

An Overview of Special Education Programs in Canadian Universities

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Dans le but d'obtenir des données comparatives relatives aux programmes d'enseignement spécialisé pour la formation des maîtres au premier et au deuxième cycle, un questionnaire mis au point en 1976 fut posté à tous les doyens des Sciences de l'éducation des Universités canadiennes. En se servant des renseignements ainsi obtenus, on a dévisé les programmes d'enseignement spécialisé en neuf programmes majeurs et onze mineurs. Chacun des programmes a ensuite été décrit selon la philosophie de base, les exigences d'admission, les cours dispensés, les exigences pratiques, les numéros d'inscription et de professeurs, le classement, et les plus hauts grades attribués. Les données comparatives ont été fournies sous forme de tableau afin de faciliter la comparaison.

Special education classes have been a component of undergraduate teacher preparation at various Canadian universities and teachers' colleges for several decades. In Saskatchewan, for example, as early as 1934 Samuel Laycock, later a distinguished Dean of Education, stated that every regular class teacher should be an educational diagnostician capable of providing for the learning and behavioral needs of exceptional children in the regular classroom. A few major universities offered post-graduate classes in special education as well, although the historical pattern has been for Canadian graduate students to seek post-graduate level special education programs in the United States or elsewhere abroad.

With the advent of legislation mandating more adequate educational services for exceptional children in several of the provinces, there has been a greater demand for Canadian teacher preparation programs in all areas of exceptionality. The past 10 years have witnessed phenomenal growth in undergraduate special education programs with consequent pressure for new and improved post-graduate programs. This pressure, coupled with the increased cost of study in foreign universities and a new feeling of nationalism, has increased demands for, and resulted in, rapid growth of post-graduate special education programs in most regions of Canada.

Education, and thus teacher preparation, is a provincial matter and hence developments in special education differ greatly from province to province. There has been little formal effort made by university personnel to work together to plan for or meet regional or national teacher preparation needs in special education. The Council for Exceptional Children in

Canada, responding to its perception of the need to upgrade standards for special education teacher preparation, did publish an excellent model for such staff preparation (Hardy, et al., 1971). Only three universities in Canada have adopted it. More recently, the Council for Exceptional Children's Teacher Education Division (TED) has become active in Canada, recruiting membership from among teacher educators at several universities. Over time, through professional association in TED, a greater consensus may develop toward improving the standards of special education teacher preparation.

Since 1976 there have been two meetings of special education teacher educators from the four western provinces. The meetings, hosted by the University of Saskatchewan in October 1976 and by the University of Alberta in November 1977, were convened through the initiative of the University of Alberta. To date, the result of the two meetings of western special educators has been a mutually beneficial sharing of information. Recommendations with reference to standards for undergraduate and graduate programs, bursary support for new personnel in the field and graduate student and staff exchanges were recorded at the meetings; however, substantive follow-up has not yet resulted. Moreover, there has been no concerted effort to avoid program duplication, or to ensure that at least one university in each region of Canada offers a comprehensive teacher preparation program in each area of exceptionality.

Today with the new feeling of nationalism abroad in Canada and with an increased demand by school systems for better prepared professionals, both potential students and teacher educators are seeking accurate, current information describing existing undergraduate and graduate teacher preparation in this country. A study by the present writers has shown that comparative information on undergraduate and graduate teacher preparation programs for special educators has not been published in Canada. The purpose of the present paper is to provide an overview of that information.

METHOD

The writers designed a 14 item questionnaire to obtain comparative information on special education offerings, support systems, and staffing from all Canadian universities and institutes offering special education classes. Copies of the questionnaire were mailed to Deans of Education and special education department heads in March 1976. Subsequent follow-up letters and additional copies of the questionnaire were forwarded to non-respondents in July 1976 and January 1977, respectively.

Of 44 universities and institutes contacted, 36 submitted completed survey forms. Based on numbers of different class offerings, numbers of undergraduate and/or graduate students enrolled and numbers of full-time equivalent staff appointments in special education, the university

programs were classified as major or minor. Details of major programs were summarized and tables describing individual programs forwarded to department heads for a final check on accuracy of information. These summary tables were reviewed and returned by all programs. Minor programs had fewer class offerings, fewer students enrolled and fewer professors assigned to teaching special education classes. The nine major special education teacher preparation programs constitute the major focus of the present paper. Minor programs have been described in less detail.

