

# Teacher Candidates' Perceptions of Conceptual Orientations in Their Preservice Program

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Using interviews, focus groups, and observations, we examined teacher candidates' understanding of the conceptual orientations that defined their preservice program and practicum experience. Using Feiman-Nemser's (1990) framework, we analyzed our data to determine the dominant perspectives of teacher candidates. Results indicated congruence between the orientations (i.e., critical/social and personal) of their preservice program and teacher candidates' conceptions of their professional development. The results also suggested that conceptual orientations may not all be equally used in practice. Teacher candidates reported that the critical/social orientation was often not supported by their associate teachers and was particularly difficult to implement in math and science subject areas. Data also suggested that the implementation of the personal orientation depended on a prolonged experience within schools, which teacher candidates reported they were lacking.

Keywords: preservice teacher education, conceptual orientation, field-based teacher education, constructivist teaching, practicum

À l'aide d'entrevues, de discussions en groupe et d'observations, les auteurs ont cherché à cerner la compréhension qu'ont les futurs enseignants des orientations conceptuelles qui définissent leur programme de formation et leurs stages. Analysant les données recueillies à l'aide du cadre de Feiman-Nemser (1990), ils ont mis en lumière les principaux points de vue des candidats à l'enseignement. Les résultats indiquent une congruence entre les orientations (critique/sociale et personnelle) du programme de formation à l'enseignement et les idées que se font les candidats à l'enseignement au sujet de leur perfectionnement professionnel. Les résultats donnent également à penser que les orientations conceptuelles ne sont peut-être pas toutes utilisées de manière égale dans la pratique. Les candidats à l'enseignement ont signalé que l'orientation critique/sociale ne reçoit pas souvent l'appui des enseignants associés et était particulièrement difficile à mettre en œuvre en mathématiques et en sciences. Les données recueillies semblent également indiquer que le recours à l'orientation personnelle suppose une expérience prolongée dans les écoles, ce qui fait défaut, comme l'ont fait remarquer les candidats à l'enseignement.

Mots clés : formation à l'enseignement, orientation conceptuelle, formation à l'enseignement sur le terrain, enseignement constructiviste, stage

Although many preservice programs are based on particular views of what constitutes an effective teacher, no single unifying theory of teacher

education currently exists (Goodlad, 1998; Schwartz, 1996). Theorists and researchers in teacher education disagree with each other on what student teachers need to know and the best way to help them develop that knowledge (Hargreaves & Jacka, 1995; Jackson & Leroy, 1998). Attempts to legitimate particular kinds of teaching and to advance projects in teacher education do so in a context with little or no consensus. Research suggests multiple ways of understanding the meaning of effectiveness in teacher education; linear notions of reform do not reflect the dynamic qualities of teacher-education programs (Dunleavy, 1996). Our study examined the applicability of key concepts that underpinned an intermediate/senior preservice program. The latter may suggest important constraints that affect the application of particular approaches to teaching.

#### DIFFERENTIATING TEACHER-EDUCATION PROGRAMS

Unlike students studying medicine, law, accounting, or architecture, who tend to follow a set curriculum, not all teachers receive the same training (Darling-Hammond, 1996). More than ever, teacher-education programs are characterized by a variety of structural models and conceptual orientations that contribute to candidates' interpretations of effective teaching and learning (Fullan, Galluzzo, Morris, & Watson, 1998). Structural models are tied to particular forms of teacher preparation. For example, traditional preservice programs typically require students to complete course work in a university setting under the direction of university faculty. Conversely, both university faculty and public-school teachers are involved in planning, teaching, and evaluating within Professional-Development School (PDS) programs (Darling-Hammond, 1999). Thus, PDS programs require school-based teachers to play a more pronounced role in the delivery of course work. Much of the past and present debate related to teacher-education reform has been discussed in relation to the advantages and disadvantages of these models.

