

Evolving Practices: Admissions Policies in Ontario Teacher Education Programs

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Abstract

This study investigated the admissions practices of Ontario's teacher education programs during the 2014–2015 and 2015–2016 academic years. Data were gathered from 15 institutions via online resources and collaborative conversations with stakeholders at each institution. The findings identify that academic averages are used by every Ontario university as a measure of cognitive skills, while non-cognitive written statements and references are used by a majority of institutions. A majority of programs also articulate explicit equity admissions policies. These findings represent the first study of Ontario admissions in the wake of Regulation 283/13, and the first Ontario admissions study to augment online data with province-wide stakeholder input. This research offers a thorough, current overview of admissions practices that may be used to inform policymaking in Ontario teacher education, and serve as a helpful resource to other ITE programs outside of Ontario.

Keywords: teacher education, admissions practices

Résumé

Cette étude porte sur les pratiques d'admission des programmes de formation à l'enseignement en Ontario au cours des années universitaires 2014-2015 et 2015-2016. Les données ont été colligées auprès de 15 établissements par le biais de ressources en ligne et d'échanges avec des responsables au sein de chaque établissement. Les conclusions mettent en lumière que les notes moyennes sont utilisées par chaque université ontarienne pour mesurer les aptitudes cognitives tandis que les déclarations écrites d'ordre non cognitif et les références sont utilisées par la majorité des universités. La plupart des programmes comprennent aussi des politiques d'équité explicites quant aux admissions. Il s'agit de la première étude sur les admissions en Ontario à la suite du Règlement 283/13 et de la première étude sur les admissions en Ontario à enrichir les données grâce à la collaboration de responsables en poste partout dans la province. Cette recherche présente un survol exhaustif des pratiques d'admission actuelles, lequel pourrait être utilisé pour l'élaboration des politiques relatives à la formation à l'enseignement en Ontario et servir de ressource précieuse pour d'autres programmes de formation initiale à l'enseignement en dehors de l'Ontario.

Mots-clés : formation à l'enseignement, pratiques d'admission

Introduction

Canadian teacher education programs exist within a context of change and competing stakeholder visions. These challenges are well-documented in teacher education literature (Darling-Hammond & Bransford, 2005; Goodwin & Oyler, 2008; Kitchen & Petrarca, 2015; Kosnik & Beck, 2006) and have prompted the institutions that offer these programs to make a variety of changes to teacher education (Crocker & Dibbon, 2008). Ontario teacher education programs have a particular impetus for change. In 2013, the Ontario Ministry of Education (OME) introduced Regulation 283/13, requiring teacher education programs to increase their minimum number of semesters from two to four, and increase the minimum number of field experience days in their programs from 40 to 80 (OME, 2013b). Moreover, the government announced a plan to reduce admission rates to teacher education programs by 50% to “address an oversupply of graduates, enabling Ontario’s qualified teachers to find jobs” (OME, 2013a, para. 4). Thus, in addition to the structural and substantive changes to teacher education, Ontario’s teacher education programs also face challenges in adjusting their admissions practices to reflect this new program structure (Thomas & Kane, 2015).

These challenges must be addressed if admissions practices are to align to the programs they serve. For example, teacher educators must consider which admissions tools to use (Petrarca & LeSage, 2014) and how those tools will affect the makeup of their student cohorts (Childs, Ferguson, Herbert, Broad, & Zhang, 2016). They must consider which requirements are necessary (Falkenberg, 2010) and which policies help them to respond to students’ needs as emerging educators (Hirschhorn & Sears, 2015). As Eva, Rosenfeld, Reiter, and Norman (2004) note, “there is considerable controversy regarding how best to select individuals from pools of highly qualified applicants” (p. 314) and, in particular, how to select candidates most appropriate for a program’s approach (Kitchen & Petrarca, 2016). This article, based on a larger report of admissions practices in Ontario (Holden, Kitchen, Petrarca, & LeSage, 2016), aims to support teacher educators by identifying these issues, and by clarifying what practices are being used across the Ontario context. Teacher educators may then use this information to inform decisions at their own institutions and develop admissions practices that support their program goals.

In the following sections, we summarize the existing research on admissions practices, particularly in Canadian teacher education. We also describe seven assessment tools

being used to assess applicants' cognitive and non-cognitive suitability for admission. A description of the present study follows.

