

Northwest Journal of Teacher Education

Volume 9

Issue 1 *Northwest Passage: Journal of Educational Practices*

Article 9

March 2011

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Recommended Citation

Kitchenham, Andrew (2011) "Programmatic Navel Gazing: One School of Education's Experiences of a Comprehensive Review," *Northwest Journal of Teacher Education*: Vol. 9 : Iss. 1 , Article 9.

DOI: 10.15760/nwjte.2011.9.1.9

Available at: <https://pdxscholar.library.pdx.edu/nwjte/vol9/iss1/9>

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Programmatic Navel Gazing: One School of Education's Experiences of a Comprehensive Review

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Abstract

This article describes a small study conducted within the School of Education as part of its internal and external reviews of the undergraduate and graduate programs. Using data collected from teaching faculty self-reports, archival information, surveys, and focus groups, the findings are presented. Although the UNBC School of Education does perform well based on reports from a variety of stakeholders, the internal and external review information will assist the School in strengthening both undergraduate and graduate programs.

In 1990, the Education Advisory Committee recommended to the interim governing council of the University of Northern British Columbia that an undergraduate teacher education program be established with a special emphasis on meeting the needs of Aboriginal people. Three years later UNBC created a Master of Education program; however, it was not until December 2000 that the proposal for a Bachelor of Education program was forwarded to the governing body, the British Columbia College of Teachers (BCCT), which was in charge of all new and existing teacher education programs in the province. The teacher education program's was "a dynamic, continually developing resource that [was] responsive to the ever-changing needs of society" (*Education Program Degree Proposal*, Dec. 2000, p. 3) which was "based on the strong belief that high quality teachers are graduated when there is: 1) collaboration among faculty members within the university community; 2) collaboration between the Education Program and local school districts; 3) collaboration between the Education Program and the larger communities of people; and 4) a strong connection made between theory, research and practice" (p. 3.). After a two-year consultation period, the BC College of Teachers approved the two-year post-Baccalaureate degree program for elementary and secondary streams and the elementary program started in 2002 followed by the secondary program in 2003.

Adhering to the 1993 Teaching Profession Act and the subsequent 2003 Teaching Profession Amendment Act (BC Ministry of Education, 2003), the University of Northern British Columbia, along with all teacher education programs in the province, provided Attainment of Standards Reports (ASRs) to the British Columbia College of Teachers. These reports outlined the criteria on which teacher candidates would be recommended for certification. A recent fact finder report, however, indicates that the BCCT may no longer be serving its original mandate and could be disbanded in the near future as "it is not currently regarded as an independent and credible entity" (Avison, 2010, p. 32).

Trinity Western University and Malaspina University-College (now, Vancouver Island University) agreed to be the first institutions to submit their ASRs to the BC College of Teachers (Kitchenham, 2006; Kitchenham & O'Neill, 2006). Shortly after that time, the remaining institutions submitted their respective Attainment of Standards Reports. The University of Northern British Columbia's School of Education concentrated on the BCCT Standards 1 to 10 (of 13 standards in total) as evaluation criteria for recommending their teacher candidates for

certification (BCCT, 2004). In 2007, UNBC's Attainment of Standards Report was approved by the British Columbia College of Teachers. In 2008, the BCCT revised the standards and reduced the number of standards that teacher candidates had to meet from the original 13 to eight standards for professional educators. As part of the university's requirements, the School of Education undertook an internal review of its two Bachelor of Education programs and its two Master of Education programs. As the BCCT required an external review of the teacher education program within five years of its inception, the School of Education invited them to conduct an external review of the Bachelor of Education programs following the internal review. Additionally, two Deans of Education were invited to evaluate the Master of Education programs so that they could report their findings to the university. This article discusses our experiences of both the internal and external reviews.