#### CONCEPTUAL DIMENSIONS

Unlike structural models that vary according to the length and duration of the practicum component as well as the relative importance of university versus school-based instruction, conceptual orientations are not tied to particular types of preservice programs. A conceptual orientation refers to a set of ideas about the goals of teacher education and the means for achieving them (Feiman-Nemser, 1990). Each orientation has a particular focus that highlights certain aspects of teaching, learning, and learning to

teach; that directs attention to a central goal of teacher preparation; and that manifests itself in particular practices (Feiman-Nemser, 1990). As Zeichner (1993) pointed out, no teacher-education program can be understood in relation to any one orientation. Research suggests that different orientations can be reflected within the same program (Feiman-Nemser, 1990). Zeichner (1993) noted that this assertion regarding multiple orientations embedded in programs is supported by observations from those who have studied teacher-education programs with the purpose of understanding the central concepts that guide their development. He argued that the degree of emphasis and particular meaning of various orientations gives particular programs their identities.

Clarifying the unique conceptual orientation of a particular teacher-education program is an important research endeavour. A well-defined conceptual framework helps identify a program's central tasks, such as helping teachers become intellectual leaders, promoting the primacy of experience, or developing a progressive social vision in all teachers. These core activities "logically and practically belong to the preservice phase of learning to teach" (Feiman-Nemser, 1990, p. 227). This type of conceptual clarity provides guidance to teacher educators in program development and evaluation by identifying issues or tasks that specific programs should address (Feiman-Nemser, 1990).

The question of what the central task(s) of a teacher should be continues to occupy the minds of those who prepare teachers for the challenges of twenty-first-century schools. Faculties of education cannot avoid emphasizing certain themes. In doing so, one can argue that all teacher-education programs implicitly address what should be the main responsibilities of teachers. Although little consensus exists on the degree to which certain issues should be emphasized, Feiman-Nemser's (1990) framework serves as a useful starting point for making such deliberations. Her framework allows practitioners and researchers a simple and effective way of organizing the underlying themes that drive any particular program.

The primary objective of this study was to determine the configuration of the main conceptual orientations of an alternative program at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (OISE) of the University of Toronto. This study serves as an important examination of students' comments about their teacher-education program. The latter is in contrast to previous conceptual-orientations research that has relied almost exclusively on the perceptions of faculty. The insights gleaned from the present study offer important implications for the operation of teacher-education programs in general.

## CONCEPTUAL ORIENTATIONS RESEARCH

Educational scholars have proposed several frameworks to examine conceptual orientations in preservice programs (Feiman-Nemser, 1990; Hartnett & Nash, 1980; Kennedy, 1987; Zeichner, 1993; Zimpher & Howey, 1987). Although considerable overlap occurs among these frameworks, Feiman-Nemser's (1990) has provided the most comprehensive scheme of the five previously listed. Her classification scheme, which addresses all the major elements that define teacher-education programs, includes the academic, practical, technological, personal, and critical/social orientations. One or more of these orientations are absent from each of the other frameworks and are not subsumed under a different category.

Feiman-Nemser's (1990) article, *Teacher Preparation: Structural and Conceptual Alternatives*, provides descriptions of each of her five main conceptual orientations:

- The academic orientation emphasizes the fact that teaching is primarily concerned with the transmission of knowledge and the development of understanding. This orientation, developed out of a liberal arts educational philosophy, focuses on a teacher's role as scholar and subject-matter specialist.
- The practical orientation focuses on the elements of craft, technique, and artistry that skilful practitioners reveal in their work. Advocates of this orientation argue that teachers must be prepared for the localized nature of teaching with its associated demand for adaptability. The reliance on the primacy of experience is a key source of knowledge for both new and experienced teachers.
- The technological orientation focuses on empirically validated teaching strategies. Learning to teach involves the acquisition of principles and practices derived from the scientific study of teaching.
- The personal orientation places the teacher-learner at the centre of the education process, where learning to teach is a process of learning to understand oneself and individual students.
- The critical/social orientation combines a progressive social vision with a radical critique of schooling in which teacher education is envisioned as a larger strategy to create a more just and democratic society.

If one agrees that all teacher-education programs possess these various orientations to some degree, then the relationships among these orientations are of utmost importance to teacher educators. Consider how the dominant orientation(s) in a program may influence teacher candidates' perceptions of those orientations that are more peripheral. One might ask how a program that focuses on the transmission of knowledge influences

social justice issues or the drive towards self-adequacy in teacher candidates. The previous examples highlight the multitude of relationships that will always exist within programs. There can never be a grand synthesis of orientations that washes away ideological differences (Zeichner, 1993).

