

Teacher Candidates' Perceptions of School Organization: Fundamental inconsistencies between expectations and experiences

Perceptions des candidats à l'enseignement face à l'organisation scolaire : incohérences fondamentales entre les attentes et les expériences pratiques

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Résumé de l'article

Les candidats à l'enseignement inscrits au sein des programmes d'éducation des maîtres à travers le Canada sont exposés à la réalité de l'organisation scolaire au cours de leurs expériences pratiques d'enseignement. Or, si la littérature soulève abondamment les inquiétudes des nouveaux enseignants, peu d'attention a été accordée aux facteurs de l'organisation scolaire comme sources de dissonance pour les nouveaux enseignants et les candidats à la profession enseignante. En ce sens, cette étude utilise des méthodes quantitatives et qualitatives pour déterminer les effets des stages sur les croyances des aspirants enseignants relativement à l'organisation scolaire en Ontario. La conclusion fondamentale de cette étude est que les expériences des aspirants enseignants durant leurs travaux pratiques ont des effets significativement négatifs sur leurs croyances concernant l'organisation scolaire.

TEACHER CANDIDATES' PERCEPTIONS OF SCHOOL ORGANIZATION: FUNDAMENTAL INCONSISTENCIES BETWEEN EXPECTATIONS AND EXPERIENCES

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ABSTRACT. Preservice teacher-candidates enrolled in teacher education programs across Canada are exposed to the nuances of school organization during their practice-teaching assignments. Although the literature is full of scholarship about the concerns of new teachers, less attention has been given to school organizational factors as sources of dissonance for new teachers and preservice teacher education candidates. This study employed quantitative and qualitative methods to determine the effect of the practicum experience on prospective teachers' beliefs about school organization in Ontario. The fundamental finding of the study was that participants' experiences during their teaching-practicum assignments had a significantly negative effect upon their beliefs about school organization.

PERCEPTIONS DES CANDIDATS À L'ENSEIGNEMENT FACE À L'ORGANISATION SCOLAIRE : INCOHÉRENCES FONDAMENTALES ENTRE LES ATTENTES ET LES EXPÉRIENCES PRATIQUES

RÉSUMÉ. Les candidats à l'enseignement inscrits au sein des programmes d'éducation des maîtres à travers le Canada sont exposés à la réalité de l'organisation scolaire au cours de leurs expériences pratiques d'enseignement. Or, si la littérature soulève abondamment les inquiétudes des nouveaux enseignants, peu d'attention a été accordée aux facteurs de l'organisation scolaire comme sources de dissonance pour les nouveaux enseignants et les candidats à la profession enseignante. En ce sens, cette étude utilise des méthodes quantitatives et qualitatives pour déterminer les effets des stages sur les croyances des aspirants enseignants relativement à l'organisation scolaire en Ontario. La conclusion fondamentale de cette étude est que les expériences des aspirants enseignants durant leurs travaux pratiques ont des effets significativement négatifs sur leurs croyances concernant l'organisation scolaire.

INTRODUCTION

Creating organizational frameworks to help teachers engage students in authentic learning is a complex but necessary endeavour (Bransford, Darling-Hammond, & LePage, 2005; Cole & Knowles, 2000; Turner-Bisset, 2001). Equally significant is the need to support novice teachers, particularly in circumstances where school organization does not adequately sustain knowledge-creation and meaningful action (Darling-Hammond, 2005; Lipshitz, Friedman, & Popper, 2007). School organization consists of an educational hierarchy, structure, and bureaucracy that enable students, teachers, and administrators to function effectively (Fineman, Sims, & Gabriel, 2006). The formal procedures and practices of the school organization govern the norms that lend order to the professional relationships and day-to-day functions of schooling (Young & Levin, 1998). As socially constructed systems of activity, school organizations are goal directed. The organization represents a purposive system that codifies its common goals and school vision – often in the context of mission statements (Aldrich & Ruef, 2006). Sustainable school organizations recognize the potential for members to exert influence and exercise their meaningful involvement in student learning (Morenoff, Sampson, & Raudenbush, 2001; Payne, Gottfredson, & Gottfredson, 2003). The positive outcomes of sustainable school organizations are documented in the literature (Gottfredson, Gottfredson, Payne, & Gottfredson, 2003; Welsh, 2000). Schools organized as communities of professional practice encourage members to engage in shared meaning and knowledge-creation (Hara, 2001; Zhu & Baylen 2005). Research suggests that sustainable school organization also influences broader collective action since the work of educators extends beyond classrooms and policies (Morgan, 2006; Young, 2000).