The Review Process

Internal Review

In the Fall of 2009, I was asked to conduct an internal review, in consultation with the Chair of Undergraduate Education and the Chair of Graduate Education, of both programs and to prepare a report to be presented to the faculty members in the Spring of 2010. The Chairs asked all professors and instructors to prepare material that would assist me in the process and to complete any surveys that were requested. Additionally, I created, implemented, and analyzed surveys for the present undergraduate students and for cooperating teachers who sponsor our undergraduate students in their field experiences.

Instructor binders. As part of the internal review for the Bachelor of Education program, all tenured and tenure-track professors and term and sessional instructors were asked to indicate which of the BCCT Standards they were meeting in their courses. This information was recorded in binders for each course. All 400-level courses adhered to the original 13 standards while all 300-level courses adhered to the revised eight standards. The tables below summarize the percentage of courses that met each standard.

It is clear that the Year Three (300-level) instructors stress the importance of meeting the affective needs of the children so that the students see the benefits of caring for the pupils in their respective classes (Standard One), of being well prepared to plan, teach, and assess their students (Standard Five), of possessing a broad range of knowledge to prepare to teach and to implement teaching strategies (Standard Six), and of acquiring a strong knowledge of child development and how to apply that knowledge in the teaching and learning process (Standard Three). It should be noted that the Year Three courses encompass the first two semesters of the four-semester teacher education program so that there is a great deal of foundational work that is conducted with the students.

The Year Four faculty also ensured that the students learned about understanding children's growth (Standard Six), have a broad knowledge base from which to draw when planning and teaching (Standard Three), have a good grasp of effective pedagogical techniques (Standard Seven) and promising practices in assessment (Standard Eight). It should be noted that the Year Four courses encompass the final two semesters of the four-semester teacher education program so that there is a great deal of teacher preparation work that is conducted with the students so that they are fully prepared for their final 10-week practicum.

Table 1

Percentage of Year Three (300-level) Courses Meeting Specific BCCT Standards

YEAR 3		
S1	Educators value and care for all students and act in their best interests.	18.6
S2	Educators are role models who act ethically and honestly.	7.6
S3	Educators understand and apply knowledge of student growth and development.	15.3
S4	Educators value the involvement and support of parents, guardians, families and communities in schools.	7.6
S5	Educators implement effective practices in areas of classroom management, planning, instruction, assessment, evaluation and reporting.	17.8
S6	Educators have a broad knowledge base and understand the subject areas they teach.	17.8
S7	Educators engage in career-long learning.	9.3
S8	Educators contribute to the profession.	5.9

Table 2

Percentage of Year Four (400-level) Courses Meeting Specific BCCT Standards

YEAR 4		
S1	Professional educators value and care for all children, acting at all times in the best interests of the children	8.9
S2	Professional educators demonstrate an understanding of the role of parents and the home in the life of students.	6.3
S3	Professional educators have a broad knowledge base as well as an in-depth understanding about the subject areas they teach.	11.5
S4	Professional educators are knowledgeable about Canada and the world.	7.6
S5	Professional educators are knowledgeable about BC's education system.	8.9
S6	Professional educators understand children's growth and development.	13.4
S7	Professional educators implement effective teaching strategies.	10.8
S8	Professional educators apply principles of assessment, evaluation and reporting.	10.2
S9	Professional educators act as ethical educational leaders.	3.8
S10	Professional educators engage in life-long learning.	5.7
S11	Professional educators have a responsibility to students.	3.8
S12	Professional educators have a responsibility to parents and the public.	3.8
S13	Professional educators have a responsibility to the profession.	5.1

To ascertain an overall sense of how the faculty was meeting the standards, I combined the original 13 and the revised eight standards into three broad themes: Background Knowledge, Professional Qualities, and Capacity to Teach (see Table 3). In this way, one could see how much emphasis was being placed on these three important parts to training an effective teacher.