Feiman-Nemser's (1990) research, which reveals some of the diversity within each orientation, provides a basis for thinking about the value of describing teacher-education programs in terms of conceptual orientations or patterns of emphasis of these orientations. Nevertheless, educational researchers have based conceptual orientation research mainly on the efforts of faculty to document and evaluate their own work (Feiman-Nemser, 1990). These reflections may depict the espoused (i.e., curriculum documents and plans) rather than the enacted curriculum (i.e., actual activities and discussions in class). In our study, we have examined the perceptions of teacher candidates in an intermediate/senior preservice program to explore their understanding of the conceptual orientations that made up their program.

#### THE PROGRAM

Our study considered an alternative program at OISE, classified as alternative primarily because of its focus on school, community, and global connections. Students in a cohort undertook a series of three core courses that were integrated to form a program: a Teacher Education Seminar, Educational Psychology, and School and Society. The Teacher Education Seminar provided an overview of secondary education in which teacher candidates 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 seminar was a full-year 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, teacher candidates developed an understanding of important psychological processes of formal education. Teacher candidates 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, teacher candidates developed a critical awareness of the intersections among schools, classrooms, communities, and society within 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 is considered a field-based program because of its particular practicum structure. Students spent approximately 15 days in placement schools in addition to the two regular four- to five-week placements that all intermediate/senior students completed. Both the additional days and two placements were normally completed within schools the program directors chose because of their close alignment with the program's thematic focus. Unfortunately, the intended field-component of the program was disrupted during the study's academic year by labour unrest. Many school boards in the Toronto area were unwilling to accept student teachers as part of their work-to-rule campaign. The program students essentially lost the field component (i.e., 15 additional days) that distinguished this program structurally from more traditional forms of teacher education.

#### MAJOR RESEARCH QUESTIONS

We examined teacher candidate's perceptions of the program through the application of Feiman-Nemser's (1990) framework, which was used to guide the development of data-gathering procedures and provide an organizational schema to analyze the data. Collectively, we designed the interview, focus-group, and field-work procedures to explicate the conceptual orientations of the program and to assess the impact of various ideas associated with specific conceptual orientations.

Three main research questions guided this study. First, we looked at how teacher candidates characterized the program in relation to Feiman-Nemser's conceptual orientations framework. This type of conceptual clarity provides a vehicle for program faculty to reflect on the main objectives of their program and on their own individual teaching. This in turn promotes the skills and dispositions of a reflective practitioner, which have been cited as an important component in professional development (Delaney, 1997).

Second, we considered the influence of the program on students' professional development. In essence, this question investigated some of the outcomes of the dominant ideas and practices associated with specific conceptual orientations. The inquiry process related to the second question needed to consider the unique structure of the program. As previously noted, the program was not organized around curriculum and instruction courses. Students also attended curriculum and instruction classes in their subject areas of choice. We were particularly interested in how various ideas within the core courses of the program influenced students' thinking

in their subject areas. This question determined whether teacher candidates used the main ideas in the program in their various disciplines. Are various conceptual orientations more or less applicable to certain disciplines?

Third, we considered the factors that influenced students' ability to adhere to their educational philosophy within their schools. We sought to uncover the various personal, social, and organizational structures that affected a teacher candidate's practice teaching experience.

## METHOD

### Research Site

**Program Students.** We drew our participants from teacher candidates within the program. We observed, surveyed, and interviewed them at various stages in the academic year. In 2000/2001, 47 students were enrolled in the program: 10 males (21.3%) and 37 females (78.7%), reflecting the increasing gender difference of secondary preservice teachers in recent years. Subject specialists from many areas of the curriculum were represented within the program student body. However, the majority of students (70%) within the program were working toward gaining credentials in social studies courses (i.e., History, Politics, Geography, Family Studies, and Individual and Society) as their subject areas.

**Program Faculty.** Four full-time teaching members were assigned to the program for the 2000/2001 academic year. Collectively, these four 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).