Preservice teacher candidates are directly exposed to the factors that influence school organization and professional culture during their practice-teaching assignments (Lee, Bryk, & Smith, 1993). Organizations that foster collegial and collaborative professional relationships are more responsive to the varying needs of novice teachers (Bryk, Camburn, & Louis, 1999). Furthermore, they conceptualize school organization from a quality processes paradigm (Marshall, Pritchard, & Gunderson, 2004) rather than from a division of labour perspective that silos certain functions and organizational roles. Research attests to the fact that schools organized as collaborative professional communities with clear and achievable goals are more sustainable (Fullan, 2002; Johnson & Johnson, 1998; Lieberman, 1996). Sustainable school organization also includes the symbiotic roles of knowledge, institutional norms, and specific organizational roles apart from the technical requirements that pertain to school and schooling (Oplatka, 2004; Rowan & Miskel, 1999).

Purpose of the study

Preservice teacher-candidates enrolled in teacher education programs across Canada are exposed to the particular nuances of varying school organizations during their practice-teaching assignments. Interestingly, although the literature is full of studies into the problems and concerns of beginning teachers (Calderhead & Robson, 1991; Cherubini, 2006), significantly less research has been focused on the factors of school organization as sources of dissonance among new teachers and even less research on preservice teacher education candidates (Menon & Cristou, 2002). Given that beginning teachers' experiences are "affected by perceptions and expectations formed during teacher training" (Menon & Christou, 2002, p. 98), and those individual perceptions and expectations factor into their career evolution (Bandura, 1997), it seemed prudent to compare their expectations prior to the field-teaching placements with their experiences after the practicum. As Murmane, Singer, Willet, Kemple, and Olsen (1991) suggest, the disconnect between teacher candidates' expectations and the eventual realities of their role as teachers can be very stressful and have an adverse effect upon their career development.

I employed quantitative and qualitative research methods to determine the effect of the student-teacher practicum experience on prospective teachers' beliefs about school organization in Ontario. The examination of prospective teachers' experiences as they are immersed in various school organizations clarifies "the problems teachers face and the knowledge they find of most worth. By attending to student teachers' concerns we can further understand the processes students undergo to become teachers" (Guillaume & Rudney, 1993, p. 65). The results may help education faculty and school board teacher induction providers across Canada to evaluate the disconnect between preservice teachers' and new teachers' expectations and experiences of school organization.

METHODS

The study's mixed-methods design provided the opportunity for participants to elaborate upon their quantitative responses through open-ended questions (Creswell & Plano-Clark, 2007; Elliot, 2005; Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2003).

Participants

Preservice students enrolled in a consecutive one-year post-graduate bachelor of education teacher-preparation program from a mid-sized Canadian university in Ontario were invited to participate in this study. Seventy-five students accepted the invitation (from the 145 originally enlisted), representing a 52% response rate. One percent of the responses were discarded during the preliminary vetting due to response prevarication. In self-reported measurement indicators, 63% of participants were female and 17% male; 51% were enrolled in the intermediate/senior qualification program and 41% in the primary/junior

divisional qualifications; 65% belonged to the 22 to 29 year old age bracket, 11% to the 30 to 39 year old age category, and 13% of those who responded indicated that they were 40 years of age or older. The participants completed their practicum in numerous elementary and secondary schools dispersed across a vast geographical region in Ontario.