Table 3

Percentage of Year Three (300-level) and Year Four (400-level) Courses Meeting Specific BCCT Standards by Theme

Theme	BCCT Standard		Percentage
	Revised	Original	
Background Knowledge	S3, S6	S3, S4, S5, S6	33.1/41.4
Professional Qualities	S1, S2, S4, S7, S8	S1, S2, S9, S10, S11, S12, S13	49.0/37.4
Capacity to Teach	S5	S7, S8	17.8/21.0

As can be seen, one-third of the Year Three teaching faculty stressed the importance of acquiring significant background knowledge to plan effective lessons while approximately 40% of the Year Four teaching faculty maintains that emphasis. Additionally, almost half of the Year Three instructors ensure that the students have a strong understanding of the key qualities required to be a professional educator and over 35% of the Year Four instructors do the same. Not surprisingly, approximately 18% of the Year Three instructors create a strong capacity to teach for their students since the teacher-candidates have a two-week practicum in their second semester of the program and do not teach 100% of the time. Interestingly, a mere one-fifth of the Year Four tenured and tenure-track professors and term and sessional instructors emphasize the skills needed to plan, implement, assess, evaluate, and report on the teaching process given that the final two semesters are meant to prepare students for the final 10-week practicum.

Table 4

Types of Assignments Used for Evidence in Year Three (300-level) Courses by Percentage

Assignment	Percentage
Tests	20.9
Lesson plans	15.4
Unit plans	10.9
Case studies	10.0
Article review	5.5
Journals, Essays	3.6
Oral presentation, Report	2.7
Article analysis, Curriculum Map, Role Play, Poster, Debate, Book Review, Classroom Rules, Practicum Debrief, Management Plan, Group Project, Mini-Lesson	1.8
Letter, Diagnostic Assessment, Pamphlet, Board Game, Reflection	0.9

Table 5

Types of Assignments Used for Evidence in Year Four (400-level) Courses by Percentage

Assignment	Percentage
Reflection	15.8
Portfolio	13.3
Unit plans	11.6
Tests	8.3
Lesson plans	7.5
Professional literature analysis	4.2
IEPs, Website Review, Planning Binder, Report	3.3
Oral presentation, Planning Web, Marksheet, Mini-lesson, Course outline	2.5
Philosophy, Seating plan, Term plan, Discussions, Resumés, Resource	1.6
Package, Essay	0.8
Role play, Parent plan	0.8

Additionally, all tenured and tenure-track professors and term and sessional instructors were asked to indicate what artifacts (assignments) students were asked to produce to meet those selected standards. This information was also recorded in binders for each course. Table 4 and Table 5 summarize those artifacts as reported by the teaching faculty.

The traditional assessments of knowledge and mastery were evident in the assignments required by Year Three teaching faculty: tests (20.9%), lesson plans (15.4%), unit plans (10.9%), case studies (10.0%), essays (3.6%), research article reviews (5.5%), and oral presentations (2.7%). What was also evident was that there was clear redundancy across the courses since 15% of the faculty required lesson plans and 11% asked for unit plans.

As would be expected, the assignments used by Year Four faculty to meet the BCCT standards were more closely related to preparing teacher-candidates to enter the teaching profession. To wit, reflection was stressed by approximately 16% of the faculty and portfolios by approximately 13% of the instructors. However, the more traditional assignments were also present in the Year Four courses: unit plans (11.6%), tests (8.3%), and lesson plans (7.5%). This finding reinforces the previous comment that there is overt redundancy in the courses as lesson plans and unit plans are over-taught which results in the students being required to repeat assignments across years and across same-semester courses.

Surveys. At the conclusion of each academic year, we survey the graduated Bachelor of Education teacher candidates. Additionally, in the Spring of 2010, we surveyed the current students in the Bachelor of Education Program.

Based on these results, it would appear that the students ($n = 43$) are pleased with their past and present programs. For instance, in Spring 2010, 60% or more of the students believed that the courses had prepared them for the following BCCT Standards: Value and care for all students and act in their best interest; act as a role model who acts ethically and honestly; understand and apply knowledge of student growth and development; value the involvement and support of parents, guardians, families, and communities in schools; implement effective practices in planning; implement effective practices in instruction; possess a broad knowledge base; and engage in career-long learning. Conversely, over 30% believed that the course work had not prepared them in relation to the following BCCT Standards: implement effective

practices in assessment; implement effective practices in evaluation; and implement effective practices in reporting.