### Procedures

Data collection procedures included field work, focus groups, and semi-structured interviews. The researchers took field notes in 21 university classes from the first week of September to the last week of April. The lead author usually sat at the front of the university classrooms. Students became accustomed to seeing him in their classes and were not shy in their interactions with him. Many jokingly commented that he was in class more than some of the other students. Although serving as a participant observer is not a requisite to acquire valuable information for a study, it is often a preferred practice because participating with the group makes it a bit easier to diminish the impressions people may have

about an outsider (Wiseman, 1999). He felt that he built a high level of rapport between himself and the program students. Thus, we concluded that the observations made were genuine. As researchers, we were disinterested outsiders with no stake in the operation of the program.

We held focus-group interviews 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. We gave the teacher candidates the option of signing up for one of the four 45-minute focus-group sessions where we asked them to reflect on the following 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 out of a possible 47 students attended one of the four focus group sessions, with a participation rate of approximately 89%. Participation in the mid-year focus-group sessions was completely voluntary and we provided teacher candidates no compensation for attending.

We conducted 12 interviews at the end of the academic year, after students had completed both of their required practicum sessions. Participants reflected a wide range of subject areas, including science, math, geography, history, politics, English, music, dramatic arts, and individual and society. The interview protocol contained three main questions:

- To what extent (if any) have your initial conceptions of what it means to be a teacher in secondary schools shifted as a result of your course-based and school-based experiences within the program this academic year? This question also used three probes to elicit detailed answers in each interview: How has the program influenced your educational philosophy? How has the program influenced your thinking in your subject areas? How has the program influenced your practice in the field?
- What do you see as the main focus of the program?
- Thinking back to your teaching placements, what factors promoted or constrained your ability to adhere to your educational philosophy within school settings?

As with the focus groups, teacher candidates participated in the interviews voluntarily without compensation.

We did not explicitly set out to elicit responses that addressed each of the five orientations. Rather than skew responses in the direction of one or more orientations, we used the probing questions in focus groups and interviews was meant to clarify unresolved points. It was primarily during the data analysis stage that we determined the congruence between student



responses and particular orientations. We based the rationale behind our data gathering procedure on the fact that Feiman-Nemser's framework was extensive in nature, so student responses would undoubtedly align with particular orientations when they discussed the nature of the program.

#### Data Analysis

Analysis of all three data sources followed the constant comparison method outlined by Bertrand, Brown, and Ward (1992). The process of constant comparison is similar to the more widely recognized grounded theory approach, where the researcher develops an emergent fit: that is, they modify the category to fit the data and not select data to match a predetermined category (Taber, 2000). We read and reviewed each field note, focus-group, and interview transcript, assigning codes to each entry directly in the margins of the transcripts. We merged entries with codes of similar meanings into a new category. We reviewed the transcripts a second time to ensure the reliability of the codes and the accuracy of the merged items. We repeated this process for each set of transcripts carrying codes from the first field-note transcript to the second field-note transcript. We also used this procedure for the focus-group and interview data — that is, we carried over codes from the first focus-group and interview transcripts to the second focus-group and interview transcripts. With this procedure, we compared students across the three data sources.

### RESULTS

#### Description of the Program

All data sources converged to depict a program that was primarily focused on the critical/social and personal orientations. Teacher candidates consistently made reference to issues that were closely aligned with these orientations.

I think that I was trying to think of this open-mindedness and sort of place where people encourage each other to embrace values that are beyond what a lot of society is ready to embrace. Most of the class is against homophobic actions, sexist actions. (Teacher Candidate)

I've worked in organizations that had similar visions in that they were anti-racist, client centered, attempting to challenge the status quo, attempting to challenge the envelope. In this program we are encouraged to be critical and reflective of board policies, ministry policies but we are also being trained to sort of carry the professional persona. (Teacher

Candidate)

Every student interviewed made reference to ideas that were congruent with critical/social orientation when discussing the program, providing evidence of the prominence of this orientation.

Students also referred to the constructivist perspective, a learner-centred teaching style closely related to key aspects of the personal orientation. Proponents of this orientation argue for classrooms where learning derives from students' interests and takes the form of active, self-directed exploration. They also stress concepts such as readiness and personal meaning.

