

## The First Five Years: A Follow-up Study of a Rural Teacher Cohort

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*Since 1990, the University of Victoria has operated the East Kootenay Elementary Teacher Education Program (EKETEP), a preservice preparation program designed for rural school districts and citizens. Established as a collaborative venture of the University, a community college, and the provincial government, EKETEP is located in southeastern British Columbia, Canada, in the East Kootenay town of Cranbrook. In 1992, the first EKETEP cohort completed the preparation and certification process. These 22 teachers then participated in a 5-year study focusing on key aspects of their experience: career activities, career goals and preferences, perspectives on teaching, employment strategies, and reflection on preservice experience. This article reviews the findings of the study and their implications for teacher preparation and recruitment. The intent was to capture data regarding the early years of these teachers' professional experience to provide a reference for program planners and teacher employers.*

Canadian provinces and the federal government periodically undertake systematic reviews of key social services or major issues. The most recent British Columbia Royal Commission on Education (1988) provided a comprehensive review of the circumstances and conditions of schooling in the province. It identified some of the unique dimensions of rural life and education, and "the problem of delivering equal school services and ensuring equal opportunity to areas with thinly scattered population" (p. 194). Specifically, the Royal Commission noted the difficulty faced by rural school districts in recruiting and retaining teaching staff, observing that these districts faced "particular difficulties in competing with urban areas to attract teachers" (p. 195).

Elsewhere (Storey, 1992), I traced the early history of a collaborative venture in preservice teacher preparation mounted by the University of Victoria, East Kootenay Community College, and the government of British Columbia. A consortium was formed to deliver a 60-place elementary preservice teacher education program in Cranbrook, a community in the East Kootenay area of southeastern British Columbia. Thirty candidates would complete the 2-year program each year. One important intent of the East Kootenay Elementary Teacher Education Program (EKETEP) was to aid in meeting staffing needs in six area school districts by establishing a pool of qualified teachers likely to remain in the area. At the time this article was written, EKETEP had been in operation for 10 years. Eight cohorts had completed the program. The initiative was an

important and well-received response to citizens' demands for equity of opportunity.

EKETEP introduced opportunities for three groups: rural citizens, to pursue the goal of becoming teachers; rural school districts, to observe and interact with candidates who were acquainted with the region; and the two educational institutions, to fulfill their service mandates more completely. The present study provided an opportunity for a close look over several years at the professional lives of Cohort One, the first group of candidates to complete this program. Their experiences offer valuable insights into a unique initiative that, by 2000, had involved more than 200 individuals and had contributed positively to teacher recruitment and retention in southeastern British Columbia. The geographic setting of the program includes several communities that fit the U.S. Census definition of rural populations as "those in towns of 2,500 or fewer, or outside incorporated areas" (Kannapel & DeYoung, 1999, p. 67) and a few incorporated towns in the 4,000 to 20,000 range.

### The Study Group

The intent of the present longitudinal study was to follow for 5 years the first EKETEP cohort of 22 students, who completed their 2-year preservice program in the spring of 1992. The profile of this first EKETEP class differed somewhat from those that followed. Many Cohort One members could be considered "returning" rather than "continuing" students in terms of their enrollment in a full-time university program. Their median age was somewhat higher than that of later cohorts, suggesting that this first intake of students was drawn from a pool of people who were "waiting in the wings."

This was a rural area where previously there had been no similar opportunity. Most members of this first group were committed to living and working in the area on a long-term basis. In many cases, they were older than the typical student enrolled in a preservice teacher education program:

Many had families and considerable work experience. Recently held positions included, among others: biological technician, retail manager, bank teller, financial consultant, and child care worker. One commented, "It has been wonderful to be a part of this group of people who have so much experience." (Storey, 1992, p. 51)

The first EKETEP cohort provided a unique opportunity to study a group of recently certified teachers who were likely to be affected by the vagaries of the employment market, by restrained education budgets, and by a declining rural population. Most were place-bound, many of them by choice—the East Kootenay area was their home. They understood clearly the impact of home location on their educational opportunities. Asked what they would have done if the program had not been offered, only 8 of the 21 who responded indicated that they would have made other plans to attend university.

In important ways, enrollment in the first EKETEP cohort reflected the recommendation of the National Inquiry into Rural and Remote Education (Australia) to "maximise the utilisation of potential teaching talent already in rural or remote areas" (Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, 2000, p. 44). These students were familiar with local culture, geography, and economy. For a variety of reasons, this was their preferred area in which to live and work.