Similar results were shown for how the students believed the degree to which their field experiences met specific BCCT Standards. For instance, 60% or more of the students believed that the field experiences had prepared them for the following BCCT Standards: Value and care for all students and act in their best interest; act as a role model who acts ethically and honestly; understand the implement effective practices in instruction; possess a broad knowledge base; understand the subject areas you teach; engage in career-long learning; and contribute to the profession. Conversely, over 20% believed that the field experience had not prepared them in relation to the following BCCT Standard: implement effective practices in evaluation, and implement effective practices in reporting.

These results are cause for consideration. Although the School of Education appears to be performing well in meeting most of the BCCT Standards, it is disturbing that over 30% of the 2010 graduating class believed that the course work and over 20% believed that the field experience had not prepared them to implement effective teaching practices. Clearly, more work and discussion needs to occur to ascertain where improvement could be noted.

We also surveyed the cooperating teachers who sponsor our practicum students during their field experiences. Overall, we found that the cooperating teachers believed that the School of Education had prepared the teacher candidates to meet the BCCT Standards.

In particular, 75% or more of the cooperating teachers ($n = 37$) believed that the School of Education had prepared the students to value children and parents, to plan and teach effectively, and to possess strong background knowledge. They believed that the following BCCT Standards had been met: Value and care for all students and act in their best interest; act as a role model who acts ethically and honestly; value the involvement and support of parents, guardians, families, and communities in schools; implement effective practices in planning; implement effective practices in instruction; possess a broad knowledge base; and understand the subject areas you teach. Conversely, only 15% believed that the School of Education had not prepared the students in relation to the following two BCCT Standards: implement effective practices in evaluation, and implement effective practices in reporting.

When we consider how the cooperating teachers believed the degree to which the field experiences prepared the students to meet specific BCCT Standards, there was overwhelming support. Seventy-five percent or more of the cooperating teachers believed that the field experiences had prepared the teacher candidates to meet all eight BCCT Standards: value and care for all students and act in their best interest; act as a role model who acts ethically and honestly; understand and apply knowledge of student growth and development; value the involvement and support of parents, guardians, families, and communities in schools; implement effective practices in planning; implement effective practices in instruction; implement effective practices in assessment; implement effective practices in reporting; possess a broad knowledge base; understand the subject areas you teach; engage in career-long learning; and contribute to the profession. Based on these results, the School of Education is preparing our teacher candidates to meet the BCCT Standards in their field experiences.

Teaching and research strengths. All faculty members were asked to comment on the teaching and research strengths as well as the areas of improvement in teaching and research. These comments were collated and summarized based on the criterion of whether a similar comment was made by at least five faculty members. Table 6 summarizes teaching and Table 7 summarizes research strengths and areas of concern.

Table 6

Teaching Strengths and Areas of Concern for the UNBC School of Education Faculty

Strengths	Areas of Concern
1. One faculty member received UNBC Excellence in Teaching Award.	1. Many concepts taught over and over in very similar courses.
2. Four faculty members have been nominated for the UNBC Excellence in Teaching Award.	2. Same content is taught to elementary and secondary students.
3. Majority of faculty maintains membership in the BC College of Teachers.	3. Too many courses are taught by sessional instructors.
4. Faculty ensure that courses reflect current trends and research in their respective areas of expertise.	4. More tenured faculty need to teach in the undergraduate program.
5. Strong relationships with students.	5. Stronger connection to standards-based teaching.
6. Sessional instructors bring recent experience.	6. A stronger connection between present practices of assessment in the school system and what is taught in the BEd Program.
7. Mentoring of junior faculty members.	7. Lacking in tenure-track positions, especially at regional campuses.
8. High rate of graduation in the BEd and MEd programs	
9. Overall, faculty receives above 4.0 (out of 5.0) for their course evaluations.	