The program really emphasized the importance of a constructivist approach to learning where learners construct their own knowledge. Which I think on some level I believed anyway but to suddenly have a lot of textbooks and quotes to support what I believed was helpful. (Teacher Candidate)

Materials wise too, learning about equity issues and constructivist learning approaches, that all fills in together to bring us together in this big picture of what we would like to see as education. (Teacher Candidate)

As indicated in the previous quotations, students typically referred to the importance of equity issues when they discussed their own personal development as a teacher. In this respect, student responses addressed both components of Feiman-Nemser's personal orientation — namely, its focus on personal development and the requisite knowledge needed to select materials or learning tasks that respond to individual students.

Very few comments in interviews or focus groups were related to any of the three remaining conceptual orientations. Our field work also supported this convergence of data. University classroom observations revealed that much of the discussion concerned radical critiques of schooling, progressive social visions, and a learner-centred teaching style. The instructor responsible for teaching the School and Society course often encouraged students to think critically about concepts such as the real school, regular student, regular curriculum, applied/academic student, problem student, and real subject and how these concepts affected their thinking and practice as a teacher. She or he would argue that education is a "multi-level phenomenon" and that forces reinforced or conspired to maintain a regular program. This professor often discussed these shortcomings in terms of race, class, and gender. Conversely, the instructor responsible for teaching the Educational Psychology course explicitly set up his or her classroom both to model and reinforce the constructivist

perspective. She or he would often discuss a theory of learning that viewed students as partners in the learning process. This professor noted that understanding students' interests in relation to the classroom was essential to structured classroom activities: students should be the centre of any classroom.

The instructors who jointly taught the Teacher Education Seminar would reinforce the ideas taking place in the other two classes. For example, they discussed the importance of being critical of sources of information used in classrooms such as textbooks, Internet, television, or other media sources. On one occasion, they invited a guest speaker to discuss how teacher candidates could carry out special projects with their students such as writing books on anti-racism, poverty, or child labour, as well as doing outreach work with children and senior citizens in the community.

#### Professional Development of Teacher Candidates

Results from the three data sources indicated that students framed their professional development primarily in relation to the perceived focus of the program. In interviews, we asked teacher candidates "to what extent (if any) have your initial conceptions of what it means to be a teacher in secondary schools shifted as a result of your course-based and school-based experiences within the program this academic year?" Their responses to this question were congruent with the critical/social and personal orientations.

It has given me the opportunity to spend some time and think about issues that are important, issues concerning race, gender, class, different ways of looking at things. I was in a structured environment in which I could share ideas with other people. I could examine different perspectives and values on those issues and think about how I could teach from a different perspective. (Teacher Candidate)

I think one thing is you really have to know the students. Really being aware of where your students are coming from and what's their experience, and you may not be teaching in a way they can understand. I've really started to become aware of the students in my class as individuals and what they need. The more I do, I think it's not 5 different colours it's 30 different types of colours. (Teacher Candidate)

The above quotations echo the sentiments of many other students: that to be effective, teachers have to build an inclusive classroom environment and strong personal relationships with students.

The focus-group data were consistent with the findings from the interview sessions. As previously mentioned, the lead question in the focus group was "How have you grown professionally this year in the program,

what personal goals still remain, and how might the program help you achieve them?" Although the majority of students focused on the latter two parts of this question, those that spoke of their own professional development during the year made reference primarily to issues that reflected the critical/social and personal orientations.

I've grown over the last term, just listening to people's perspectives in the group discussions and especially related to equity issues. I've learned a lot from the group discussions that people have had in the classroom. (Teacher Candidate)

How I will understand what they are or are not going through? How I will be able to address them? The teaching aspect, strategies and activities to use? I have been thinking about things I want to bring to my students, how these things relate to them and interest them. Then my total relation to them, how do I connect to them? I did not understand this stuff before. (Teacher Candidate)

Clearly, the development of ideas related to the critical/social and personal orientations were dominant areas of professional growth.

When they were given an explanation of Feiman-Nemser's framework, teacher candidates also seemed to identify with the main orientations of the program. In the School and Society course, the instructor briefly discussed the nature of Feiman-Nemser's (1990) framework, after teacher candidates had read this article. Teacher candidates were then asked to pick an orientation that they identified with strongly. Of the 25 teacher candidates who participated in this activity, 12 chose the personal orientation, 9 chose the critical/social orientation, 4 chose the practical orientation, and none chose the academic or technological orientations. Thus, most of the teacher candidates participating in this activity identified with the two main perspectives within the program. Although these teacher candidates might have identified with more than one orientation if they had been provided the opportunity, these results do provide a glimpse into the mindset of teacher candidates within the program. They also suggest why teacher candidates tended to speak of their educational philosophy, practice in the field, and thinking in subject areas using concepts closely aligned with the critical/social and personal orientations.

