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Research brief: Pre-service teacher education availability in rural Canadian communities

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While the majority of Canadian university-based pre-service teacher education takes place within central and southern urban centers, limited programming is available for individuals who wish to pursue Bachelor of Education training in rural Canada. This document provides a summary of current Canadian options for rural pre-service teacher development also known as community-based teacher education.

In the Maritime provinces of Prince Edward Island, New Brunswick, Nova Scotia and Newfoundland, only Memorial University offers a Bachelor of Education Native and Northern program (Memorial University, 2016). As of May 2016, this program was under review and unavailable for admission. It is unclear as to whether this program was available in rural settings or on-campus.

There are currently no pre-service teacher education programs with rural availability in Québec.

In Ontario, both the University of Ottawa and Queen's University offer aboriginal community based pre-service teacher education programs. The University of Ottawa three-year, part-time program is offered in partnership with indigenous, including 80 days of practice teaching. Courses are delivered through distance education during the fall and winter, and in person in the sponsoring communities during the summer (University of Ottawa, 2016). In past years, the program was offered with community-based and on-campus availability. The program in 2016-17 was not running due to lack of applications (Kane, personal communication, 2016). The Aboriginal Teacher Education Program (ATEP) at Queen's University is a community-based program offered in the Manitoulin-North Shore region and at the Seven Generations Education Institute in the Fort Frances-Kenora region. Program material is delivered through short, intensive community-based course sessions during the fall and winter, and on campus sessions at Queen's University for two summer terms from May to August (Queen's University, 2016).

In Saskatchewan, community-based teacher education is available in numerous rural settings through the University of Regina, University of Saskatchewan, and First Nations University of Canada. The University of Regina offers community-based pre-service

teacher development programs in Meadow Lake and Nipawin (University of Regina, 2016). Each program is four years in length. The University of Saskatchewan has four-year Bachelor of Education programs in Duck Lake, Fort Smith, North Battleford, Debden, Onion Lake and Turtleford. These programs are taught by University of Saskatchewan faculty in the community and are not available through online delivery (University of Saskatchewan, 2016). The First Nations University of Canada has full-time community-based teacher education programs in Yorkton and Fort Qu'Appelle with planned expansions to Northern First Nation's communities in the future.

At the University of Alberta, community-based pre-service teacher education is available in Red Deer, Grand Prairie, and Fort MacMurray wherein the first two years of courses are held in satellite campuses and the final two years take place on the urban campus. Additionally, the Aboriginal Teacher Education Program (ATEP) is available through partnerships with Blue Quills First Nations College, Northern Lakes College, Portage College, and Maskwacis Cultural College (University of Alberta, 2016). As of July 2015, University of Calgary has created a Community-Based Bachelor of Education program that allows students to remain in their local Alberta communities. Students are required to attend a two-week summer residence every year. Online courses are provided in the fall and winter terms, and students have field experience placements in their local communities. Unlike the satellite campus model, students can reside anywhere in the province during the duration of their degree.

In British Columbia, community-based teacher education is available in rural satellite campuses through the University of British Columbia, the University of Victoria, and University of Northern British Columbia. University of British Columbia's pre-service teacher education is delivered via the West Kootenay Teacher Education Program located in Nelson (University of British Columbia, 2016) and the Okanagan teacher Education Program located in Kelowna (University of British Columbia, 2016a). University of British Columbia also offers aboriginal teacher education programs in Lillooet and Fraser Valley (2016b). In these programs the first two years take place in rural satellite campuses and final two years at the main urban campus. The University of Victoria, in association with the College of the Rockies in Cranbrook, offers a full-time teacher

education program leading to a Bachelor of Education degree. Participants complete their first year in a satellite campus in Cranbrook and second year in Victoria (CR, 2016). The University of Northern BC offers the final two years of a Bachelor of Education in Prince George and Terrace (University of Northern British Columbia, 2016).

There are no rural pre-service teacher programs in Manitoba, Yukon, Nunavut, and North West Territories. Programs are being developed in British Columbia, Alberta and Saskatchewan that could provide opportunities for those individuals in the Territories who wish to become teachers.

Analysis

A review of the current provision of teacher education programs targeted for rural and indigenous students revealed that Saskatchewan leads the way in terms of offering programs at numerous sites in an effort to be accessible to the largest number of rural students. These long standing programs from the University of Regina, First Nations University of Canada, and University of Saskatchewan are particularly designed for Indigenous communities.

Rural education programs in Canada generally fall under two models. The first model sets up a satellite campus for the duration of the program. The satellite campus offers the opportunity for students to remain in their local community, geographically close to the satellite campus, and have a face-to-face, residency-based program. The challenge for these programs is to attract and retain sufficient numbers of students in one particular rural area to run the program. These programs also face an additional challenge to find instructors and faculty with the requisite level of expertise and ability to teach at those satellite campuses. This is both a resource and quality issue for the participating universities. In some cases, faculty may be flown to a particular area for a term in order to teach a course. In other cases, institutions may look to find sessional or instructors in the local area to offer the course.

The second model places students in a satellite campus for a portion of their studies, with the other portion requiring students to move to the urban center to complete their degree.

The strength of this combined approach is threefold. It allows students to remain near the vicinity of the satellite campus for a portion of their studies, thereby lowering the costs of their tuition. For the host institution, it reduces the costs for providing an entire program beyond their main campus. Furthermore, this approach may reduce the perception that satellite campus programs provide a lesser quality of provision than can be provided by full-time faculty and main campus provisions. However, institutions that offer combined satellite and main campus programming may be limited by certain hidden assumptions. In particular, they may inadvertently assume that sufficient numbers of interested students reside in close proximity to the satellite campus in any given year. In addition, there may be an assumption that students have the financial means and mobility for relocation to the main urban campus for their studies.

Recently, the University of Calgary developed a new rural educational model to address the concerns raised above. This model allows students to reside in any rural area beyond the geographical vicinity of a satellite campus and a main urban campus, therein reducing the financial and personal implications of moving to an urban center.

Conclusion

Teacher education programs across Canada inconsistently address the needs of rural individuals who wish to become teachers. Canadian pre-service teacher programming continues to be dominated by urban-based programs operated well outside the vast Canadian North. While institutions in Saskatchewan, British Columbia, and Alberta provide leadership in the development of rural teacher education programs, there is an obvious need for further research into the practical delivery, accessibility, and availability for rural pre-service teachers across Canada.

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