact some of the ideals, practices, and structures articulated here need to be bold in their vision but also strategic in their implementation, helping to educate not only the preservice teachers who experience the curriculum and the practicing teachers in whose classrooms preservice teachers are placed, but also those who will ultimately determine the fate of the program—university hierarchies, school board officials, school principals, and parents.

### **Conclusion**

As Korthagen et al. (2006) note, “in order to change educational practices, it is necessary to break the circle of traditionally trained teachers who teach in a traditional manner” (p. 1021). Despite this understanding, many of the reports of innovative teacher education efforts centre on small-scale changes—usually to an individual component such as a practicum experience or a reform of an individual teaching methods course. However, tinkering with individual courses within an overarching program framework that does not have a clearly articulated philosophy and whose structures do not match the ideas being promulgated by the instructors teaching within it may be insufficient to enable new teachers to sustain innovative practices when they face opposition to those practices in the schools.

The findings of this study reveal that, seven years into these teachers’ careers, consistencies are evident between the teachers’ beliefs and practices and the grounding philosophy, principles, and structures of their particular initial teacher education program. Therefore, despite widespread reports that teacher education is often a weak intervention whose ideals cannot be maintained once new teachers enter the “real world” of teaching (Korthagen et al., 2006; Lunenberg et al., 2007; Wideen et al., 1998), this research suggests that initial teacher education can assist new teachers in developing the discourse, beliefs, commitments, and practices necessary for resisting the dominant discourses of the field.

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### Notes

- <sup>1</sup> The description that follows relates to the structure of the program at the time of the research study, though various elements of the program changed over the ensuing years and indeed the entire program has now been dismantled in the face of ideological opposition to its existence. For interested readers, an expanded exploration of the provocations of this form of teacher education is available (Lund, Panayotidis, Smits, & Towers, 2012).
- <sup>2</sup> See Towers (2010) for a detailed account of Daniel's classroom practices and efforts to sustain an inquiry-oriented approach in his classroom during his first year of teaching.

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