FINDINGS

In the present paper findings with reference to major professional preparation programs in special education are presented first. These are followed by a summary of findings with reference to minor programs.

MAJOR PROGRAMS

Philosophical bases

Staff from five of the nine major programs responded to the request to describe their philosophical bases. Most responses were quite brief. However, it was possible to identify common elements in most programs. For example, the majority of respondents stated that at the undergraduate level their objective was to prepare "generalists" in the education of exceptional children. While students were expected to complete a basic core of required classes in special education there was a wide choice of optional special education classes offered. Pre-service teachers were expected to acquire the competencies to teach across categories of exceptionality. Even the "core" or required classes were designed to provide teachers with "generalists" credentials.

At the post-graduate level, programs allowed students who had already completed a major in special education to begin specialization in some area of exceptionality. Only at the University of British Columbia in hearing impairment, learning disorders, and mental retardation, and at the University of Saskatchewan in hearing impairment are graduate diplomas offered in discrete areas of exceptionality. Saskatchewan and Moncton are the only universities offering master's level degrees in one primary area of study, both with degrees in hearing impairment. Other post-graduate programs offer concentrations of study in particular areas but still expect the student to plan class work so that he will have competencies which will allow him to teach children with various exceptionalities.

A number of programs indicated a commitment to serve the staffing needs of the provinces in which the universities were located. While that objective was articulated by Alberta and Ontario universities it was also inferred by respondents from the other major programs.

Programs

Eight of the nine universities with major special education programs offered undergraduate majors in the education of exceptional children, with OISE being the exception (see Table 1). Only the universities of Alberta, Saskatchewan, McGill, and Moncton offered generalist post-graduate diplomas in special education. The York diploma was available at the post- or pre-BA level to certified teachers. All universities with the exception of York offered master's degrees in special education while York, Moncton, and the University of Manitoba did not offer doctoral programs.

TABLE 1
*Major Professional Preparation Programs in Special Education:
Canadian Universities*

<i>Major Special Education Programs</i>									
<i>Levels</i>	<i>UBC</i>	<i>Alta.</i>	<i>Sask.</i>	<i>Man.</i>	<i>OISE</i>	<i>York</i>	<i>McGill</i>	<i>Laval</i>	<i>Monc- ton</i>
Under-graduate Special Education Major	X	X	X ^a	X ^b		X	X	X	X
Graduate Diploma — Generalist		X	X			X	X		X
— MR	X								
— LD	X								
— Hearing	X		X						
MA (thesis)	X				X		X	X	X
MA (non-thesis)							X ^c	X	
MEd (thesis)		X	X	X					X
MEd (non-thesis)	X		X	X	X		X		X ^d
PhD		X	X		X		X	X	
Edd	X	X			X				

^aMajors in general special education and language and learning disabilities

^bPre-Master's preparation year

^cMSc in Ed.

MSc in Auditory-Oral Rehabilitation and Education of the Hearing Impaired
(School of Human Communication Disorders)

^dMEd in Hearing Impairment

The University of British Columbia, OISE, and McGill offered the MEd without thesis only, while the University of Alberta offered the MEd with thesis only. The universities of Saskatchewan, Manitoba, and Moncton offered the MEd with and without thesis. UBC, OISE, McGill, and Laval offered the MA with thesis while McGill and Laval also offered a non-thesis MA.

Entrance requirements

Candidates wishing to obtain undergraduate majors in special education were expected to meet general university entrance standards. The University of Manitoba normally accepted students for special education preparation following the completion of a BA degree. Both UBC and Alberta had a speech test requirement at the undergraduate level while UBC and McGill had English Test requirements.

At the diploma level, the University of British Columbia, the University of Alberta, and the University of Saskatchewan required a BA or BEd. The University of British Columbia, the University of Alberta, and the University of Saskatchewan required professional experience as did York, McGill, Laval, and Moncton. Four universities — Alberta, York, McGill, and Moncton — required that diploma candidates possess teaching certificates.