Literature Review

The Many Purposes of Admissions Practices

At their most basic level, admissions practices select which applicants are qualified to enter teacher education programs and which are not (DeLuca, 2012). Because teacher education programs have low rates of attrition, failure, and withdrawal (Childs & Ferguson, 2015; Kosnik, Brown, & Beck, 2005), admissions practices are often viewed as the only systematic opportunity to select candidates who are suitable to the program and the profession (Dore et al., 2009). Beyond their utility as a gatekeeping practice, however, admissions standards also shape the future of the profession. For the student, admission to a program increases their social capital and positions them as a citizen who will one day shape education for future generations (Guinier, 2003). For the university, accepted candidates become program ambassadors, and the quality of their representation affects the perceived quality of the institution (Kosnik et al., 2005).

Admissions practices must also be cost effective (Eva et al., 2004) and align with the size and values of their programs (Childs et al., 2011; Kosnik et al., 2005). Crocker and Dibbon's (2008) pan-Canadian study of teacher education programs identified programs that valued social justice, equity, and producing competent, reflective practitioners. Alternatively, Kosnik and colleagues describe an admissions process that seeks to identify "strong interpersonal skills, good problem-solving skills, keen reflective tendencies, a broad world-view, and a social conscience" (p. 103). Guinier (2003) and Childs and colleagues (2011) advocate for more equitable admissions processes, particularly since "the current teaching force does not reflect the diversity of the student population" (Childs & Ferguson, 2015, p. 428). Each of these purposes may alter the way in which the program selects its candidates.

In order to align a program's purpose with its admissions practices, Thomson and colleagues (2011) suggest that teacher educators should develop an "explicit coherence" for the admissions process. Casey and Childs (2007) similarly suggest teacher educators

should base their admissions practices on clear research and an analysis of their own program's capabilities. Such an approach may also provide a more level playing field for program applications and clarify how equity practices will actually support members of underrepresented groups (Childs et al., 2011; Oloo, 2007).

Assessment Tools in Admissions

Regardless of what a program values or the purposes its admissions serve, every teacher education program must decide how those values will be assessed, and what tools will be used in the assessment process. While different programs use different combinations of tools (Casey & Childs, 2011), how these tools are used is not always made explicit (Smith & Pratt, 1996). Determining which assessment tools are most effective is not a simple task (Marrin, McIntosh, Keane, & Schmuck, 2004), and as a result teacher educators disagree on how best to select teacher candidates (Caskey, Peterson, & Temple, 2001). Further, despite widespread interest in selecting the correct assessment tools (Caskey et al., 2001; Petrarca & LeSage, 2014), existing assessment tools may not be valid, and may not actually select candidates who are most likely to succeed in the program or the profession (Ackley, Fallon, & Brouwer, 2007). Assessment tools are often criticized for being unable to objectively assess applicants' non-cognitive abilities, further complicating teacher educators' interest in candidates' non-cognitive skills (Albanese, Snow, Skochelak, Huggett, & Farrell, 2003; DeLuca, 2012; Thomas & Kane, 2015).

While academic averages are by far the most common tool for assessing program applicants, they are not a universally accepted measurement of applicant ability (Casey & Childs, 2011). In particular, academic averages do not seem to serve as strong predictors of a candidate's performance once they enter the profession (Ackley et al., 2007; Smith & Pratt, 1996), and emphasizing academic criteria at the expense of non-cognitive abilities overlooks applicants' "verbal, interpersonal, and leadership qualities" (Byrnes, Kiger, & Shechtman, 2003, p. 163).

After academic averages, written statements are the most commonly used tool in teacher education admissions. Teacher educators contend that these statements provide insights into applicants' dispositions, their beliefs, and whether they possess the qualities necessary to succeed in the profession (Denner, Salzman, & Newsome, 2001; Hirschhorn

& Sears, 2015; Kosnik et al., 2005). As written statements vary from institution to institution, however, it is difficult to assess the validity of these tools (Albanese et al., 2003), particularly if students receive help from outside sources when submitting their application. Writing in an American context, Guinier (2003) notes that “test preparation is now a major industry...that puts enormous resources into...help[ing] students ‘beat the system’” (p. 13). Casey and Childs (2007) and DeLuca (2012) similarly caution that Canadian faculties of education may not be able to determine if written statements have been written by the applicants themselves.

Other traditional assessment tools also face limitations. Individual interviews are an expensive, time consuming tool that are criticized for their low reliability and lack of significant depth (Albanese et al., 2003; Blouin, 2010; Casey & Childs, 2007; Petrarca & LeSage, 2014). Indeed, inconsistent inter-rater reliability coefficients have prompted some researchers to contend that using interviews as an admissions tool may be unfair or unethical (Blouin, 2010; Eva et al., 2004; Kreiter, Yin, Solow, & Brennan, 2004). Standardized tests are similarly criticized for failing to assess teaching performance ability and for favouring applicants from privileged backgrounds (Ackley et al., 2007; Guinier, 2003), while Albanese and colleagues contend that letters of reference are unreliable and fail to add substantive information to a student’s application.