#### Study Purposes, Design, and Procedures

All 22 members of Cohort One agreed to participate in the first year of this 5-year longitudinal study (EKTCS), with the understanding that individuals could withdraw at any time. This qualitative research project had six objectives:

1. to track the career activities and patterns over 5 years of the 22 members of the first cohort,
2. to determine the extent to which participants' career experiences matched their goals and preferences,
3. to identify developments and changes in participants' perspectives on teaching,
4. to identify employment strategies utilized by subjects during a period of limited opportunity,
5. to identify components of the preservice preparation program that remained important over the study period, and
6. to obtain participants' views of ways to strengthen the preservice experience.

Yin (1984, p. 50) describes the single-case design as "eminently justifiable under certain conditions . . . [including] where the case is a rare or unique event, or where the case serves a revelatory purpose." EKETEP, as the only program of its type in the province, qualifies as an example of Yin's Type 2 single-case embedded design, in that the 22 cohort members constituted multiple units of analysis (1984, p. 46). Provincially, this was also somewhat of a revelatory case—the first EKETEP cohort offered an opportunity to study "a phenomenon previously inaccessible to scientific investigation" (Yin, 1984, p. 48). Methodology involved questionnaires, annual group meetings and, in some instances, personal interviews. At the outset, each participant was assigned a unique identification number as the sole means of identifying him/her to anyone other than the principal researcher.

Each year, available study participants met in Cranbrook for an update on the project and a get-together with colleagues they might not have seen for some time. When possible, the researcher traveled to other locations to which some participants had moved, or interviewed them by telephone. By the time the study period ended—5 years after program completion—17 of the 22 cohort members were still living in the East Kootenays. Of the remaining five, one had moved to Alberta, one to the Fraser Valley, and two to the Okanagan areas of British Columbia. The remaining cohort member was teaching in Indonesia. More than 5 years after program completion, these teachers were far less dispersed than probably was the case with their successors in later cohorts. That circumstance, combined with the commitment of almost all to completion of the study, facilitated data collection. Twenty-one of the 22 original cohort members participated through to the end of the 5-year data collection period.

Data were collected on age, prior education, reasons for choosing the program, career plans and changes of plan, employment status and preference, employment search strategies, continuing education, issues of interest, and professional development plans. The intent was to track quantifiable data such as employment status and preference, and to gather these teachers' views on their worlds of teaching. Funding and time constraints precluded extending the study

to include later cohorts, though systematic monitoring of these continues to be carried out by program staff.

### Discussion of the Findings

#### *Analysis of Work History*

*One year later: Initial reflections.* Throughout their program, EKETEP students worked closely with fellow cohort members and a small group of faculty. In their 2nd year, they were followed by a second cohort; that intake pattern has continued throughout the life of the program. This opportunity to enroll in a university program was a new phenomenon for the members of Cohort One, some of whom had seen themselves as isolated individuals with dreams. Some of their dreams became reality after program completion in a context of vigorous conversation and sharing of hopes, plans, and experiences. This dialogue and their early school experiences helped to confirm earlier decisions to explore new horizons:

I now want my B.Ed. degree with a focus on remediation. I am going to work towards that goal, keep applying for positions, and will probably leave my job as a parapro and substitute teacher next year. I am also considering applying for the Master's in Counseling.

I am no longer happy with the standard certificate, but have become a life long learner. I'd like to continue my education (part-time only) while working part-time.

Before entering the program, I thought I was only interested in teaching at the secondary school level. However, after taking 2 years of elementary education, I realized that I would also greatly enjoy teaching at the primary/intermediate level.

Originally, I had planned to complete my full 5 years and obtain a professional certificate. Since doing my practicum and with the advice of friends in the teaching profession, I have seen the value of obtaining some classroom experience before completing a degree. Also, the strain of attending school for 4 years and being a part-time wife made me want to give something back to my husband for all his support before I had to leave for the coast to complete my degree.

For these residents of rural British Columbia, the opportunity for further education with a career possibility at the end was as welcome as it was unexpected. The benefits

extended beyond Cohort One to the students, schools, and school districts of the East Kootenays.