Procedure

The results from the Likert-scale items were compared with the responses to the open-ended questions on the survey. This involved the concurrent collection and analysis of both quantitative and qualitative data (of equal weighting) prior to the merging of the two properties of data during the interpretation process (Creswell, Plano Clark, Gutmann, & Hanson, 2003; Hansen, Creswell, Plano Clark, Petska, & Creswell, 2005). On a basis of a Likert-type scale ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree, participants indicated their expectations before their initial practicum experience at the beginning of the school year and then ranked the same items after their final teaching practicum at the conclusion of their preservice teacher education program. Each of the seven statements began with, *During my interning and practice-teaching in schools, I expect that....* The statements were scripted as follows: Teachers will be equitably provided with the resources they need to be creative and effective; School will have a functional mission statement that is effectively communicated to parents, staff, and students; Schools will have a mission statement that is representative of the staff's collective vision; Teachers will perceive school administration as consistently reinforcing the school rules; Administrators will consult teachers about decisions needed to be made within the school that influence school policy; Teachers will observe one another's teaching to facilitate professional development; School boards will offer a comprehensive mentorship program for beginning teachers.

In the qualitative section of the pre-survey, participants commented upon their expectation that school organization will be conducive to collaborative and collegial practice. Specifically, the two questions were stated as follows:

- i. Schools will be organized so that both new and experienced teachers have opportunities to fulfill their own vision and beliefs. Explain why you either agree or disagree with this statement.
- ii. Do you expect administrators and teachers (regardless of their years of experience in teaching) to work collaboratively to improve student learning? Explain in detail. If not, explain why.

Conversely, the post-survey invited their explanations to the following question:

- iii. Describe examples of how collaboration was embedded in the routines and practices of schools to improve student learning. Or, explain why you believe collaboration was not embedded in the routines and practices of schools to improve student learning.

Both the quantitative and qualitative components of the survey were field tested under relative circumstances with different samples of preservice student cohorts for the sake of instrument fidelity (Onwuegbuzie, Witcher, Collins, Filer, Wiedmaier, & Moore, 2007). Peer debriefing sessions followed each field test as a vehicle for external evaluation (Maxwell, 2005). A fellow researcher with extensive experience in mixed-methods design (but who had no vested interest in the study) constructively criticized the findings as they emerged (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Sample integration legitimation allowed for inferences to be made from both the quantitative and qualitative results (Onwuegbuzie & Johnson, 2006; Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2003; 2006).

Data analysis

The seven statement responses were quantitatively analyzed in terms of means and frequencies before being subjected to *t*-tests to factor significant differences. There were several statistically significant differences in means across the pre- and post-test responses. The quantitative responses were further subjected to multiple comparisons based on participants' self-reported age, gender, and divisional qualifications.

The open-ended qualitative responses were inputted into Ethnograph software to identify dominant patterns. Grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), as a qualitative analytical mode of analysis, was used to code the respective patterns into emerging themes as they were grounded in the data (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). The process of constant comparison saturated the conceptual relationships into the respective categories (Cherubini, 2007; Glaser, 1978; 1992). The qualitative data was combined and inductively analyzed using a cross-section of variables, including age, gender, and divisional qualifications.

RESULTS

The findings for each of the variables from both the quantitative and qualitative analyses are presented respectively. The fundamental finding of the study was that participants' experiences during their teaching-practicum assignments had a significantly negative effect upon their beliefs of school organization.

Quantitative results

The descriptive means for each of the seven statements were lower in the post-survey than they were in the first administration of the survey. Quite significantly, participants had higher expectations of the schools' mission statement as representing teachers' collective vision. They expected prior to their practicum that there would have been a greater degree of collaborative practice within the school's routines and practices, and school administrators would have had a greater influence on organizational matters (see Table 1).