More recent non-cognitive assessment tools have received praise from some educators. Caskey and colleagues (2001) contend that group assessment tools have “strong face validity for admissions, [as a] collaborative group task is much like the expectations of performance for program course work and field placements” (p. 19). The multiple mini interview (or MMI) may be of particular interest to teacher educators (see Eva et al., 2004; Thomas, Young, Mazer, Lubarsky & Razack, 2015). Digital assessment tools, where applicants respond to online real-time video and written response questions, show similar promise. Dore and colleagues (2009) reported strong inter-rater reliability coefficients (ranging 0.81-0.95), while Tiller and colleagues (2013) found that digital assessments reduced costs by an estimated 84% as compared to a fully face-to-face admissions process. Importantly, Dore and colleagues do caution that their findings are preliminary and have not yet established predictive validity for candidate performance. Thus, as with other tools outlined in this section, further research is needed.

The Present Study

The present study investigates existing admissions practices across Ontario's teacher education programs. While previous studies have examined Canadian admissions practices (Casey & Childs, 2011; Crocker & Dibbon, 2008; Smith & Pratt, 1996), such studies gather their information almost exclusively from institutions' admissions materials, such as online data, which are limited in their depth and clarity (Crocker & Dibbon, 2008). Thus, while the study does draw on online information, the study design necessarily includes contacting stakeholders at each institution to verify and clarify information (see Wang & Fwu, 2007). In addition, to date there exists no other study examining Ontario admissions practices in the wake of recent legislation. These clarifying conversations were therefore essential to the study's design.

Methodology

Participants

To provide a province-wide scope, this study includes every institution offering teacher education programs in Ontario in the 2014–2015 academic year. We identified 15 such institutions, including 13 publicly funded faculties of education and two additional institutions recognized by the Ontario College of Teachers (Casey & Childs, 2011; Ontario College of Teachers, 2015). Importantly, while some of these programs were not continued into 2015–2016 (Ontario Universities' Application Centre [OUAC], 2015d), and while some programs are run in partnership with multiple Ontario institutions (Trent University, 2015), we have sought to include every institution currently involved in Ontario teacher education.

In order to gather clarifying and follow-up information, we invited stakeholders at each institution to participate in the study. Institutions' responses to the letter of invitation varied: in some cases, the dean or program director we contacted responded as a participant in the study. Other institutions established a specific point of contact, such as a department chair or assistant registrar. Still other institutions provided multiple points of

contact, providing information from separate departments depending on our questions for those groups.

Data Collection

In the first phase of data collection, we gathered online data relating to each of the teacher education programs listed by the Ontario College of Teachers (2015) and the Ontario Universities' Application Centre (OUAC, 2015b). These data are available on institutions' individual websites as well as through OUAC (2013, 2014, 2015a, 2015d) and the Teacher Education Application Service (TEAS). We collected data identifying the types of programs offered (i.e., concurrent, consecutive, and alternative), the admissions requirements and policies of those programs (e.g., equity policies), the admissions tools used to assess applications (e.g., written profiles), any data describing how those tools were used (e.g., weighting of multiple tools), as well as any other pertinent information. Whenever possible, these data points were gathered for both the 2014–2015 and 2015–2016 academic years.

In the second phase of data collection, we extended the results of the first phase by following up with each institution. For each program, we identified areas that needed further clarification or were not described in the online data. For example, many institutions use the phrase “preference given” for applicants with some particular quality or qualification. Most institutions, however, do not specify what this preference means in the application process (i.e., selection in the case of a tie, a percentage boost, or some other benefit). Each institution received between five and 10 clarifying questions in the letter of invitation we sent to the deans and program directors.

Participating stakeholders responded to these questions by drawing on their knowledge of the program, and in some cases, citing or quoting specific policies related to their admissions practices. Most clarifying questions were clearly answered in the first wave of responses from each institution. At times, however, further clarifications were needed, either because of specific nuances at a given institution, or because the participant mentioned another practice not included in the online data.

Thirteen of the 15 institutions expressed interest in participating in the second phase of data collection, with 12 of those 13 institutions ultimately providing clarifying data. One institution did not respond to our invitations, and one institution chose not to

participate in the study. To maintain a province-wide perspective, these institutions' on-line data have still been included, though the data available for these institutions include some gaps in clarity that a responding stakeholder would have been able to address.