*The first 5 years.* Data were gathered regarding the respondents' work history for 5 years following program completion in 1992. Their employment activity was examined in three main categories: teaching contract, substitute teaching, and other activity (Table 1). Within the first category, data were grouped into the subcategories of continuing and temporary contract, and the returns were referenced according to percentage of full-time employment.

Overall, the results were encouraging, though that might not have seemed so for some individual respondents. In the first year of reporting (1992-93), 6 of 21 respondents had at least a temporary contrary teaching contract. Three held continuing full-time contracts. By year five (1996-97), the number holding a teaching contract had climbed to 15, although the number of full-time continuing contracts had only risen from 3 to 4. For some, frustration with employment realities continued. In 1996, a respondent who reported working as a substitute teacher an average of 3-5 days per week, hoped to find "a full-time or part-time job rather than substituting forever. . . . I want to be a full-fledged member of a teaching team, not just back-up help." By 1997, though her employment pattern had not changed, she rated proximity to preferred employment as "reasonably close."

A participant who, in 1996, had reported working an average of 3-5 days per week as a teacher on call, was by 1997 working on a temporary part-time contract of at least 50%. In 1997, he rated proximity as "not very close, but acceptable." In 1996, however, he had asked "How do I get a full-time job—how much longer do I have to wait? . . . Are there other jobs or professions in the area that my education could be useful for (i.e., do companies need people with an education background for training purposes)?"

In a small study such as this, percentages can be misleading. For that reason, most of this discussion will refer to numbers rather than percentages. Nevertheless, over the 5-year study period, the total number who reported holding a teaching contract grew from 6 to 15—a 250% increase. That is noteworthy, particularly in a group warned that they could have considerable difficulty securing a teaching position. By the end of the study, 15 of the 21 whose status was known held either a temporary or a continuing appointment, ranging up to full-time continuing for four respondents.

The increase in the number who reported holding a teaching contract (a gain of 9 over the study period) was matched almost exactly by a decline of 8—from 13 to 5—in the number who reported substitute teaching as an activity. Most of the on-call group were working an average of at least 1-2 days per week. It was clear from discussions

Table 1  
*Respondents' Work History 1992-1997—Group Analysis*

Activity	1992-93	1993-94	1994-95	1995-96	1996-97	Change
<b>A. Teaching contract:</b>						
1. Continuing full-time	3	2	2	3	4	
2. Continuing part-time over 50%	-	1	5	1	1	
3. Continuing part-time to 50%	-	-	-	3	2	
Totals (continuing appointment)	3	3	7	7	7	+4
4. Temporary full-time	1	1	1	3	3	
5. Temporary part-time over 50%	-	3	-	2	1	
6. Temporary part-time to 50%	2	2	5	3	4	
Totals (temporary appointment)	3	6	6	8	8	+5
Totals (teaching contract)	6	9	13	15	15	+9
<b>B. Substitute teaching:</b>						
7. Average 3-5 days/week	6	6	4	5	2	
8. Average 1-2 days/week	6	7	3	1	3	
9. Average less than one day/week	1	1	4	2	-	
Totals (substitute teaching)	13	14	11	8	5	-8
<b>C. Other activity:</b>						
10. Other school job	1	-	-	-	-	
11. Homemaker	-	-	3	-	-	
12. Other employment	-	-	2	2	1	
13. Other activity	3	-	1	1	-	
14. Unknown	1	-	-	1	1	
Totals (other activity)	4	-	6	3	2	-2
Respondents	22	22	22	21	21	

*Note.* Some respondents identified more than one activity.

with some participants that substitute teaching was viewed as a "door" to securing a teaching contract.

By the end of 1997, 5 years after program completion, at least 20 of the 22 members of EKETEP Cohort One were working as teachers. Fifteen held teaching contracts; seven of those held continuing appointments, in four cases full-time contracts. The remaining 5 of the 20 who completed and returned surveys in Year Five were working as substitute teachers (teachers on call). Those were surprisingly

positive returns in a period of fiscal restraint, considering the very small size of the six East Kootenay school districts.

Four of the seven respondents whose Year Five employment was a continuing contract (subcategories 1-3) had moved to that category from a non-continuing position: temporary appointment, teacher on call, or other activity. Of the eight who reported a temporary teaching contract (subcategories 4-6), six had moved from teacher on call

(substitute teacher) or other activity. All of these teachers reported wanting to teach, whether on call or as a regular staff member. For most, that proved a reality. Eight respondents reported no change in category, but four of these individuals held at least a temporary teaching contract in Year Five. Overall, the results reflect a strong trend toward regularized employment as a teacher and away from the relative uncertainty of teaching on call. For most, this was the target.