All graduate programs except Laval and Moncton required or preferred experience in the field in addition to a BA or BEd or equivalent for MA or MEd level study. Teaching certificates were required by UBC, Manitoba and McGill. The University of Alberta and Moncton indicated one-year residency requirements. One year of residency was required for an MA degree at OISE while McGill's requirement was two years.

All programs offering doctoral studies required a MA or MEd or equivalent. UBC, Saskatchewan, and OISE required field experience at the PhD/EdD level while Alberta preferred candidates with such experience. McGill was the single university to set entrance examinations. UBC, Alberta, and Laval had two-year residency requirements while Saskatchewan has a one-year requirement and OISE set one-year EdD and two-year PhD residency periods.

Course offerings

Most universities with major special education programs offered a wide variety of classes (see Table 2). The University of British Columbia had the greatest number and variety of course offerings while York had the fewest and most general courses. Some universities, such as UBC, Moncton, and Saskatchewan, offered articulated programs in specialized areas such as hearing impairment, while other universities, such as Alberta and McGill, provided mainly general courses in special education.

TABLE 2
*Areas and Numbers of Special Education Class Offerings:
Major Special Education Programs in Canadian Universities*

<i>Numbers of Classes Offered^a</i>									
<i>Areas</i>	<i>UBC</i>	<i>Alta.^b</i>	<i>Sask.</i>	<i>Man.</i>	<i>OISE</i>	<i>York</i>	<i>McGill</i>	<i>Laval</i>	<i>Monc- ton</i>
General	16	11	7	3	10	6	15	3	7
Mental Retardation	5	1	3	2	2			2	3
Emotional Disturbance	3	1	3	1	2		1	1	4
Learning Disability	3		2	4	2		2	3	3
Hearing Impairment	8		9	1	1				13
Visual Impairment	4				1				
Orthopaedic Impairment	1							1	
Gifted and Creative	2				2				
Educational Assessment	1	4 4 ^c	5	3	2		4	1	2
Prescriptive Teaching	1	1	3				2	1	
Language and Linguistic	4		3					9 ^d	1
Multiply Handicapped	2								

^aFull and half classes not differentiated: programs not differentiated

^bNon-categorical class design

^cBoth assessment and prescription

^dIncludes two remedial reading

Special education practica

At the undergraduate level, most universities with major programs in special education required students to complete practica. The exceptions were Manitoba and McGill, with optional practica. All programs offering diplomas except Moncton required practica. Among universities with major special education programs, only Laval did not include required or optional practica at the master's level. Practica were optional at the master's level at Alberta and at Manitoba. Alberta, Laval, and McGill did not require practica in their doctoral programs while Manitoba, York, and Moncton did not offer doctoral programs.

TABLE 3
*Required and Optional Special Education Practica In
 Canadian Universities*

<i>Major Special Education Programs</i>									
<i>Practica Require- ments</i>	<i>UBC</i>	<i>Alta.</i>	<i>Sask.</i>	<i>Man.</i>	<i>OISE</i>	<i>York</i>	<i>McGill</i>	<i>Laval</i>	<i>Monc- ton</i>
Under-graduate									
— required	X	X	X ^a			X		X	X
— optional				X			X		
Diploma									
— required	X	X	X ^a			X	X ^a		
— optional									
Master's									
— required	X		X ^a		X		X ^a		X
— optional		X		X					
Doctoral									
— required	X		X ^a		X				
— optional							X		

^aEducational Clinical Setting

Education clinics

Only the three most western universities — UBC, Alberta, and Saskatchewan — and McGill had specialized clinical education facilities associated with their programs. McGill also used a hospital-based clinic for a practicum setting while five universities — Manitoba, OISE, York, Laval, and Moncton — had no clinical supportive facility. In addition to a diagnostic clinic, Saskatchewan and McGill provided remedial programming for children.

The supportive facility strength of the three most western major programs was further demonstrated by the presence of preschools for retarded children on the UBC and Alberta campuses, and of an integrated preschool at Saskatchewan. In the east, only York, with a summer school program, provided on-campus classroom experience with exceptional children.