After the second phase of data collection, we prepared a profile of each institution's admissions practices. This profile was sent to the participating contact for each institution, asking them to review the information and verify its accuracy. Of the participating institutions, nine responded to this member check supporting the findings or offering clarifications. The three institutions that did not respond to the member check did offer several clarifications during the second phase of data collection. All of the suggested changes were included for data analysis.

Analysis

Throughout the study, data analysis followed an emergent structure. As Toma (2006) and as Borko, Whitcomb, and Byrnes (2008) advise, this process of analysis occurred concurrently with the data collection process. Analysis began during the first phase of data collection, as the practices described in the literature review guided our search of institutions' websites. Similarly, the data available on some websites but absent on others informed our choice of questions for the second phase of data collection. The emerging patterns in the data across institutions also proved valuable for analysis of the current practices in Ontario teacher education admissions. To this end, our analysis focused on identifying existing practices and patterns across the 15 institutions, as well as on connections between Ontario practices and the reviewed admissions literature. This descriptive analysis is intended to provide Ontario's teacher education programs with a clearer understanding of the provincial context, and to enable teacher educators to reflect more deeply on their institutions' admissions practices.

Results

In the following sections, we describe the admissions practices used across Ontario, with particular emphasis on patterns emerging across institutions. Each of Ontario's many programs includes its own admissions policies, some of which have changed during the period under investigation. To track program changes and changes made as a result of

Regulation 283/13, we have included data for two academic years: 2014–2015 and 2015–2016. We have also chosen to separate non-cognitive tools from academic averages, as we have found more variation between institutions' use of non-cognitive tools than among the use of academic averages. Importantly, requirements for after-degree (consecutive) programs refer to two-semester programs in the 2014–2015 year, and four-semester programs in the 2015–2016 year.

Programs Offered

All 15 institutions offering teacher education in Ontario offer consecutive teacher education programs at two or three of the province's three certification levels (Primary/Junior, K–6; Junior/Intermediate, 4–10; and Intermediate/Senior, 7–12). Further, 10 institutions offered integrated (concurrent) education programs in 2014–2015, while seven institutions continued to offer concurrent education in 2015–2016. Similarly, 10 institutions offered some alternative programs for either Aboriginal, French, or technological education in 2014–2015, with eight institutions continuing to offer these programs in 2015–2016. The admissions practices for these alternative programs are described in a later section.

What, then, of the changes to Ontario's program offerings? Lakehead University has discontinued their Junior/Intermediate stream for both their consecutive and concurrent programs, and as our colleagues explained, the program will not be reviewed for renewal until 2019. Conversely, in 2015–2016 Nipissing University began offering a concurrent stream for Intermediate/Senior candidates, and so now offers teacher education at all certification levels. The Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (OISE) at the University of Toronto significantly altered their teacher education programs between 2014–2015 and 2015–2016. While OISE still offers teacher education programs for all three certification levels (OISE, 2015a), the institute has discontinued their consecutive, concurrent, and technological programs in favour of a graduate degree in teacher education (OISE, 2015b).

Regulation 283/13 also ended two inter-university partnerships. Trent University's partnership with Queen's University and Wilfrid Laurier's partnership with Nipissing were both discontinued in 2015–2016, and so Trent and Laurier no longer offer

concurrent education programs. Nipissing explicitly referenced changes to provincial funding mechanisms as a rationale for ending the program (Wilfrid Laurier University, 2014).

Academic Averages and Other Cognitive Requirements

Academic averages (or GPAs) are by far the most common requirement for admission to Ontario teacher education programs. Minimum averages have been set for every traditional program, and for some alternative programs. These requirements are not consistent, however. Depending on the institution's practices, academic averages may be calculated using an applicant's most recently completed courses or their highest course grades, with the number of courses included varying from institution to institution. Some programs assign a percentage boost to applicants with graduate or doctoral degrees, while others will include these additional courses when calculating the academic average. Consecutive applicants' minimum requirements range from 66 to 76% in 2014–2015, and from 67 to 76% in 2015–2016. Six of the 15 institutions also require consecutive applicants to meet at least a 70% minimum average in their teachable subject areas. Comparatively, concurrent applicants' minimum requirements varied between a minimum of 65% and averages in the high 80s across both academic years. Since most concurrent applicants apply without having completed another undergraduate degree, this requirement is almost always assessed using applicants' high school academic average.

Despite this widespread use of academic averages, however, most institutions also assess applicants' non-cognitive abilities. Further, several consecutive and concurrent programs assign equal weighting to academic and non-cognitive parts of the admissions process. To our knowledge, Redeemer University College assigns the least weight to academic averages: our colleagues at Redeemer explained that only 20% of an applicant's final score is based on their academic average. Only two institutions (Lakehead and Laurentian) base consecutive admissions solely on academic average, and only one other institution (Nipissing) explicitly emphasizes academic achievement over non-cognitive performance.