*Employment strategies and circumstances.* In 1996, respondents who held a teaching contract were asked to identify the primary strategies or circumstances that had led to this employment. Their responses could be categorized as prior work experience, academic/professional preparation, contract provisions, and reputation and initiative. Three respondents indicated that they had done prior related work in the school or district to establish their presence (e.g., as a paraprofessional or substitute teacher).

Two respondents indicated aspects of their preparation as a teacher that they felt had affected their employment (e.g., internship, specialty subject areas). Two respondents commented on the effect of their work history on their employment. For example, "I was contacted by the School Board and offered the job on the basis of my position on the recall list."

The final category, reputation and initiative, included factors cited previously. One respondent noted: "I had worked with the principal before at another school, and he knew I had the specialty training for the job and that I would be willing to take on a challenging position." Three respondents indicated clearly that, in the quest to find work, establishing evidence of capability was of great importance. For example,

Being prepared for interviews and for class. Giving my all as a TOC (attending extra meetings, volunteering extra time, always marking and preparing daybook). Last year I took an extremely demanding temporary assignment and was successful—I had the superintendent and the principal on my job-hunting side.

I had a very successful practicum at that school. I subbed a lot, was available when my first term job came up, a teacher left on stress leave. I was actually in the school and took over the next day. I have taken a leadership role in science curriculum.

#### *Work Preferences and Realities*

At the time Cohort One completed the program, 11 of the 19 who indicated that they planned to teach stated that they wanted to obtain a continuing contract. Nine desired a

full-time appointment. Two of the remaining eight preferred a temporary contract, while six wished to work as a teacher on call. Of greater interest, though, is the respondents' level of satisfaction with the 1997 reality that followed their stated preferences from 5 years before. Respondents were asked to assess their Year Five activities in terms of their 1992 preferences as "very close or an exact match;" "reasonably close;" "not very close, but acceptable;" or "not very close, not very satisfying."

No respondent chose "not very close, not very satisfying." For 13 of 22, 1997 activity either matched the 1992 stated preference or was even closer than that to full-time continuing employment. Eight cohort members categorized their 1997 activity as "very close or an exact match;" and 10 assessed it as "reasonably close."

Clearly, some cohort members had adjusted their thinking over time. Three examples illustrate this point. One respondent had stated a 1992 preference for "continuing full-time employment" as a teacher. That person's work activity in 1997 was reported as "other employment," but was assessed by the respondent as "reasonably close" to 1992 stated preference. A respondent who had stated a preference for "continuing part-time over 50%," reported in 1977 "substitute teaching average 1-2 days/week" and assessed proximity to the 1992 preference as "reasonably close." A third respondent, who had stated a 1992 preference for "continuing part-time to 50%," in 1997 held a temporary appointment within that time category and assessed it as "reasonably close" to 1992 stated preference.

By 1997, at least 20 of the 22 members of Cohort One were employed in some capacity as teachers. For five, that was still the uncertainty of employment as a teacher on call, which had applied to 13 individuals in 1992-93, the first year after program completion. By 1997, seven (up from three in their first year) held continuing appointments, and eight (up by five) held temporary appointments. Given the employment prospects presented to these people before and during their time in EKETEP, this reflected both program and personal success.

#### *Looking Ahead*

In 1997, the final year of the study period, respondents were asked about their work preferences and their most realistic perceived possibilities for the coming year and for the 5 years ahead. In every case, cohort members indicated a preference for and a perceived possibility of continued involvement in teaching, whether on call or under contract.

The data were examined in two categories: teaching on contract, whether full- or part-time, continuing or temporary; and substitute teaching, regardless of the average number of days per week. Optimism was stronger for the time 5 years from reporting, an indication perhaps that most saw a reasonable longer-term professional future. Only one

respondent who preferred a contract appointment in 5 years projected that the most realistic scenario was substitute teaching. In terms of the coming year, 17 projected employment in their preferred main category (contract or teacher on call). Four projected that while they would prefer either a temporary or a continuing position, they would actually be teaching on call in 1997-98. It is relevant to note that these respondents were located in some of the smallest communities in the East Kootenay area, where opportunities were more limited. Enrollment and the fiscal situation were cited most frequently as factors affecting the work life of those who would prefer a contract in 1997-98, but did not expect to secure one.