TABLE 1. *Descriptive means for items related to school organization*

Responses	N	Pre-mean	SD	N	Post-mean	SD
Teachers being equitably provided with resources	75	3.97	.930	75	3.74	.87
School mission statement & parents, staff and students	75	4.23	.746	75	3.78	.97
School mission statement rep. staff vision	75	3.72	1.04	75	3.60	.92
School administrators reinforcement of rules	75	3.83	1.01	75	3.68	1.05
Administrators consulting teachers	75	3.78	1.07	75	3.60	.90
Teachers observing one another's teaching	75	3.01	1.02	75	2.73	1.29
School boards' capacity to offer mentoring program for new teachers	75	3.52	1.09	75	3.40	1.31

N: Number of Participants; SD: Standard Deviation

The most significant difference between mean scores was related to the clear communication of a school's mission statement to the school community and its contextual relevance to teachers' practice. Opportunities to observe other teachers' practice as an organizational norm to further professional development also resulted in a significant contrast between teacher candidates' expectations and experiences in schools. Study participants' expectations of school administrators' equitable support of curriculum-related resources in each of the primary, junior, intermediate, and senior divisions also represented a significant difference to their post-teaching observations. The remaining differences were statistically minimal in comparison.

Significant differences: 2-tailed t-tests

The data was subjected to 2-tailed t-tests at an alpha of .05. A statistically significant difference resulted in one of the seven responses, with two more t-test results approaching significance (see Table 2). The most insignificant difference was in participants' expectations and observed realities of schools and school boards' capacities to deliver a mentoring program for beginning teachers.

TABLE 2. Paired sample test

Items	Mean	SD	SD Error Mean	T	Sig. (2-tailed)
Pair 1 equity – equity 2	.22667	1.08520	.12531	1.809	.075
Pair 2 mission – mission 2	.44000	1.00324	.11584	3.798	.000
Pair 3 vision – vision 2	.12000	1.20763	.13945	.861	.392
Pair 4 principals – principals 2	.14667	1.35261	.15619	.939	.351
Pair 5 policy – policy 2	.17568	1.22035	.14186	1.238	.220
Pair 6 observe – observe 2	.28000	1.51176	.17456	1.604	.113
Pair 7 mentor – mentor 2	.12000	1.45156	.16761	.716	.476

Std. Dev.: Standard Deviation; Sig.: Significant Difference of 2-Tailed T-Test

Student-teacher candidates believed that the communication of schools' mission statements, school administrators' equitable support, and professional development opportunities for teachers to exert their influence across organizational lines were far less prevalent than they expected. Participants' expectations and experiences of school administrators' consistent enforcement of school rules resulted in an insignificant relationship.

Independent t-test comparisons

Independent t-tests were conducted based on participants' age, gender, and divisional qualifications. Of note, the 22 to 29 and over-40-year-old cohorts reported significant differences between their expectations and experiences of teachers' perceptions of school administrators as consistently implementing the school rules as a function of organizational order. The 22 to 29 and 30 to 39-year-old cohort groups reported statistically significant differences with schools' capacities to facilitate peer observations and professional development opportunities. The 30 to 39 and 40-year-old and over cohorts reported a significant difference in the same regard. This cohort also reported a significant difference between their expectation and experience of schools capacity to offer a mentoring program that would induct new teachers into the organizational culture of the school. The significant differences between participants' ages are located in Table 3.

TABLE 3. *Multiple comparisons: Age, gender, divisional qualifications*

<i>Age:</i>				
Responses	Age	Age	Mean Difference	Sig.
Enforcing school rules	22-29	40+	.643	.038
Admin. visibility in school	22-29	30-39	.766	.032
Observing other teachers' practice	22-29	30-39	.946	.008
	30-39	40+	1.073	.015
Mentoring program	30-39	40+	1.009	.037
<i>Gender:</i>				
Enforcing school rules	Males	Undeclared	1.000	.002
	Females	Undeclared	.96296	.015
<i>Divisional Qualifications:</i>				
School mission statements	i/s	p/j	.438	.059
Enforcing school rules	p/j	i/s	.542	.05
	i/s	i/s (tech)	.72424	.026
Principals' visibility in school	p/j	i/s	.66667	.049
Teachers consulted on school policy	p/j	i/s	.56667	.048
Administrators' support	p/j	i/s	.57917	.014
	p/j	i/s	.83333	.001

Sig: Significant Difference; i/s: Intermediate / Senior Division

Teaching Qualifications: p/j: Primary / Junior Division Teaching Qualifications

Independent t-tests of multiple comparisons based on gender are also reported in Table 3. Two statistically significant differences are evident in the enforcement of school rules by administrators to maintain order (between males and those participants who did not declare their gender) and in this same category by females and undeclared participants.