Interestingly, the tendency to pair academic averages with non-cognitive assessments is not as consistent in concurrent programs. In both 2014–2015 and 2015–2016, at least 40% of Ontario's concurrent programs assessed applicants exclusively based on

their academic performance. Three of the institutions (Brock, Nipissing, and by extension, Laurier) that did not assess concurrent applicants' non-cognitive skills did measure those qualities in their consecutive applicants.

While several institutions (six in 2014–2015, seven in 2015–2016) include additional academic requirements, the vast majority of these are subject-specific competency exams. Similarly, most institutions do not require consecutive applicants to have completed specific undergraduate courses. Instead, some institutions will reward applicants by giving additional points or selection preference if they have completed graduate degrees or particular courses. Thus, in Ontario teacher education, the use of cognitive tools tends to refer to academic averages.

Non-Cognitive Admissions Tools

Thirteen of Ontario's consecutive programs include at least one non-cognitive tool as part of their admissions process, as do a majority of concurrent programs. More than half of these institutions use multiple non-cognitive tools when assessing applications. Yet, despite the range of non-cognitive tools identified in the literature, Ontario's teacher education programs tend to use only a select number of tools in their admissions processes.

Written statements. Written statements are both the most common and the most heavily weighted non-cognitive tool, appearing in 13 consecutive programs and in half of the concurrent programs across both academic years. This commonality is complex, however. While many of the examined written statements are referred to in similar terms—namely, as statements of experience or as experience profiles—the content these tools assess is not consistent. Brock University's experience profile asks applicants to identify specific teaching-related experiences related to criteria of leadership, instruction, and working with children. Nipissing's experience profile, in contrast, asks applicants to outline how their experiences have contributed to their growth as educators. Applicants to Tyndale University College submit written statements related to their worldview and the profession's standards of practice, while applicants to the University of Ottawa are asked to articulate their understanding of teaching and learning. Further, while some institutions require only one form of a written statement (such as Trent University and Redeemer University College), other universities include multiple written statements or a single

tool with multiple sub-statements (such as UOIT—the University of Ontario Institute of Technology—and York University).

Institutions also vary in how these written statements are assessed. Some universities assess these written statements according to specific criteria, while others use a more holistic approach. At least two institutions (Trent and UOIT) assess written statements during “Read Days” to enhance inter-rater reliability. As our colleagues at Redeemer identified, however, this is not a universal practice—Redeemer’s written statements are reviewed informally to determine if the applicant will advance to the next stage of the process. Similarly, stakeholders at Nipissing explained that while all consecutive applicants submit an experience profile, this written statement will only be assessed if applicants are near the threshold for admission. Our colleagues explained that roughly 100 such applications would be reviewed by the admissions committee each year to evaluate whether or not an applicant’s profile is sufficiently prepared and related to teaching.

References and other non-cognitive tools. Letters of references, as well as reference contact information, are the second most common non-cognitive tool used in Ontario teacher education admissions. Among consecutive programs, nine institutions required references in 2014–2015, compared to 10 in 2015–2016. References were also required for three concurrent programs across both academic years, and by Trent University while their partner program was offered in 2014–2015. As with written statements, however, these references are not assessed in the same way. While Trent University contacts every reference as part of the admissions process, at least two institutions (Nipissing and Ottawa) indicated that references are only contacted when further information is required. Redeemer offers a unique case: applicants’ references are included in the weighted criteria only when the personal references are outstanding. Such references account for an additional point (or 5%) in the application score. Thus, despite their prevalence as non-cognitive tools, references are not always a significant part of the admissions process in Ontario’s teacher education programs.

After written statements and references, relatively few non-cognitive tools are used in Ontario admissions. Only five institutions used other non-cognitive tools in 2014–2015 and 2015–2016, and only two of these institutions (Brock and UOIT) did so for publicly funded bachelor of education programs. To our knowledge, only Brock and Redeemer require applicants to demonstrate a specific number of hours’ experience

working with students, requiring 200 and 25 hours, respectively. Tyndale University College is the only undergraduate program which requires applicants to submit a resume outlining relevant experiences, although OISE's graduate teacher education program also requires a resume. Only three institutions (UOIT, Redeemer, and Tyndale) made use of individual interviews in the general application process in 2014–2015. UOIT has since removed individual interviews from their admissions process. As a result, only Ontario's non-publicly funded teacher education programs currently use interviews in the general admissions process, and as our colleagues identified, these are smaller programs with fewer applicants than other programs in the province. None of Ontario's programs used digital assessment tools to assess applicants during the 2014–2016 period, though our colleagues at Brock University and several other institutions have identified that they are investigating the possibility of adapting digital assessment tools for their teacher education programs.