#### *Continuing Education and Professional Development*

The postsecondary education levels of the Cohort One students at entry into EKETEP varied from less than 2 years to completion of a degree in another field. By finishing the 2-year program, these students had completed at least 4 years of the 5-year Bachelor of Education degree. In addition, they were certified to teach in British Columbia.

By the end of the 5-year study period, 13 of 21 Cohort One members had undertaken further education. Three were working on the final year of the bachelor's degree and eight had finished that degree. Two had completed a Master's degree—one in Educational Administration, the other in Counseling. The remaining eight respondents had not undertaken further postsecondary education. There was no apparent connection between further education and the nature of respondents' 1997 employment activity. Of the four teachers who reported that they held a full-time continuing appointment as a teacher, one had pursued no further education since completing EKETEP, one had completed part of the 5th year, one had completed the bachelor's degree, and one had completed a Master's degree. Among those who had not undertaken further education, all types of teaching activity were reported: continuing full-time and part-time, temporary part-time and full-time, and substitute teaching.

In 1996, Cohort One members were asked about their plans for professional growth. The responses were clustered as: (a) contingency plans, (b) further education, (c) administration as a career goal, (d) general upgrading, and (e) curriculum and instructional skill. Contingency plans were noted by three respondents as a response to the possibility of not achieving their primary employment goals. Five indicated plans to pursue further education, in most cases to complete the Bachelor of Education degree. One respondent had gained experience that helped to clarify administration as a career goal.

The majority of responses focusing on professional development were directly related to currency and general

improvement of teaching skill. The general upgrading responses dealt primarily with currency, presumably in some cases to enhance job prospects. The largest single group of comments (four) focused on the acquisition/development of computer skills. Other responses dealt with development of curriculum and instructional skill in special education or in specific subjects, such as reading. Only one respondent indicated an effect that the general employment reality might have on career and professional development planning, suggesting that "If I cannot secure a counseling position in my school district, then I would like to try my hand at private practice—maybe contract work."

#### *Topics of Discussion and Personal Reflection*

In the final 2 years of data collection, two questions designed to identify topics important to study participants were included in the survey to determine whether there were any trends or common themes. Respondents were asked: (a) What important topics and issues related to education/schools/teaching and teachers are discussed frequently among those with whom you work? and (b) What important topics and issues related to education/schools/teaching and teachers do you think about quite often as matters of challenge or concern? In other words, what are the important issues for you personally?

Several of the comments and patterns discussed below were also noted by cohort members who attended reunion meetings in June of each year. In some cases, there was considerable overlap between responses to the two questions. For purposes of this discussion, the participants' observations have been grouped according to five themes.

*Curriculum and instruction.* The data regarding curriculum and instruction clustered into seven areas: (a) curriculum change, (b) breadth and diversity of curriculum, (c) implementation, (d) instructional strategies, (e) expectations, (f) evaluation and reporting, and (g) specific curricula. Curriculum change drew more comment than any other component of this topic area. Generally, the message could be interpreted as "too much too fast." One respondent commented, "Too much curricular and evaluative change, too fast," while another added, "too much change imposed too often from Ministry." One respondent referred to "the incredible amount of change taking place." Integrated Resource Packages (IRPs) were noted by several as a key variable in curriculum change. Regarding to breadth and diversity, respondents commented further about the complexity and impact of curricular change: "Too broad of a curriculum base to be realistically covered well," and "how to decide what the priorities are in meeting new curriculum and all the other 'stuff' we do as teachers." One noted, "the difficulty of getting it 'all' in." Further specificity was added in comments regarding implementation,

which focused on both content and strategy. The reader gains the impression of a group of teachers bombarded with rapid and pervasive changes. For teachers, much of this externally imposed change is not only required, but also scheduled.

Other topics in this section were more typical of the content of teachers' professional conversations. They wondered about the core areas of reading and mathematics, identifying the need for instructional strategies in these subject areas. Regarding expectations, one respondent asked, "Now what does the Ministry and parents expect us teachers to teach?"

A few commented on evaluation and reporting, others on specific curricula. Integrated Resource Packages (IRPs) were cited by seven respondents either as a matter for staff discussion or as an item of personal concern. They used such descriptors as "change," "new," "implementing," "dealing with," and "ways to deal with," suggesting that this was an item of considerable importance. One might infer that perhaps these teachers were feeling the pressure of rapid, sustained curricular change and its accompanying flow of support materials.