Although teacher candidates routinely framed their professional development in relation to the critical/social and personal orientations, the ease with which they incorporated these ideas in practice varied from subject to subject. Many teacher candidates indicated that they had difficulty implementing key program ideas within specific courses during their practicum. They found it particularly difficult to implement the concepts related to the critical/social orientation such as equity strategies.

[M]y teachables are math and science. In math, I have no idea how to bring it in. I brought this up in Instructor X's class. I'm very unlikely to open a discussion on racism or sexism, or any of those topics in math class as part of my curriculum. If something happens I'll talk about it but it's really hard to see how that stuff fits in terms of curriculum. (Teacher Candidate)

This response illustrates a general trend in our data that students teaching social studies and humanities courses were better situated to implement the program concepts during their practicum experiences.

#### Promoting and Constraining Factors in Practicum Settings

Results from the interview, focus-group, and field-work data indicated that a number of key factors promoted and constrained teacher candidates within their placement settings. These factors had a profound effect on teacher candidates' ability to use important concepts stressed in university classes as well as to develop their own personal teaching style.

**Promoting Factors.** Some teacher candidates discussed the importance of having a supportive associate teacher who accepted the key ideas of their preservice program. Consider the follow quotation in response to the query, "What factors promoted your ability to adhere to your educational philosophy within practicum settings?"

The things that helped me were my associates. One associate in particular had a really strong interest in a lot of the things that I did, like anti-racism education and I had a lot of freedom. Another associate of mine was well versed in the new curriculum and was using it in a way that it actually occurred to me that it could be possible to use. (Teacher Candidate)

Not surprisingly, those teacher candidates who identified with the critical/social orientation when they completed the School and Society group activity explicitly identified finding "like-minded people" when teaching equity issues. These students recognized this as an important support as indicated by the previous quotation.

Teacher candidates also spoke of the relationship between classroom structure and the ability to form close personal relationships with individual students. Their comments suggested that less rigid classroom arrangements were more conducive to forming bonds between teacher and student. Teacher candidates viewed these types of arrangements favourably. As previously noted, the ability to form personal relationships is a key component of Feiman-Nemser's personal orientation.

Students had more freedom. They only had to be in class Monday, Tuesday to Friday; they

could be wherever they wanted, studying whatever subject they wanted. So the relationship was a lot more personal, because you also have the teacher advisor program. They've been doing that for years, even before it became mandatory. (Teacher Candidate)

Not surprisingly, teacher candidates who identified with the personal orientation noted the need to find "personally oriented schools" that provided prolonged periods within placement settings.

**Constraining Factors.** All teacher candidates cited an unsupportive associate teacher as a constraining factor. Indeed, they had this experience in one or both of their practicum placements. Aside from the difficulty in developing a general teaching style, many students noted that associate teachers had difficulty with progressive ideas, particularly around equity issues. Interviewed teacher candidates offered a picture of associate teachers who were resistant to change.

A big hindrance and something that really scares me about going into teaching is that both the schools I went to were not particularly progressive. They were very conservative and change was not seen as a good thing. It always seemed like it was in this context of, this is how I do it and this is how it works. Or getting comments like you're just full of ideas right now, you're young. (Teacher Candidate)

I couldn't do the kind of teaching that I wanted to do. The people I was working with were nice but they weren't aware of the impact that some of the comments might have on students, on people of other ethnicities. (Teacher Candidate)

Not surprisingly, field-work data indicated that students who identified with the critical/social orientation believed there were negative consequences for "being who you are." That is, they believed they would be looked down on for openly embracing anti-racist, anti-sexist, or other critical/social ideals. In general, the negative attitude of colleagues and the prospect of being evaluated by someone who did not share their philosophy or values acted as a significant constraint. We found teacher candidates' experiences consistent with the teacher-education literature (Smith & Souviney, 1997).

Teacher candidates also reported difficulties with implementing constructivist practices because of the conservative nature of schools.