Alternative Teacher Education Admissions

Alternative teacher education programs are, understandably, offered by fewer institutions: we were able to identify nine institutions which offered alternative consecutive programs, compared to three universities offering alternative concurrent programs. Five universities offered at least one Aboriginal program in 2014–2015, increasing to six institutions in 2015–2016, as the University of Ottawa had not offered their program the previous year. Four institutions offered French programs across both years, although Ottawa's part-time French consecutive program will not continue in 2016–2017. In contrast to this relative stability, five of Ontario's eight technological education programs were not offered in 2015–2016.

Admissions requirements for these programs tend to follow similar structures for each program type. For example, every technological education program required applicants to demonstrate proof of competence as well as some combination of work experience and education totalling five years. When technological applicants are required to submit written statements (e.g., OISE and York), these statements tend to draw on a combination of applicants' employment and educational experiences. Interestingly, not all technological programs require minimum academic averages. While the University of Windsor's 2014–2015 program explicitly required applicants to achieve a minimum 70%

average in their qualifying program, Western University had no such requirement during the same year. Similarly, while some programs require applicants to submit resumes or references (e.g., Queen's, Windsor, and York), others do not (Brock, Western).

Ontario's Aboriginal education programs are less consistent in their admissions practices; however, each places emphasis on Aboriginal perspectives and, in most cases, the lived experiences of the applicants. Specifically, four of the six institutions offering Aboriginal education include some variation on a written statement of experience. The exceptions are Brock University—whose applicants are recruited directly by the Northern Nishnawbe Education Council in the Sioux Lookout District of Northwestern Ontario—and Lakehead, whose Aboriginal program follows the same admissions process as its traditional programs, which rely exclusively on academic averages. Nipissing's programs include a variety of requirements, in large part because the university offers Aboriginal education programs for three distinct levels of certification (Nipissing University, 2015a, 2015b, 2015c). One such program requires no minimum academic average but does require applicants to submit references. Queen's University, similarly, requires references in its admissions process. One of Nipissing's programs requires applicants to demonstrate at least 700 hours' experience working with children or youth. This requirement is similar to traditional program requirements at Brock University and Redeemer, however, Nipissing is, to our knowledge, the only Ontario institution to have such a requirement for an Aboriginal education program.

French teacher education programs are the most consistent category of programs, as all such programs draw on the same admissions requirements as the traditional programs offered at each institution. Thus, the variations in admissions practices for French teacher education are the same as the variations for English teacher education, with the exception that French teacher education programs also assess language proficiency more explicitly in their admissions processes.

Equity Practices in Teacher Education Admissions

Twelve of the 15 programs we reviewed were able to articulate an explicit equity admissions policy. While Laurentian, Redeemer, and Tyndale did not identify equity admissions policies, this does not mean that these three institutions do not make efforts to include underrepresented groups. Redeemer's Department of Education, for example, awards

discretionary points to applicants from underrepresented groups and applicants with unique challenges. Tyndale, similarly, gives applicants the opportunity to disclose accessibility needs or self-identify as a member of a minority group. Our Tyndale colleagues also noted that because of the program's small size, they "have not found that any such disclosure has had an impact on [their] admissions decisions." Equity appears to be a central focus in the design and delivery of Laurentian's program, as Laurentian "has an embedded indigenous focus with First Nation, Metis, and Inuit content and teachings found in each course" (Laurentian University, 2015, "Unique Experiences" section). Thus, the following findings specifically identify how institutions choose to enact equity through their admissions process, and do not speak to additional equity practices in the broader university community.

While many universities note that equity applicants are "encouraged to apply," this desire for student diversity takes several different forms. For example, equity applicants to Lakehead, Redeemer, and Tyndale are required to meet minimum academic averages and are not reviewed in a separate process. Interestingly, while OISE follows a similar model, the university does give preference to equity applicants if they are equally qualified with non-equity applicants (see Childs et al., 2016). Brock, UOIT, Windsor, Western, and York all review applicants in a separate process. Of these institutions, only Western does not require its equity applicants to submit an additional written statement. All five institutions require equity applicants to meet the minimum academic standard for admission. Four other institutions—Nipissing, Queen's, Ottawa, and Laurier—approach equity admissions from a different perspective. These universities reserve a number of admission spots for individuals from under-represented groups, and, in most cases, review these applicants separately from the general applicant pool (Ottawa does not).