Four respondents cited evaluation and reporting as an item of discussion or concern. Two raised questions fundamental to the teaching-learning process: "Standards — am I meeting those elusive standards?" and "Educating vs. looking good (i.e., test scores for grades 2 and 3)." Some referred generally to "evaluation," others more specifically to "effective assessment and evaluation" or "criterion referenced assessment." One noted as a personal concern, "I'd like to find a less time-consuming way to do report cards that was still valid."

In the main, though, these teachers indicated that curricular change and its resulting realities were prominent enough to be discussed widely among colleagues. It was not difficult to sense, in some relatively brief comments, the pressures of a world of teaching in which desired a greater sense of certainty and predictability. Perhaps one implication for teacher educators is the need to educate prospective teachers to meet and handle the complexities of change that sometimes seems overwhelming in scope and content.

*Students.* Respondents commented in three areas: (a) behavior/discipline, (b) changing student profile, and (c) special needs. Students were a primary topic of conversation throughout the period of this study, particularly during the annual get-togethers of Cohort One members. Understandably, when teachers identify challenges regarding student behavior, they look beyond that to establish reasons for the behavior and ways of dealing with it in students' best interests. Cohort members offered many comments regarding student behavior/discipline, both in 1996

and in 1997. Some were terse: "Behavior problems." Others provide some elaboration:

How to discipline unruly children or have a calm school environment.

Unacceptable behaviors of students and lack of support from administrators in dealing firmly with them.

Poor level of mutual respect, kindness, acceptance among children themselves—frequency of bullying, ostracization, etc.

Classroom management of severe disruptive, behaviorally challenged students.

Discipline—how children have changed, what to do about it.

One female respondent, during an annual cohort get-together dinner, described having been physically assaulted by an intermediate-grade child, prompting a discussion among cohort members about the nature of the student population. Some respondents referred to evidence of a changing student profile as a factor job challenge and complexity. Several provided detail in later questionnaire responses:

Increase in the numbers of troubled/difficult children.

Changing student profile and lack of support for these students.

Breakdown of families—stresses on kids.

These challenges were seen as part of a larger picture. Cohort One members needed to plan for and instruct students with a wide range of special needs, in contexts that often did not provide adequate support:

Decrease in special education support for troubled/difficult kids.

Wide range of student abilities with insufficient structure/resources to accommodate successfully.

In a recent study, Abel and Sewell (1999, p. 293) reported that both urban and rural teachers experienced stress associated with "pupil misbehavior (i.e., pupils who continually misbehave and are impolite), maintaining class discipline, and . . . lack of time to spend with individual pupils."

As the Cohort One comments suggest, those issues are pervasive and prominent.

These teachers voiced concern for the best interests of students. Some reported searching for better ways of meeting individual needs:

How to reach that student who is just not getting it—methods to try, etc.

Trying to meet the needs of the one or two students in each class year that seem academically unprepared for the next grade level.

Able students—am I providing enough enrichment for those bright sparks?

The members of Cohort One started teaching during a period of fiscal restraint, new perspectives on inclusion, and substantial curriculum change. Unlike many of their colleagues who had been teachers for a longer period, they perhaps had less opportunity for mentoring and support, because the new realities surrounding teaching and schools were new to all. These beginning teachers would have to adjust and learn to cope along with their experienced colleagues. They commented extensively on the circumstances of their work, as noted below.

*Working and learning conditions.* Participants' comments regarding their concerns focused on seven dimensions: (a) job availability and tenure, (b) school district organization and funding, (c) cutbacks and layoffs, (d) support personnel, (e) expectations, (f) stress and burnout, and (g) professional development.

For teachers who have undertaken extensive pre-certification preparation, and particularly people who have long dreamed of the opportunity to enter the profession, obtaining a job is a major priority. For a few members of Cohort One, that was not a major issue—they found their preferred work quite quickly. For others, substitute teaching and short-term appointments were facts of life, accepted as steps along the way, but not their real goal. Many comments on job availability and tenure reflected uncomfortable realities of the times and the setting in which these teachers sought to begin teaching:

Finding a full-time or a part-time job rather than substituting forever. I want to be a full-fledged member of a teaching team, not just back-up help.