A major strength in the School of Education is the teaching abilities of its faculty members. The vast majority of the instructors and professors receive teaching evaluations above 4.0 (out of 5.0) in both undergraduate and graduate classes. Several faculty members have been nominated for the university's Excellence in Teaching Award and one faculty member received the prestigious award, becoming the first School of Education recipient since its inception. Almost all comments stated as a teaching strength were also re-worded as an area of concern. For instance, many members indicated that their courses reflected current trends and research in their respective areas of concern but others indicated that there was a mismatch between what instructors and professors taught as assessment practices and what was reflected in the schools. Additionally, over 60% of the undergraduate and graduate courses are taught by term and sessional instructors which is a definite strength given the recency of their teaching experience; however, many respondents indicated that more courses needed to be taught by tenured and tenure-track members who bring research and service experience to the teaching and learning processes. Lastly, the overwhelming majority of the faculty commented on the redundancy in the undergraduate courses as so much content was taught over and over across the courses and identical content was taught in the elementary as the secondary stream. Both of these last points were commented on in the aforementioned student survey and in the binder content.

Table 7

Research Strengths and Areas of Concern for the UNBC School of Education Faculty

Strengths	Areas of Concern
1. Three SSHRC grants in three years by three separate faculty members as principal investigators.	1. Majority of publications are authored by four or five faculty.
2. One faculty member received the Excellence in Research Award.	2. Some faculty members have one or two refereed publications.
3. Three Full Professors and four Associate Professors.	3. Majority of federal funding/grants comes from a few faculty members.
4. The entire School of Education faculty publishes four to five refereed publications per year.	4. No defined research culture.
5. Majority of faculty members are tenured.	5. No real expectation to publish more than one article every few years.
6. Most faculty have strong research backgrounds	
7. Majority of graduate faculty supervise project and thesis students in the program and a few faculty members serve on doctoral committees.	
8. A few faculty members have served as External members or External Examiners on thesis defenses at UNBC and other universities.	
9. Graduate students and faculty have co-published in refereed journals and books, and co-presented at learned conferences.	
10. Faculty members have been invited to serve as external program reviewers for other universities.	

The School of Education has no real defined research culture. A few faculty have begun the process of establishing a strong culture; however, many faculty members are stretched due to the rapid expansion of the graduate programs so that they do not have a great deal of time to devote to research. There are, however, definite strengths within the program since one faculty member received the institutional Excellence in Research Award and became not only the first School of Education member to receive the honour but also the first UNBC faculty member ever to receive this award and the Excellence in Teaching Award. Additionally, the majority of graduate faculty members supervises Master of Education students, serve on Master of Education committees or on committees in other disciplines, and a few serve on doctoral

committees. As well, a few have either co-published with their graduate students refereed journal articles and book chapters or co-presented with their graduate students at learned conferences. Additionally, some faculty members have received national competitive research grants which are difficult to obtain in the Social Sciences in Canada. There are definite concerns within the School of Education. Most notably, most publications are attributed to four or five faculty members which represents about one-third of the tenured and tenure-track faculty and most research grants are received by the same faculty members. Additionally, a few tenured faculty members have four or five publications.

External Review

In April 2010, a group of external reviewers came to the campus to evaluate the undergraduate and graduate programs. Three representatives from the British Columbia College of Teachers concentrated on the Bachelor of Education program and two Deans of Education from two different Canadian universities spent most of their time evaluating the two Master of Education programs: Multidisciplinary Leadership and Counselling. The School of Education now offers a third program, a Master of Education in Special Education through online delivery but it was under development at the time of the external review. All five group members received an advance copy of the internal review document.

The BCCT group members scrutinized the internal review document and binders that each faculty member was asked to complete that included how he or she met a specific standard with example artifacts and assessment criteria. Additionally, the members met with the undergraduate teaching faculty in a town hall meeting format. The BCCT committee also had meetings with our regional campus on which an elementary program is offered every two years, with cooperating teachers, and with present students.