There are two admissions practices that vary noticeably from the outlined equity structures. Trent University remains the only institution to not require equity applicants to meet minimum academic averages (Childs & Ferguson, 2015): all other traditional programs across Ontario require equity applicants to meet this requirement. Similarly, the admissions practices for Brock University's Aboriginal education program do not rely on academic averages. As a northern Ontario program specifically targeting underrepresented groups, the program relies on a local education council to select candidates who are most suitable for the program. Although these examples are unique in the Ontario

context, they may be of interest to teacher educators seeking to shift their admissions requirements away from academic average requirements.

Discussion

In the previous section, we outlined the pattern of practices occurring in Ontario teacher education admissions. In the remaining sections, we discuss the relationship between these findings and current admissions literature, as well as the implications these findings present for teacher educators seeking to revise their admissions practices.

Patterns in Provincial Practice

The variety of identified admission requirements suggests that Ontario's teacher educators continue to differ on how best to select candidates for their programs (Caskey et al., 2001; Crocker & Dibbon, 2008). Despite these differences, however, admissions processes in Ontario's teacher education programs share many common features. For example, every program that includes non-cognitive tools in their admissions process requires applicants to complete some variation of a written statement. Similarly, while minimum academic average requirements do vary between programs, almost every minimum average we identified fell between 70 and 75%. We were also able to identify explicit equity admissions policies at almost every Ontario institution. These similarities in admission requirements may be a reflection of the reality that, each year, there are more applications to teacher education programs than there are applicants (OUAC, 2015c). That is, individual applicants tend to submit more than one application, often applying to multiple institutions, and so may be aware of competing admissions policies. Each institution must therefore balance the need to compete for a decreasing number of applicants while still maintaining sufficiently rigorous admissions standards (Dore et al., 2009; OUAC, 2015c).

Cognitive and Non-Cognitive Admissions Tools

The extensive use of academic averages is unsurprising, as this cognitive measure is cost effective (Eva et al., 2004) and reflects Albanese and colleagues' (2003) contention that preserving academic standards is central to each institution's self-interests. Similarly,

the use of non-cognitive tools is consistent with Byrnes and colleagues' (2003) belief that non-cognitive traits are also important factors in the admissions process. Ontario's teacher educators seem to tacitly support Kosnik and colleagues' (2005) contention that written statements, while time-consuming, provide valuable information about applicants' suitability for the profession. Similarly, since a number of the written statements we reviewed included fairly open-ended language (e.g., Nipissing's personal statement, "outline your important experiences...[and] indicate how [these]...contribute to becoming a teacher"), at least some of these written statements seem to reflect Hirschhorn and Sears' (2015) recommendation for ambiguous application questions. Unfortunately, these written statements may be susceptible to the various limitations identified in the literature (see Ackley et al., 2007; Childs et al., 2011; DeLuca, 2012). While Ontario's teacher education programs use fairly standardized academic requirements, variations across written statements limit our ability to compare these tools or their assessment of applicant suitability (Albanese et al., 2003). Further research is necessary at an institutional level to determine if specific written statements used in an admissions process are reliable and valid, particularly in relation to other non-cognitive tools.

Given the concerns related to letters of reference identified in the literature (Albanese et al., 2003; Casey & Childs, 2007), we were surprised to learn that references are the second most common non-cognitive tool used in Ontario teacher education admissions. The declining use of individual interviews is more consistent with the existing literature: perhaps as a result of the contested validity of this tool, fewer Canadian institutions are dedicating resources to interviewing applicants (Petrarca & LeSage, 2014). While no Ontario programs are yet using digital assessment tools, this may be due to the relative recency of literature supporting their reliability (Dore et al., 2009). Teacher educators would do well to consider the opportunities and challenges of these tools, particularly in relation to their institutions' contexts.

Equity Practices

The prevalence of admissions equity policies reflects both Kotzee and Martin's (2013) contention that universities have an obligation to include underrepresented groups and Brown and Scott's (2014) observation that universities do articulate a desire to increase student diversity. However, as Childs and Ferguson (2015) note, encouraging applicants

to apply does not guarantee inclusion. Similarly, while we now have a clearer understanding of equity admissions at these institutions, the level of transparency and detail for each admissions process varies (Childs et al., 2011).

Most of Ontario's teacher education programs follow Guinier's (2003) contest and sponsored mobility models, where the structure of program admissions may reinforce the selection of over-represented groups. Only one of the investigated Aboriginal education programs uses an admissions process similar to Guinier's structural model. Importantly, however, Trent University began offering a five-year concurrent Indigenous education program in September 2016 (Trent University, 2016). This new program may represent a shift in Ontario's equity practices, and warrants further investigation. Province-wide equity practices may be further refined if research is conducted to determine how successful each institution has been with respect to creating an integrated, equitable admissions process, given their articulated policies and goals.

