

LEARNING DISABILITIES ASSOCIATION OF ONTARIO

Response to Ontario College of Teachers Consultation: Preparing Teachers for Tomorrow

Content of Initial Teacher Education Programs:

1. What content do you feel is needed in initial teacher education programs in order to address Ontario's future needs?

a. Foundation courses:

Educational psychology should be a required full course in all teacher education programs, with candidates completing this course as part of either their concurrent or their consecutive studies. Within this course, information should be provided regarding language and speech development, literacy development, reading and writing processes, atypical development, learning, instructional practices, and assessment and evaluation procedures.

As well, all teacher candidates, especially those involved in primary/junior programs, should receive instruction in **child development**, including factors that promote healthy development and those that hinder it. As part of this knowledge base, teacher candidates should possess general knowledge about the physical development, cognitive development, and social development of all students.

b. Pedagogy courses:

Being a reflective education practitioner: Teacher candidates should learn to adopt practices consistent with being a reflective practitioner and/or action researcher in the classroom; that is, learning to regularly assess the educational needs of students, the effectiveness of any commercially produced or teacher-made product and/or process with respect to meeting these needs, and the effectiveness of any corresponding adaptations/modifications.

Effective learning strategies and teaching methodologies: Teacher candidates should receive instruction in effective learning strategies and teaching methodologies for students who have learning difficulties, such as reciprocal reading techniques, cloze procedures, talk-aloud strategies, story webbing, information chunking, and the use of visuals. It is important that these strategies be proven and effective over a broad range of grade levels and subject areas.

Teaching to different learning styles: Teacher candidates should understand that all students have different preferred learning styles, and should learn ways to present materials and encourage learning that use visual, auditory and

kinesthetic modalities. It has been noted that in a typical classroom teachers still spend over 75% of the time talking to their students. Yet it is widely recognized that when auditory information is augmented with visual and kinesthetic materials and learning opportunities, all children learn more effectively. In spite of this, many teachers frequently rely almost exclusively on auditory information, even when they are giving very important facts to their students. This reflects the fact that most people who go into teaching are auditory learners.

A course in **Universal Instructional Design** should be part of teacher training, especially for intermediate and secondary teachers.

c. Subject methodology:

All teachers should be expected to have some knowledge of how to teach language proficiency to their students. After all, the use of language is a fundamental component of all learning.

Reading instruction: All teacher candidates, but especially those completing primary/junior programs, should possess a firm understanding of reading (and writing) processes, as well as factors that influence the acquisition of these skills. They should also possess a sound knowledge of the following research-based conclusions and associated instructional practices:

- Phonological awareness instruction promotes early reading and reading comprehension (decoding and comprehension) and spelling skills.
- Systematic phonics instruction improves reading, spelling, and, to a lesser extent, comprehension.
- Guided oral reading and repeated readings increase reading fluency.
- Vocabulary instruction (e.g., visual mnemonics, paraphrasing, context, questions) promotes reading comprehension.
- Comprehension strategies (e.g., graphic organizers, question answering, mental imagery) improve students' text comprehension.
- Direct/explicit instruction and transactional strategies instruction enhance student learning.
- Computer technologies hold substantial promise in promoting and reinforcing students' reading skills.

As well, the instructional practices and recommendations presented by established national and international reading associations such as the National Reading Council, the International Reading Association, the International Dyslexia Association, and the National Reading Panel should be endorsed.

d. Particular areas of focus:

Special Education:

There should be a *mandatory* full or equivalent course in the area of Special Education for all pre-service graduates that covers the following issues:

i) The nature of various disabilities, including learning disabilities: Teacher candidates should acquire sound knowledge of the overall nature and characteristics of learning disabilities (e.g., difficulties with language processing, memory, executive functioning, social skills), as well as of specific learning disabilities (e.g., dyslexia, dyscalculia, dysgraphia). They should also develop an understanding of other disorders and/or giftedness characteristics that often co-exist (co-morbidity) with learning disabilities (e.g., Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder, language/communication disorders, Tourette's Syndrome). As well, they should also have the opportunity to review the information contained in the document, "Learning Disabilities: A New Definition" (Learning Disabilities Association of Ontario, 2001).

ii) Assessment and evaluation practices: Given the increased emphasis on assessment at both the provincial and school levels, course work should specifically address this complex task. This course work should be extensive, allowing teacher candidates to acquire an operational understanding of a variety of assessment and evaluation tools and methodologies, as well as accommodation and modification procedures applicable in assessment and evaluation. Adequate attention also needs to be paid to the methods available for collecting student information, including observation, portfolio development, teacher-made assessment instruments, and dialogue with students.

iii) Accommodation and modification processes: Given the large number of student with diverse needs within Ontario classrooms, teacher candidates should be instructed in alternate methods of delivering curriculum within a variety of subject areas. This instruction should include accommodations and modifications to instruction procedures, such as providing a separate space for individuals to complete work, reducing the amount of work or simplifying the language. It is important that teacher candidates know what is permitted and how to implement accommodations and modifications for assessment and evaluation procedures at a variety of levels. These would include teacher-made tests as well as provincial assessments.