Also in Table 3 are the data which show significant differences for a multiple comparison of t-test based on participants' divisional qualifications. Various statistically significant differences emerged. For instance, the i/s teacher qualification cohort differed significantly from the p/j preservice candidates in terms of the reported differences in the capacity of the school organization to engage its members in shared meaning. Specifically, in terms of administrators' capacities to consult with teachers regarding decisions that impacted upon school

policy. The p/j sample considered school administrative support more critical to school organization in comparison to their i/s teacher candidate peers.

Qualitative results

After the identification of dominant patterns, responses to the qualitative open-ended questions in both the pre- and post- surveys were inductively analyzed using grounded theory procedures. The same written entries were independently coded according to the following two variables: participants' age and divisional qualifications.

Question 1. Participants across both variables reported a consistent expectation that school organization facilitates opportunities for new and experienced teachers to fulfill their professional goals on condition that these are aligned to the school administrators' vision. Participants' responses that were considered key statements are cited below. Typical of the responses, one participant stated, "I would hope that we are able to work within the greater structure" (Participant 12). In a number of instances participants identified beginning teachers as the population who needed to feel particularly affirmed that their vision and goals were significant. As this participant stated, a supportive and collaborative school organization is, "especially important for beginning teachers who may not have completed their ideas for what their vision and beliefs are" (Participant 62). In the majority of responses, participants suggested that their personal vision must "comply with the school's mission statement and policies" (Participant 66). Another individual suggested that a teacher's core beliefs are vital to her professional development but cautioned, "as long as those beliefs coincide with the values of the school" (Participant 22). Representative of this category were comments that included, "usually the principal sets the tone and tries to fulfill his/her vision and beliefs" (Participant 7), and "there may be some room for personal interpretation and expression for teachers but it is within a collective vision" (Participant 36).

The 40-year-old and older participant cohort responses were cautiously optimistic. Participants expected school organization to help develop their visions, but they had reservations that this was going to be the case. Participants expected the entire school community "to benefit from the visions and beliefs of others" (Participant 4), and anticipated opportunities to exercise "the freedom to live out those visions and beliefs" (Participant 74). They openly questioned, however, "How this can be accomplished" (Participant 82), and wondered if such opportunities "will likely be few and very limited" (Participant 68).

Question 2. Participants across both variables reported in the first survey that they expected principals and new teachers to work collaboratively towards the goal of improving student learning. The expectation was that school administrators and all teachers throughout the organization would, as these individuals suggested, "help each other and share resources" (Participant 14),

“meet regularly to discuss student progress and provide information in confidence that will help student learning” (Participant 29), and “work together in an environment where communication, integrity and respect are modeled” (Participant 2). Participants further expected that “meetings would be scheduled regarding at-risk students to identify needs and possible solutions” (Participant 32) since they believed that “everyone’s opinion matters” (Participant 71) given the expectation that teachers and administrators “are all on the same team and share the same goals” (Participant 6). In a number of instances the 22-29 year-old participants expressed the belief that their inexperience as relatively young professionals would not limit their influence across the organization. One individual wrote, “Just because they [older and more experienced teachers] are experienced doesn’t mean they know everything” (Participant 9). In the bulk of responses the notion existed, as this particular individual stated, that “administrators and teachers work hard together” (Participant 19). Participants expected school administrators to establish, as part of their organizational routine, opportunities for teachers across the school organization to foster professional goals and collaborate with one another. In the overwhelming majority of responses, participants in the 40+ cohort especially placed the onus on school administrators to, as this participant suggested, “consult with the teachers in building programs that meet the needs of the students and improve their learning” (Participant 26).