Limitations

Several factors limit the interpretation of these results. Chiefly, this study's methodology is rooted in the belief that teacher education programs are largely responsible for teacher quality (Goodwin & Oyler, 2008), and that admissions practices are a significant process for determining how qualified candidates are admitted to a program (Denner et al., 2001). Importantly, only 12 of the 15 institutions in Ontario provided data during the second phase of data collection, and so we do not have complete clarity for three of the institutions under investigation. In gathering data from institutions' websites and specific stakeholders, we assume that these sources were able to provide accurate information. That is, given their positions as deans, program directors, registrars, and other internal stakeholders, we assume that our participants are experts in their institution's practices and have provided information that reflects what applicants experience in the application process. Similarly, we assume that, by providing multiple stages of clarification, our resulting data forms an accurate picture of admissions practices in Ontario.

Summary and Implications

In summary, the present study investigated admissions practices used by Ontario's 15 institutions of teacher education during the 2014–2015 and 2015–2016 academic years. Data were gathered from each program's website, provincial application resources (OUAC, TEAS), and from stakeholders at 12 participating institutions. The findings identified the types of policies and practices being used by Ontario's consecutive, concurrent, and alternative teacher education programs, including varying combinations of cognitive and non-cognitive tools, as well as the equity admissions policies in place across the province. As described in the preceding sections, academic averages are the most common assessment tool in Ontario admissions, and are used in every traditional teacher education program. All but two Ontario universities draw on a combination of cognitive and non-cognitive measures. These non-cognitive tools include written statements and references, which are both used by a majority of institutions, as well as a selection of less-frequently used tools, including resumes, individual interviews, and hours of classroom experience.

An encouraging finding was that most (12) of Ontario's teacher education programs articulate specific equity admissions policies. Further, four universities reserve admissions for members of underrepresented groups, and one institution does not require equity applicants to meet the minimum academic average requirement.

Between 2014–2015 and 2015–2016, 17 program offerings were discontinued across the province, including four program streams run by inter-university partnerships, as well as five technological education programs. As our colleagues shared, several of these program changes are a result of Regulation 283/13 and related funding adjustments. We believe it is important to highlight that the majority of discontinued programs are either technological education programs or partner programs offered at an institution on behalf of another university. In their place, five additional programs were offered in 2015–2016, including three Master of Teaching streams and one Aboriginal education program which had not been offered the previous year.

Implications for Teacher Educators and Further Research

We would not have been able to complete this review or explore as many institutional nuances without the clarifications and additions provided by each institution's stakeholders. The more collaborative and open our conversations were with each university, the clearer our understandings were, and therefore the more detailed the data became. Thus, openness and sharing of knowledge between institutions is essential to any further investigation of Ontario teacher education, particularly with relation to understanding how teacher education admissions might change over time.

Several aspects of teacher education admissions would benefit from increased clarity. At a most basic level, admissions processes—minimum requirements, the tools that are used, and how those tools are assessed—should be clearly articulated to relevant stakeholders. As Denner and colleagues (2001) note, enhancing the clarity of selection criteria enables potential applicants to determine if they are suitable for the program in question. This determination is more difficult if the available resources do not clearly outline the admissions process.

With respect to the admission process itself, teacher educators should only include a requirement if it serves a purpose and adds value that justifies the challenges of that requirement. Ontario's shift away from individual interviews in teacher education admissions seems to reflect both the conflicted literature and the high costs associated with this tool. It is unclear whether institutions' written statements have been examined with respect to their reliability, validity, and ability to predict student success in the program. Such investigations would be valuable when considering whether to continue using written statements in their current forms. Institutions considering new practices, such as using digital tools, should also draw on reliability and validity research related to these tools (e.g., Dore et al., 2009).

Despite the importance of developing effective admissions practices (Kosnik et al., 2005), research in Canadian teacher education admissions is relatively limited (Casey & Childs, 2011; Crocker & Dibbon, 2008; Smith & Pratt, 1996). Thus, this study is intended to build on existing literature and provide Ontario's faculties of education with a comprehensive review of admissions practices. It is our hope that the data arising from this study will enable teacher educators to critically reflect on their admissions practices as they consider possible enhancements and revisions. Further, having engaged

stakeholders from multiple institutions, we hope that stakeholders in Ontario and across Canada will continue to share their admissions practices and collaborate with inter-institutional partnerships. Such partnerships seem central to any comprehensive review of our teacher education programs.

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