How do I get a full-time job. How much longer do I have to wait?

Are there other jobs or professions in the area that my education could be useful for (i.e., do compa-

nies need people with an education background for training purposes)?

While the above comments were entered as personal concerns, one respondent reported colleague discussion of the "issue of seniority and how it makes it nearly impossible for new teachers to break into the system."

School district amalgamation (consolidation), a then-current issue that affected approximately one third of British Columbia school districts, was a school district organization and funding issue that prompted several comments. Respondents saw it as a development with a direct impact on job possibilities. Consolidation was an event-rooted item, noted by eight respondents as a topic of colleague discussion and in four instances as a personal concern. Most often, respondents referred to the issue simply as "amalgamation," although two other concerns were noted. First, throughout the study period, the cohort group included individuals still teaching on call rather than on contract. They were substitute teachers, with concerns about the possible impact of school district consolidation on their employment prospects. One wondered, "Amalgamation—effect it will have on hiring?" Another was more specific: "How will amalgamation affect teachers on call—pay, how/where they will be called out, etc.?" These two concerns were direct and focused statements regarding working conditions for these teachers and echo elsewhere in this discussion.

Teachers in many rural British Columbia school districts in the mid-1990s faced both the prospect and the reality of reduction in the number of school districts through consolidation. It was a turbulent time, particularly for those whose lack of regular employment status or seniority threatened the certainty of their immediate future. One captured the mood of many: "Amalgamation—what a joke. Are we really saving money?" The topic occurred frequently in the responses as a representation of the uncertainty facing study participants and their colleagues. That uncertainty extended to the further reality of cutbacks and layoffs related both to consolidation and to the broader issue of education funding. The members of Cohort One were also affected by reductions in the number of support personnel available: child care workers, librarians, and learning assistance specialists.

Six respondents referred to the expectations facing teachers from all sides: the Ministry of Education, the public, parents, and their own union. Three commented on teacher stress and burnout as matters of concern:

Too broad a role expected out of the 'teacher' role, i.e. expected to act as parents, police, counselors, behavior specialists, etc.

Public attitudes toward education, teachers, etc.

These teachers were reflective in regard to their own professional development, especially around the topics they identified as matters of personal interest and concern. Several comments indicated a strong commitment to maintaining life as a teacher:

To foster my love of learning and teaching.

What to do next: Master's? TESL certificate?

As I look at other teachers around me, I realize the importance of keeping current with research. I am concerned I won't keep up.

The world of teaching—curriculum and instruction, the nature and needs of students, and the conditions surrounding teaching and learning—formed a different world for Cohort One members than the one they remembered from their own school years. They began teaching in a climate of change that did not always present welcome realities. However, their conversations at annual get-togethers and their questionnaire responses reflected a mature professionalism and a determination to remain active on chosen paths.

*Communication and working relationships.* Six respondents commented on administrator support as a dimension of communication and working relationships. Participants in the annual get-togethers offered examples from their experience. In part, the comments were idiosyncratic, since they referred to only a few school principals. But they highlight the crucial importance of the working relationship between teacher and principal:

Unacceptable behaviors from students and lack of support from administration in dealing with them.

Inconsistent discipline policies and inconsistent AO (administrative officer)/Board support regarding discipline of students.

Administrative support for teachers on call.

Additional inquiry might identify the precise nature of the support perceived by these teachers as necessary, but one might infer from their responses and their discussions at annual get-togethers that support in conflictual situations involving students was both crucial and sometimes lacking.

Comments regarding parents referred in some cases to the general matter of parent-teacher relations. In one case, the matter was highlighted as an "increase in frustration levels of teachers in dealing with parents of troubled kids."

Human contexts are defined by communication and relationships. The comments of two Cohort One members captured issues of concern:

Confrontational atmosphere between parents and teachers, teachers and administrators, parents and administrators, students and teachers, students and administrators.

Lack of cooperation, sharing, common-sense solutions among staff and/or between staff and administrators.

While two comments may not fully describe a situation, these remarks do illustrate the importance of particular variables to the work of teachers.

#### *School and Classroom Operation*

Comments were clustered in two areas: (a) classroom and instructional management, and (b) school-level planning. Little comment was offered regarding school-level activity, except to observe that school accreditation was for some a matter of interest. However, the comments on classroom and instructional management suggested clearly both a preservice preparation and an in-service education need in the areas of planning and time management:

Classroom management—increasingly time-consuming (class dependent).