I really needed to do a lot more with constructivist activities. I approached my associate about doing constructivist activities and she frowned and said I know that there are benefits with constructivist activities but they tend to take longer to carry out. She was a real chalk and talk person. (Teacher Candidate)

This comment illustrates how teacher candidates were often required to

change their teaching approach to satisfy their associate teachers.

Overall, a larger trend suggested that teacher candidates were not able to use teaching practices in practicum settings that were congruent with the program. One teacher candidate summarized this difficulty quite succinctly:

Inertia made it difficult to do things that were out of the ordinary, arranging your classroom around a constructivist ideal or dealing with equity issues explicitly in the curriculum. (Teacher Candidate)

The obvious differences that existed between associate teachers and teacher candidates, as well as teacher candidates' reliance on positive evaluations, made many of them reluctant to use teaching practices their associate teachers did not embrace.

Teacher candidates also noted that the structure of the practicum did not foster professional development. They reported that the short duration of the practicum made it difficult to form personal relationships with their students, learn the system, or get a realistic sense of the demands of teaching.

You're there for a short period of time. You're in there in the middle of the year so it's very hard to establish a relationship in that short period of time and teach and learn the system in terms of those written and unwritten rules. (Teacher Candidate)

It is important to reiterate that the program students lost the field component (i.e., additional 15 days) that would have enabled them to have a longer experience within a school.

A small number of teacher candidates also lamented that they did not have the proper resources to work effectively at placement sites.

Around things of equity, I don't feel like I had the resources to use in my practicum. I think it all came from me originally. It was all the stuff that I had before. (Teacher Candidate)

This teacher candidate was referring not only to tangible resources such as textbooks or curriculum documents, but also to the types of strategies associated with infusing principles of equity within the classroom.

## CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

The results of this study clearly indicate that the critical/social and personal orientations were the dominant conceptual orientations of the program. Teacher candidates' comments converged to depict a program focused on

issues related to social justice as well as the intricacies of the student-teacher dyad. Teacher candidates primarily discussed social justice issues in terms of the power relations associated with race, class, and gender. The intersection of these components and their relationship with equity issues was a key theme within the program. Teacher candidates also noted an emphasis on constructivism and learner-centred approaches to teaching.

Teacher candidates discussed equity in relation to the School and Society course and constructivism in relation to the Educational Psychology course. This apparent one-to-one correspondence between specific courses and particular conceptual orientations did not extend to the Teacher Education Seminar. This course brought together ideas that stressed both a critical/social and personal orientation.

Aside from the specific configuration of conceptual orientations, we also examined in this study teacher candidate's perceptions of their professional development during the preservice year. The majority of teacher candidates discussed their professional development in terms closely aligned to the critical/social and personal orientations. Teacher candidates repeatedly used the term equity in their interview and focus-group responses to describe how the program influenced their educational philosophy, thinking in subject areas, and their practice in the field. For many teacher candidates, the program provided a place where they could deliberate on the importance of key social justice issues. Many teacher candidates also discussed their personal development in relation to the nature of the teacher-student dyad. Teacher candidates emphasized the importance of knowing their students as individuals, particularly when making decisions about instructional practices and the selection of resources. In general, teacher candidates' responses indicated that it was essential to adopt a learner-centred approach to teaching that is premised on close personal relations with students.

Interestingly, the study indicated that teacher candidates could not apply the conceptual orientations equally within all subject areas. For the most part, teacher candidates teaching courses such as math or science struggled to find ways to implement critical/social ideas within their classrooms. These teacher candidates argued that their professors needed to provide more strategies if they were to infuse these types of ideas in a meaningful way. Whether this change should occur within the School and Society course where professors emphasized these types of ideas, or within teacher candidates' curriculum and instruction courses, remains an open question. More collaboration among faculty may ease this perceived problem for the program students. Furthermore, results indicated that ideas related to the critical/social and personal orientations were difficult



to subscribe to in traditional practicum settings. Although several teacher candidates reported that associate teachers welcomed their attempts to address social justice issues in their practicum classrooms, the majority of teacher candidates typically reported resistance from their associate teachers.