The *i/s* responses were also noteworthy. Although they expected school organization to structure collaborative opportunities between teachers across subject departments, they questioned the commitment from experienced teachers in this regard. Indicative of the other responses, this participant wrote that “all teachers should collaborate, but the ones who have been around likely won’t given human nature” (Participant 51). The *p/j* cohort’s core category, unlike the majority of the other variables in these cross-section analyses, distinguished specific organizational structures within the school that address authentic student learning. They expected regularly scheduled collaborative opportunities to “discuss modifying lessons” (Participant 20), “offer counseling on one-on-one teaching tips” (Participant 3), provide “ways to better organize my classroom for certain kids” (Participant 16), and “build programs that meet the needs of the students” (Participant 8). Given these opportunities, participants expected to exercise their capacities and contribute to the common school vision of improving student learning.

Question 3. Responses to the post-survey question were also consistent across age and qualification variables and represented a significant contrast between participants’ expectations and experiences of school organization. In the post-survey responses, it was reported that collaboration was not a structured practice of school organizations and when it occurred it was described as *ad hoc* and subject to the willingness of individual teachers. Participants identified the general lack of professional collaboration amongst staffs. As this individual

wrote, "it was not embedded because there was not teamwork" (Participant 36). In the majority of cases where collaboration was observed, it consisted of "teachers working together on the music trips" (Participant 24), "sharing [supervision] duties" (Participant 32), "sharing a lot of their resources" (Participant 2), and collaboratively "preparing for the prayer services" (Participant 11). Teachers were perceived to be "too hands-off" (Participant 72) in terms of becoming involved in school initiatives to improve student learning, and as a result collaboration was often "not embedded in the school programs at all" (Participant 14). Participants were candid in describing "teachers talking about students and sharing resources, but there was no discussion of how to improve student learning" (Participant 26).

The i/s cohort responses were especially unanimous. In many circumstances participants commented that secondary school departments "acted as though they were their own country. There was no collaboration between departments or administration" (Participant 44). Others suggested that they "didn't observe any collaboration in terms of moving kids' learning forward. Everyone did their own thing" (Participant 63). This is similar to the core category that emerged from the p/j participant responses; namely, collaboration in schools as informal and haphazard. Although there was an acknowledgement that discussion between same grade and division teachers "took place to make sure they were on the same page" (Participant 16), teachers were more often perceived as "very isolated" (Participant 9), and functioned in school organizations where there "was not a lot of communication and no one was ever in the division workrooms" (Participant 29).

DISCUSSION

Given the statistically significant differences and the respective qualitative core categories, preservice teacher expectations about school organization are profoundly different before the practicum than they are afterwards. The difference between participants' expectations and experiences of school organization point to several significant implications that deserve further discussion. In the context of this discussion, it is relevant to consider that novice teachers generally have a high degree of energy and enthusiasm even though they have little professional teaching experience (Blanchard, 1990; Marshall et al, 2004). Equally significant is the fact that new teachers vary in the amount of support and guidance they need to become competent practitioners.

First, the most statistically significant incongruence (related to school mission statements) negatively reflects schools as goal-directed organizations (Rowan, 2004). Where prior to their teaching placements participants perceived school vision and goals as products of a socially inclusive and constructed process (Johnson, 2005), their experience in the various school organizational cultures undermined their understandings. Participants' qualitative responses further

underscored the disconnect that exists between school visions and goals that are informed and enacted collectively, and those that represent the principal's paradigms and are reflective of hierarchy and control. Participants consistently expressed their willingness to conform their goals to the principal's vision. Participants assumed that they would be able to develop and exercise their professional goals, but would have to do so in the context of the administrator's vision. These beliefs and assumptions warrant further attention given participants' conspicuous resignation to authority. There is an uncritical, passive, and unquestioned commitment to what they expect will be a more sophisticated value-system. As this participant attests, "in the end, we are part of a greater organizational presence and it will be our job to further those ends and not necessarily our own" (Survey 2; Participant 54). Participants' responses perpetuate the more traditional belief that school goals and vision is the product of the individual at the top of the educational hierarchy – the principal. This is certainly not reflective of the literature that suggests organizational commitment stems from the collective construction of a vision and goal that are relevant and meaningful to all staff (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2005; Yu, Leithwood, & Jantzi, 2002).