iv) Legal responsibilities: Teacher candidates should have a firm understanding of the expectations placed on them as classroom teachers within the Individual Education Plan (IEP) process as outlined by the Ontario Ministry of Education. In light of their role and responsibilities within this process, teacher candidates should be knowledgeable about the Identification Placement Review Committee Regulation 181. As well, they should be made aware of the role and responsibilities of the Special Education Advisory Committee as mandated in Regulation 464,

Minister's Advisory Council on Special Education (MACSE), and the relationship between these bodies and special education practice. Finally, teacher candidates should be made familiar with all national, provincial, and local special education regulations and standards policies, procedures, and guidelines that have an implication and impact on the delivery of services to children with exceptionalities. These include the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, the Ontario Human Rights Code and the Ontario Education Act, which supercede other legislation such as the Education Act.

Diversity training and awareness of social, cultural, and economic influences:

Teacher candidates should possess an understanding of how social, cultural, and economic factors may influence or shape/affect the lived realities of students and their caregivers. Candidates should possess an awareness of cultural bias within some forms of standardized and teacher-developed testing, especially for students who are Aboriginal Canadians, recent immigrants, or whose cultural or linguistic diversity may limit the validity of many instruments.

Technology Training:

All teachers in today's schools need to be knowledgeable about and comfortable with use of technology for instruction, student research, and particularly for working with exceptional students who use adaptive technologies. Increasingly adaptive technologies such as specialized computer software are an integral part of accommodations for students with learning disabilities, as well as other disabilities, and classroom teachers need to be familiar with their use.

e. The practicum:

As an integral component of pre-service teacher education in Ontario, the practicum experience can provide an invaluable opportunity for teacher candidates to learn to identify and effectively teach students with learning disabilities. However, to accomplish this, it is important that faculties of education and mentor teachers be aware of this focus, and that teacher candidates be aware that working with students with learning disabilities is an expected part of the practicum experience. To that end, the LDAO Teacher Education working group recommends the inclusion of the following components in the province-wide standardized teacher education program:

Special education observational experiences: A portion of the required practicum should be set aside to allow all teacher candidates to participate in special education settings, either inside or outside the regular classroom. During

this time, teacher candidates, in collaboration with their mentor teachers, should have the opportunity to:

- Observe and/or instruct students who have learning disabilities within the classroom setting and/or with special educators outside the classroom, including learning resource teachers;
- Develop and deliver evaluation and assessment procedures for students with identified or suspected learning disabilities;
- Develop and implement accommodations and programming modifications for students with special needs, including those with identified or suspected learning disabilities, as part of daily lesson plans and plans;
- Access and, when possible, participate in the development of Individual Education Plan (IEP) and Identification, Placement, and Review Committee (IPRC) documentation for students with identified or suspected learning disabilities;
- Participate in in-school teams related to the development and implementation of IEP and IPRC processes;
- Observe and/or participate in the delivery of services provided by professional support persons such as school psychologists, speech and language pathologists, and social workers;
- Observe and/or participate in the delivery of services provided by paraprofessional support persons such as educational assistants;
- Observe and/or participate in parental communication sessions/conferences (e.g., between teacher and parents, between in-school support team and parents, between professional support person and parents), especially those that relate to the academic and socio-emotional well-being of students with learning disabilities (observation or participation in such communication sessions should be contingent on explicit parental approval); and
- Whenever possible, observe and/or participate in instruction provided in the four Provincial Demonstration Schools.

2. What should the relationship be between the component parts of initial teacher education programs?

Standardized structure: Faculties of education should develop and disseminate to mentor teachers and hosting schools a “practicum checklist” of relevant activities and experiences for teacher candidates. The checklist can also be used as a guide/prerequisite for hosting teacher candidates, helping school administrators and faculty members determine which schools/teachers are best suited to host and mentor teacher candidates.

Length and Practicum Structure of Initial Teacher Education Programs:

At the time that the College of Teachers was established, there was a great deal of discussion about the relative merits of the two formats of teacher training (concurrent and consecutive) and about the potential value of expanding the pre-service program to two years. The teacher-training program should ensure that teacher graduates are better prepared to deal with the demands of a more rigorous educational system as well as with meeting the needs of a much more diverse student population. The suggestion for a two-year program recognized the value of the two-year teacher education program offered at the Institute of Child Study, which is now a part of the Faculty of Education at the University of Toronto. Many organizations, including LDAO, endorsed this approach.

If the pre-service program remains at one year, then it may be useful to implement a form of apprenticeship or induction for new teachers, where they spend at least part of their first year(s) assigned to or under the tutelage a mentor, who is a particularly effective “master” teacher. There are benefits to this approach. However, it is very important that no decisions be made about this or any other major modifications to the system without considering how these will affect student participation and learning. For example, newly graduated teacher interns should never be assigned to special education programs and their independent teaching assignments should be limited.

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