The tension that often exists between associate and teacher candidates' teaching styles has been repeatedly cited in the literature. This study supports many of the criticisms that preservice candidates have often expressed about the practicum experience, namely that it is often a period where they are forced to adopt a particular teaching style and philosophy to secure a positive evaluation (Smith & Souviney, 1997). Teacher candidates suggested that associate teachers appear to favour the practical orientation with its emphasis on craft knowledge and the wisdom of practice.

For the most part, teacher candidates depicted schools as fixed environments that were resistant to change. Those ideas that threatened to change the status quo, such as the implementation of an anti-racist curriculum, were often subtly or explicitly frowned on. Clearly, programs that support a critical/social perspective need to carefully monitor their placements so that teacher candidates have an opportunity to actually address these issues and teach from this standpoint. Interestingly, the program placement schools were chosen with this intent in mind. The loss of these sites during the labour unrest serves to further highlight the importance of finding an appropriate match between associate teachers and teacher candidates. Within these schools, teacher candidates would have had associate teachers familiar with the program's underlying philosophy and presumably been in a better position to address social justice issues.

Just as the critical/social perspective was often incongruent with the social structures within schools, teacher candidates often reported that teaching from a personal orientation was difficult because of the structure of the practicum. Teacher candidates indicated that they needed prolonged periods within schools to build close personal relationships with students. They noted the difficulties of trying to co-ordinate group activities or tackle sensitive topics because they had such a limited amount of time within specific classrooms. Thus, field-based components of a program seem to be integral to building this important level of trust. Although this result is not surprising, it does underscore the importance of having a practicum structure that facilitates the intended focus of a program. In this study we found constraints that often act in opposition to the critical/social and personal orientations.

Our study has highlighted how the two dominant orientations of the

program were often not supported within contemporary secondary schools. Teacher candidates' interviews depicted classroom teachers and schools focused primarily on the pragmatic aspects of the teaching profession. Working in isolation, teacher candidates were often expected to adopt the teaching style of their associate teacher. What worked for an associate teacher was expected to work for a teacher candidate. Associate teachers provided little if any room to incorporate divergent ideas or teaching practices within most practicum settings.

#### Implications

The tensions that are inherent when the critical/social and personal orientations meet traditional secondary schools indicate important challenges for preservice programs focused on these themes. It seems essential that teacher candidates understand how schools may not support these orientations and receive coping strategies to offset these challenges. Teacher educators need to take the lead in this matter by providing teacher candidates with strategies on how to retain or negotiate teaching approaches that may not be endorsed by their associate teachers. Failing to do so may result in a teaching profession that is unable to take advantage of recent innovations stressed within preservice programs.

Teacher educators should also examine the expectations they place on their students. Is it realistic to expect a student to completely subscribe to a critical/social or personal orientation? Are preservice students trained within such programs being set up for failure and disillusionment with the profession? Lastly, are teacher candidates better served by a practical orientation that prepares them for the demands of a typical classroom? Perhaps teacher candidates must first learn the practical aspects of teaching a class of 30 or more students before they can focus their attention on other orientations promoted within their preservice program. The latter suggests that teacher educators need to seriously consider how they may embed their program's orientation(s) into the realities of school's practical orientation. Teacher candidates trained within such programs would be more likely to retain important concepts stressed within their university classes.

Similarly, if universities value approaches to teaching such as those promoted by the critical/social or personal orientations, greater effort needs to be placed on inservice training. The latter would presumably facilitate a more welcoming environment for such approaches to teaching. Practicum co-ordinators also need to actively seek out placements that are more closely aligned with the dominant philosophy of their programs. This

match would allow teacher candidates to implement many of the key concepts they are learning in their university courses. Only when teacher candidates are able to fully implement program concepts can a successful merger of theory and practice occur.

Given the limited scope of this study, future research is needed to determine the robustness of Feiman-Nemser's framework for other types of teacher-education programs, such as those that follow a different program structure. Research may reveal that the components within Feiman-Nemser's framework are not represented evenly within different program structures. The latter may suggest that specific conceptual orientations are indeed related to particular preservice models. Similarly, it seems important to examine the factors that promote and constrain the successful implementation of the academic, practical, and technological orientations. Research may reveal that all five orientations are not equal in their perceived applicability within practicum settings. The latter poses a significant challenge for programs that emphasize ideas not endorsed in contemporary schools. In a field that has often lacked conceptual clarity, this type of research appears essential.

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