

Evaluating the Challenges Foreign-trained Teacher Candidates Face in the Alternative Teacher Accreditation Program for Teachers with International Experience

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The Alternative Teacher Accreditation Program for Teachers with International Experience (ATAPTIE) is a special Bachelor of Education program offered to new Canadians who are foreign-trained teachers at the Faculty of Education, Queen's University. To better assist foreign-trained professionals to be integrated into the Canadian society and to make use of their experience and talents, the Ontario Government, in April 2002, invested \$3.6 million in nine bridging training programs to provide foreign-trained immigrants with the skill and knowledge needed to practice their profession in the province, of which the ATAPTIE is one of them. This program is funded by the Ontario Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities (MTCU) for three cohorts (2002-2005), and is collaborated among three partnerships: Queen's University Faculty of Education, Ottawa-Carleton District School Board and LASI World Skills Ottawa. The ultimate merit and worth of the ATAPTIE will be determined by the success of candidates in acquiring a degree in education, an Ontario teaching certificate and in securing employment in an elementary school, and will be evaluated by the Assessment and Evaluation Group at the Faculty of Education. The overarching purpose of this evaluation is to provide evidence to the stakeholders such as the MTCU and the three partners regarding the value and sustainability of such a program. Accordingly, the nature of the evaluation will be improvement-oriented (Patton, 1997) and context-based (Lynch, 1996)

Conceptions of the role of the teacher and student, and the teaching and learning process vary somewhat differently within North American and other international contexts. This difference to a large extent determines whether foreign-trained professionals can be successfully adapted and acculturated to the new environment – the Ontario teaching context in this case. Collectively, theoretical and methodological features of North American teacher learning and teacher education focus on themes related to: (a) cognitive and constructivist notions of learning that emphasize the role of teacher and student prior to knowledge, motivation, and interest, (b) conceptions of learning that feature learning by doing within context, and (c) the role of collaboration and reflection contributing to the production of professional knowledge (Beattie, 1995; Clandinin, 2000; Laferriere, Breuleux, & Bracewell, 2000; Putnam & Borko, 2000; Lucas, 1999). Whereas, the decontextualized and transmission-based understandings of knowledge and learning have been held among teacher educators in other international contexts such as African, Asian and Middle Eastern countries where the ATAPTIE teacher candidates come from (Tahir, 2000; Bassopo-Moyo, 1997; Haswesh, 1996; White, 1997; Sharp & Ning, 1998; Ackers & Hardman, 2001). These two contrastive models of teaching and learning in teacher education can contribute to great frustration and difficulties for foreign-trained teachers when they receive education and later on secure employment in the North America contexts.

Methodology

The purpose of the evaluation of the ATAPTIE is 1) to understand the challenges experienced by these foreign-trained teachers and 2) gather information on variables that contribute and impede their success in achieving the goals of the program determined by a) acquiring a degree in education, b) an Ontario teaching certificate and c) securing employment in an elementary

school. These three elements of success will be represented by ATAPRTIE teacher candidates during their academic program study (10 weeks), their school-based practicum (16 weeks), and certification, teacher testing, and job hunting (4-5 weeks). Due to the nature of the evaluation being improvement-oriented, data-collection and analysis will be conducted on a continuous basis throughout their program from the admission in May till August the following year, and using multiple research methods by asking and observing. Two comprehensive surveys, classroom observations, interviews (individual and focus group) with candidates, associate teachers and principals will be conducted among the three cohorts of ATAPTIE candidates (2002-2005).

First, two survey instruments will be used for cohort 1, 2 and 3 to track ATAPTIE teacher candidates' success with the academic program over the summer of each year during the academic program. The purposes is 1) to evaluate the perceived strengths and the potential areas of improvement for the program, 2) to document candidates' growth in this phase of their program, and 3) to understand candidates' degree of satisfaction and enthusiasm over the program. Evaluation instrument #1 is designed to achieve the first purpose 1 and will be conducted in class (30-45 minutes). Instrument #2, completed outside the class, consists of 30 5-Likert-scale statements in relation to purpose 2 and 3.

Second, individual and focus group interviews will be used to collect information regarding the regular school-based and the alternative practicum. Focus group interviews with candidates will center upon discovering the experiences and activities that contribute to the practicum successes and difficulties. Extended observations and in-depth interviews with principals and associate teachers in practicum schools will intend to investigate external factors that influence the experiences and the success of the teacher candidates. Questions will focus on the role of the alternative practicum, associate teachers/schools' expectations of candidates, and candidates' abilities to adapt to the school environment. Randomly selected sample of 1/3 of candidates and associate teachers will be selected for the data collection. The interview will last 45-60 minutes and will be audiotaped and transcribed verbatim afterwards.

Third, using formal admission data and follow-up questions on background and motivation, an analysis of existing data set and the evaluation of the candidates will be conducted to compare the ATAPTIE candidates with the regular B Eds at Queen's. Assessment and Evaluation Group (AEG) will assess the degree to which candidates vary on the criteria to determine the importance of each in meeting the overall goals of graduation, certification and employment. It will be of particular importance to assess which of the criteria, if any, are powerful predictors on the desired goals.

A clearer and better understanding of this particular group of teacher candidates' experiences and an investigation of factors contributing to or impeding their success in the program will offer insights about the nature and interpretation of teacher learning for new immigrants. The findings will provide valuable references and direction for the future relevant programs concerning foreign-trained professionals in Canada and other immigrant countries.