The Deans of Education also examined the pertinent sections of the internal review document and met with a small group of graduate teaching faculty. They were primarily interested in how many faculty taught graduate-level courses and how many supervised graduate students or served on graduate committees. Additionally, the two members met with present and past graduate students to ascertain their perspectives on the Master of Education program. Lastly, they met with individual faculty members who preferred to share their comments in a more personal setting.

In this next section, some of the results from the external review will be presented. It should be noted that much of the information gathered by the external review members was kept confidential.

Conclusion

At the time of writing, the British Columbia College of Teachers Committee report had not been given to the School of Education. Since the external review of the undergraduate program was the first of all the teacher education programs in BC, the committee argued that they needed more time to establish a standardized formatting method. Almost 12 months later appears to be a great deal of time; however, the School of Education acknowledges that the time allotted is reasonable since all of the committee members are working on the report on a volunteer, part-time basis since each member has her own responsibilities associated with the College of Teachers.

The two Deans of Education were able to produce a report within weeks of conducting their part of the external review. Overall, they believed that the UNBC School of Education was performing well. They did; however, have 10 clear recommendations which included: (1) conduct Regional Advisory Committee more frequently, use Aboriginal protocols, and follow up on the suggestions to ensure that their voices were heard; (2) conduct online surveys for both undergraduate and graduate programs for each semester, conduct exit surveys when all graduates complete their respective programs, and share the results of all surveys for pertinent faculty members to make program delivery model changes, if needed, and ensure that the students know of the changes so that their voices can also be heard; (3) develop a clear research culture in concrete ways such as dedicated research space for graduate students, development of a visiting scholar program, and use distance technologies to attend research conferences; (4) utilize the model used in the regional offering of the Bachelor of Education program, in which strong partnerships are established with the neighbouring Aboriginal communities; (5) actively recruit Aboriginal faculty and students; (6) Indigenize all aspects of the undergraduate and graduate programs rather than relying on specific courses or outside agencies; (7) use symbols, language, and art to welcome overtly Aboriginal undergraduate and graduate students; (8) train all faculty to utilize e-learning and blended learning delivery models and use the existing expertise of the one faculty member who is an expert in distance delivery models rather than rely solely on the cost-prohibitive delivery to regional sites; (9) conduct faculty meetings more regularly than once a semester and invite upper administrative officers to the meetings so that faculty can voice their opinions and concerns related to tenure and promotion accommodations, teaching in remote communities; and distance technologies; and, (10) have faculty work with other disciplines and departments in an effort to refresh their research perspectives.

It should be noted that the faculty members were asked to comment on the Dean's report at the annual retreat in August 2010. Those comments were given to the undergraduate and graduate program chairs to be incorporated into their mandatory report written in response to the External Review recommendations and given to the Dean and Provost. At the time of writing, that report had not been completed; however, some elements had been incorporated into the School of Education faculty members' teaching, scholarship, and service. Most notably, we have established a research office with dedicated space for graduate students and research assistants; we have established an online Master of Education in Special Education that is delivered primarily through Elluminate to 20 students across two provinces and one territory; several faculty members have received monies to investigate community-university partnerships involving Aboriginal communities; we have hired an Aboriginal Coordinator of Aboriginal descent and have incorporated Aboriginal ways of knowing in some courses; and some research collaborations have begun with other disciplines within and without the university.

In the end, this programmatic navel gazing has made us a stronger faculty and has strengthened our undergraduate and graduate programs. We see where there are redundancies in our Bachelor of Education program and acknowledge that our Master of Education programs have expanded at a faster rate than we can handle. Overt changes have not occurred across both undergraduate and graduate programs but we have started the process for change. Certainly, the innovative on-line Master of Education in Special Education is a step in the right direction since it has incorporated many of the changes included in the Deans' Report and is coordinated by the person who received both the Excellence in Teaching and the Excellence in Research Awards and is taught by several strong teachers and researchers.

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