Sharing of ideas between staff members—a life saver!

Do I have to re-invent everything?

My organization of day-to-day, weekly, and monthly planning.

I still spend too much time planning, marking, etc. I need to be more efficient somehow.

Respondents voiced a strong commitment to the profession of teaching. Five years after completing the EKETEP program, the majority were engaged in teaching, whether as occasional substituting or as permanent full-time work. Some had achieved important career goals. Others remained frustrated by the realities of time, place, and fiscal climate. Yet all displayed confidence in a positive future ahead. Most preferred to ensure that future in their local area.

#### *Looking Back at the Preservice Program*

In 1993, one year after they had completed EKETEP, the members of Cohort One were asked three questions about the program: What would you delete? What would you retain but change substantially? What would you add?

The responses fell primarily into three categories: (a) curriculum relevance and strengthening, (b) the practicum experience, and (c) organization for teaching. On the basis of their comments regarding curriculum relevance and strengthening, it was recommended that the relevance of each course to future classroom teachers be made explicit in a manner that will be understood and accepted by these students. Further, it was suggested that course content and relevance be reviewed in the light of student observations. Regarding practica, it was suggested that student input regarding practicum structure and nature be sought on an ongoing basis.

The writer has observed that in terms of curriculum, EKETEP is largely the regular on-campus program offered at a distant site, reflecting the critique that

teacher education programs . . . too often prepare teachers with a great deal of pedagogy but often neglect to prepare these individuals for . . . the understanding of teaching in a rural environment. Curriculum development that engulfs the opportunities for the small community as a classroom and approaches rural values and realities is virtually nonexistent. (Smith & Lotven, 1993, p. 462)

This critique is consistent with the observation of Herzog and Pittman (1995, p. 114) that "programs have done little to provide educators with specialized training for work in rural areas."

Finally, regarding organizing for teaching, it was suggested that preservice programs ensure preparation for classroom operation and instructional management: planning, time management, start-up procedures, handling operational routines. Whether or not EKETEP remains a program offering in the present location, effort should be directed toward developing it as a distinctively rural program, readily transferable to other locales.

EKETEP is an intensive experience, and Cohort One was there in "the early days." At the time this article was written, almost all respondents were actively involved in teaching in this rural corner of British Columbia. Their reality may resonate with early-career teachers in other jurisdictions.

#### Relevance and Application

At the time this study commenced, EKETEP had just completed its first full cycle and had presented 22 students as candidates for certification to teach in British Columbia. This report has presented elements of the 5-year journey of that class as they entered the world of teaching. Several observations are relevant. First, in terms of increasing the population of certified teachers available to teach

in rural British Columbia, particularly in the elementary schools of the East Kootenays, the program decidedly has met a need. Beyond that, many members of Cohort One found employment as teachers that approximated their goal or at least was acceptable to them. An opportunity was provided for rural residents of this corner of the province to receive career-focused university education generally available only in urban areas. The extent to which EKETEP represents a uniquely rural preservice alternative is queried above; the question of utilizing technology to strengthen delivery has received little attention. Both issues require attention.

Second, these first EKETEP participants have identified issues and topics of concern to them and to their colleagues—issues that reverberate throughout schools and have particular relevance for beginning teachers. That finding can be placed alongside their retrospective analyses of EKETEP, a unique preservice program. The Cohort has provided useful baseline data against which the responses of subsequent program completers in EKETEP and elsewhere can be placed. This study, then, has provided data of potential use to teacher educators, both those concerned with process and those concerned with content. The study has captured candid assessments of a program that these individuals recognized as an unparalleled opportunity, one to which they were prepared to offer constructive comment and suggestions.

EKETEP is a small part of the educational infrastructure of one Canadian province. Its future is tied closely to realities of teacher supply and demand. There are also important questions of equity, accessibility, and opportunity for those who by preference or by circumstance live in rural British Columbia. Clearly, the initiators responded to both a need and an opportunity. The immediate beneficiaries of that response are the teacher candidates, the schools, and their students. In the broader context, EKETEP provides a setting for the continued study of rural education and of programs designed to provide a certification opportunity for rural citizens. This account of the Cohort One experience may be relevant for other jurisdictions searching for valid responses to the need to ensure quality education in small rural communities.

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