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PREPARING PROSPECTIVE TEACHERS AT THE UNIVERSITY OF CALGARY

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The current research-informed, four-term, two-year Bachelor of Education Program at the University of Calgary prepares teachers for Kindergarten to Grade 12. Unique features of this program include: a focus on teachers as experts of learning; disciplinary specialization for both elementary and secondary routes; field experiences linked to Partner Research Schools; and integration across courses within each semester and a coherent flow across the four semesters based on specified themes. The paper addresses each of these and the program structure in terms of the on-campus courses and the field experiences.

El Programa de Licenciatura en Educación de la Universidad de Calgary, basado en la investigación y con duración de cuatro semestres en dos años, prepara profesores desde Kinder hasta 12° grado (tercero de bachillerato). Aspectos únicos de este programa incluyen: un enfoque en profesores como expertos en aprendizaje; especialización por disciplina para ambas rutas primaria y secundaria; experiencias de campo ligadas a escuelas asociadas de investigación; e integración a lo largo de los cursos dentro de cada semestre y un flujo coherente de cuatro semestres basados en temas específicos. La presentación discutirá cada uno de estos aspectos, así como la estructura del programa en términos de los cursos en el campus y de las experiencias de campo.

INTRODUCTION

The research-informed, four-term, two-year Bachelor of Education Program at the University of Calgary prepares teachers for Kindergarten to Grade 12. A new curriculum of the program was implemented in the fall of 2011 that significantly changed the focus to greater emphasis on disciplinary and pedagogical knowledge for teaching. The first graduates of this new program will occur in spring of 2013. Unique features of this new program include: a focus on teachers as experts of learning; disciplinary specialization for both the elementary and secondary routes; field experiences linked to *Partner Research Schools*; and integration across courses within each semester and a coherent flow across the four semesters based on specified themes. The paper discusses each of these and the program structure in terms of the on-campus courses and the field experiences.

ROUTES AND PATHWAYS

There are two routes to the program: elementary (K – grade 6) and secondary (grades 6 – 12). However, all students are integrated in most of the courses, with the exceptions being the specialization and disciplinary-based courses and field experiences

There are also two pathways to obtaining the Bachelor of Education degree: the consecutive and the concurrent pathways. The consecutive or after-degree pathway is for students who already hold a university degree. This is a two year pathway, that is, students receive a Bachelor of Education degree in two years. The concurrent or direct-entry pathway is for students entering university directly from high school, i.e., they do not hold a post-secondary degree. This is a five-year pathway that leads to two degrees, the Bachelor of Education degree and a degree with faculty of Arts, Science or Kinesiology of the University of Calgary. Prospective students must apply to the Faculty of Education and one of these faculties and must be accepted by both to continue in this pathway. Students spend two years (year 3 and year 5) working towards the education degree and three years working towards the other degree.

UNIQUE FEATURES OF PROGRAM

The remainder of the paper highlights four of the prominent features of the program that are viewed as unique in relation to other programs in Canada and in relation to the old curriculum that it replaces.

Focus on teachers as experts of learning: The goal here is to engage the prospective teachers in learning about learning, for example, engage in critical review of prominent theories of learning within current discussions of education. The use of *learning* instead of learners is intended to acknowledge the inseparability of discussions of who is learning and what is being learned.

Disciplinary specialization for the elementary and secondary routes: The program recognizes the importance of specialist knowledge for both elementary and secondary teachers. General practice in Canada is for elementary teachers to be prepared as generalists and secondary teachers as specialists. Our program deviates from this by requiring prospective elementary teachers to select a specialization from those available (Table 1). However, because they will be hired as generalists and expected to teach all of the elementary disciplines, they do receive a course on each of the core elementary curriculum disciplines. The “inclusive education” and “English as an addition language” specializations are offered only to the elementary route because they are not teachable school subjects which the secondary route needs for teacher certification.

Elementary Route	Secondary Route
Mathematics	Mathematics
Science	Science
English Language Arts	English Language Arts
Social Studies	Social Studies
Early Childhood Education	French/second languages
French/second languages	Physical Education
Physical Education	Fine Arts
Fine Arts	
Inclusive Education	
English as an Additional Language	

Table 1: Specializations

Field experiences linked to “Partner Research Schools.” This is still in the developmental stage so a general description is not available. However, there is current relationship with two schools that involve a focus on mathematics education. On a general basis, a *Partner Research School* is similar to the Professional Development Schools in the USA. These schools are a key aspect of a teacher education model that involves a partnership between the Faculty of Education and K – 12 schools and offer mutual benefits to both through research activities that provide learning opportunities for student teachers and practicing teachers in the schools involved. This model is generally not a feature of programs in Canada.