A second significant finding was the disconnect between participants' expectations and experiences in regards to the professional collaboration among educators. Although the expectations existed that the school organization would facilitate professional development opportunities to further teachers' practice and allow members to exert their influence across the organization, their experiences during the practicum suggested otherwise. This lack of routine professional development and collaboration, as norms of school organization, resonated in participants' qualitative responses as well. The disconnect between the expectations and perceived realities of professional collaboration may be particularly detrimental to new teachers' socialization into organizational norms (Chubbuck, Clift, Allard, & Quinlan, 2001; Kelchtermans & Ballet, 2002). Research attests to the fact that novice teachers want to be immersed in an organizational structure that honours their members and they aspire to make valuable contributions in collaborative contexts (Spindler & Biott, 2000). They expect during their induction period to be invited into collaborative professional networks where their input is valued, respected, and acknowledged by experienced colleagues and school administrators (Martin & Rippon, 2003).

The views, attitudes and perceptions of these groups and the interface between them will impinge upon how the probationary teacher progresses in gaining their own identity as an established teacher in the school context as well as in their own mind. [The organization] has to manage the exchanges to enhance the probationary teacher's contribution to the school and their own professional and personal development. (Rippon & Martin, 2006, p. 94)

The discrepancy between participants' expectations and experiences was accentuated by their observations that collaboration in schools seemed more

dependent upon the individual teacher's willingness to engage in sustaining collegial networks than it did on it being a structured organizational practice. Participants concluded that some teachers became directly involved in collaborative endeavours, while others were more reluctant in their commitments. Underscoring the disconnect between participants' expectations and experiences is their observation of collaboration being reduced to the sharing of resources and management responsibilities. Especially true for the p/j cohort, collaboration was perceived as informal conversation about the routine management of duties and responsibilities. Participants expected school organization to structure professional development practices that would foster collaboration and further student learning. The characteristics of sustainable school organization, such as goal-directedness and shared meaning for all its members, to name only two, were scarcely apparent (Marshall et al., 2004). School organization was perceived by participants as a series of fragmented routines and relatively isolated practices that were not readily associated to a common vision (Haydn, 2001; Osterman, 2000).

Noteworthy statistical and qualitative differences also existed between participants' responses across divisional qualifications. The i/s cohort reported significantly less expectation to be consulted by administrators about decisions that impact upon the school community. This may be attributed to the organizational infrastructure of schools. Secondary school teachers belong to subject and content area departments, a situation that generally reduces their interaction with school administrators. Conversely, elementary teachers practice in less populated organizational units and typically take direction from school administrators in terms of policy and practice. According to the literature, however, school organizations (be they elementary or secondary) that facilitate collaboration amongst colleagues and respect the collective expertise of their teachers invite their active involvement in meaningful decision-making strategies (Imants, 2002; Zhu & Baylen, 2005). These organizations are also attentive to the fairness and equity of their decisions (Johnson, 2005). In both cases, it seems that participants' expectations and observed realities were very much located in the hierarchical structure of school organization.

Participants' experiences during their teaching-practicum assignments had a significantly adverse effect upon their expectations of school organization. For preservice faculty, the disconnect between prospective teachers' expectations and experiences deserves further consideration. The practicum experience may potentially erode the constructivist and research-informed perspectives related to school organization and professional development that are espoused by the faculty of education. School board induction providers are also responsible to account for the organizational realities into which they induct their novice members. Prospective and new teachers expect school organization to complement their individual autonomy and the capacities they bring to make valuable contributions to the profession across the organization.

Limitations

Although this research design accounted for political legitimation by implementing qualitative and quantitative research techniques, replications of this study would enhance the reliability of its findings. As Onwuegbuzie and Johnson (2006) suggest, mixed-methods research designs and techniques applied to a similar context could acknowledge sequential and conversion legitimation. Second, the results of this study are not necessarily generalizable beyond the sample from one preservice teacher education program in an Ontario university. The findings of the study would be strengthened if applied using the same research procedure to other consecutive education students from the various faculties of education situated across the province.

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