Integration across courses and coherent flow across the four terms: The program is not intended to be a collection of isolated courses. Instead, the focus is on organizing the courses in each term and creating a flow across each term of the program based on the following themes:

- *Term 1 theme 1:* Introduction to learning and teaching
- *Term 2 theme 2:* Principles of individual learning and development
- *Term 3 theme 3:* Principles of social and cultural engagement
- *Term 4 theme 4:* Extending teaching and curriculum expertise

Table 2 summarizes the on-campus courses for each term and table 3 the field experiences for each term. The integration courses, in particular, are intended to provide connections across the courses within a term, for example, they allow students to integrate what they are learning in the non-specialization courses with what they are learning in the specialization courses.

Term 1	Term 2
Theme 1: <i>Introduction to learning and teaching</i> <u>Courses</u> Issues in Learning and Teaching Principles of Educational Psychology Pragmatics of learning and teaching Literacy, Language and Culture	Theme 2: <i>Principles of individual learning and development</i> <u>Courses</u> Individual Learning: Theories and Applications Diversity in learning Professional Development and Lifelong learning Specialization I Integration Seminar I
Term 3	Term 4
Theme 3: <i>Principles of social and cultural engagement</i> <u>Courses</u> Socio-Cultural Theories of Learning Interdisciplinary Learning Ethics and Law in Education English Language Learners FNMI History, Education Leadership Specialization II Integration Seminar II	Theme 4: <i>Extending teaching and curriculum expertise</i> <u>Courses</u> Elementary/secondary: Curriculum Seminars Assessment and Evaluation Integration Seminar III

Table 2: Program structure – on-campus courses

Students in the concurrent program are also required to take an introductory course in education in term 1 of the five-year program to establish their enrolment with the faculty of education. This course is intended to provide them (as new graduates from high school) with an introduction to the breadth and complexity of educational studies and to help them to decide whether becoming a teacher is really what they want to pursue.

Some of the courses unique to the program are:

- *Language, literacy, and culture* – based on the premise that all teachers are teachers of reading, so all students in the program take this course.
- *Professional development and lifelong learning* – based on adult education and intended to help the prospective teachers to understand themselves as learners and the impact of their learning on their teaching practice, and to prepare them to continue their learning after they graduate from the program.
- *Interdisciplinary learning* – intended to provide opportunities to help the prospective teachers to understand what it means to learn and work in teams, how to connect and integrate ideas from a variety of disciplines, and how to engage their students in team learning, for example, through project-based learning.
- *Integration seminar II* – intended to make the prospective teachers aware of current school-policy initiatives of the Alberta Ministry of Education and how the initiatives will influence school contexts in which they will work as future teachers in Alberta.

The field experiences (Table 3) are also connected to the themes of each term. The first field experience allows the prospective teachers to develop a general understanding of schools without getting engaged in any teaching. They spend one week in an elementary school (Kindergarten to grade 6) and one week in a secondary school (generally, grades 7 to 9 or grades 10 to 12) with a focus of conducting an ethnographic study of the schools. The second field experience allows them to apply theory from the on-campus courses and further develop their understanding of the individual learner and learning by working with individual or small groups of students in their classrooms. In the third term of the program, the third field experience allows the prospective teachers to learn and teach in teams in keeping with the socio-cultural theme of this term. The goal is for two or more of them to be placed in the same classroom with a mentor teacher and to collaborate in planning, team teaching, and reflecting on teaching. The final field experience in the fourth term of the program allows the prospective teachers to pool all of the knowledge from the previous field experiences and the on-campus courses to plan and conduct whole-class teaching to develop their pedagogical knowledge and identity as a teacher in a practical setting with a mentor teacher. The prospective teachers are also supervised by a faculty member in each term.

Term 1 – Field 1: 2 weeks ethnographic study of schools
Term 2 – Field 2: 3 weeks on individual learner/learning
Term 3 – Field 3: 4 weeks team learning and teaching
Term 4 – Field 4: 8 weeks whole-class teaching

Table 3: Field experiences

Technology is important to the program, but at this point, instead of being a separate course, it is infused throughout the program. Blackboard discussions are very common in the program.

Many of the courses are taught as a combination of a large lecture intended to provide a common core body of knowledge to all students and medium-sized break out seminars intended to allow students to further explore and deepen their understanding of the content covered in the lectures. The specialization, integration, curriculum and interdisciplinary courses do not have large lectures associated with them. The specialization courses are generally of smaller size ranging from 10 to 35 depending on the specialization, with social studies and English language arts being the largest and second languages and French being the smallest.

CONCLUSION

Now that the first two-year cycle of the new curriculum has been implemented, the program is being reviewed for possible changes to enhance the students' experience in it. Teacher education is a challenging endeavour and any teacher education program should involve ongoing evaluation to monitor the quality of the program from a lived experience perspective. Programs can be designed from an idealistic perspective that is difficult to realize because of the constraints when applied to a real-world context. The program at the University of Calgary is at a stage where it can benefit from evaluation and meaningful changes and these processes have begun.