Enrolments

Actual and potential student enrolments for major special education programs are shown in Table 4. With the exception of UBC, York, and Moncton, undergraduate programs in the major universities are at maxi-

TABLE 4
*Actual and Potential 1976-77 Enrolments:
 Major Special Education Programs in Canadian Universities*

<i>Program</i>	<i>Actual 1976-77</i>				<i>Potential 1976-77</i>			
	<i>Undergraduate</i>	<i>Diploma</i>	<i>Master</i>	<i>Doctoral</i>	<i>Undergraduate</i>	<i>Diploma</i>	<i>Master</i>	<i>Doctoral</i>
UBC	80	30	25	5	200	36	50	8
Alberta	495	11	13	15	450	—	40	—
Saskatchewan	593	14	28	1	500	10	20	3
Manitoba								
— Full-time	— ^a	6 ^b		— ^a	— ^a	10 ^b	2	— ^a
— Part-time	— ^a	400 ^b	20		— ^a	400 ^b	21	— ^a
OISE								
— Full-time	— ^a	— ^a	23	15	— ^a	— ^a	25	20
— Part-time	— ^a	— ^a	155	14	— ^a	— ^a	160	20
York	14	500	— ^a	— ^a	70	800	— ^a	— ^a
McGill	—500	—	100	1	—500	—	100	4
Laval	184	— ^a	21	2	184	— ^a	30	5
Moncton	40	25	3	— ^a	50	unlimited	10	— ^a

^aNo program established

^bPre-Master's

num or oversubscribed. On the other hand, doctoral programs tend to be small in potential student numbers and significantly undersubscribed. Even OISE, which has the largest doctoral program, has only 75% of the students it could serve at that level.

Faculty numbers, ranks and degrees

Staff of major special education programs vary widely in staff-student ratios, ranks and qualifications (see Table 5). Some universities, such as York, McGill, Laval, and Alberta, rely very heavily on part-time appointments to staff their special education programs. Others, such as UBC, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, and OISE, tend to utilize mainly full-time staff.

Virtually all faculty in major special education programs at UBC, Alberta, and OISE have their doctorates, while most of those at Saskatchewan, Manitoba, and Moncton have their doctorates. McGill, Laval, and York tended to have many faculty who were part-time and had not completed their doctorates. The majority of full-time staff had assistant professor or higher academic ranks while the majority of part-time staff had lecturer or lower appointments.

Minor programs

Minor programs generally parallel larger ones in possessing a generalist character with the occasional program concentrating efforts in one area of exceptionality. All but one minor program responding offered classes across a range of exceptionalities and related areas. Simon Fraser concentrated classes in the field of learning disabilities to provide students with a minor in that area. Sufficient class offerings were available at the University of Lethbridge and the University of Brandon to permit students to obtain undergraduate majors in special education, while Lethbridge and Memorial offer diploma level study. Classes at the University of Western Ontario qualified students for the Ministry of Education Elementary Certificate in Special Education.

Beyond the occasional diploma course, graduate study in special education was not available in these minor programs.

Practical experience teaching exceptional children is a mainstay of most established special education programs. The relative strengths of teacher preparation programs in any area are related to the degree of contact the student has with those he is to teach. Analysis of responses from the minor programs under discussion here indicated a wide variance in practicum requirements. Lethbridge, Acadia, and Memorial required block practica of various lengths, with Memorial also requiring 35 hours of supervised individual practicum. Western Ontario initiated students into teaching exceptional children with 15 single days over 15 weeks and then provided longer-term experiences with practica of two, three, and two weeks in

TABLE 5
Faculty Numbers, Ranks and Highest Degrees
Major Special Education Programs in Canadian Universities

<i>Major Special Education Programs</i>									
<i>Faculty, Rank and Degree Level</i>	<i>UBC</i>	<i>Alta.</i>	<i>Sask.</i>	<i>Man.</i>	<i>OISE</i>	<i>York</i>	<i>McGill</i>	<i>Laval</i>	<i>Monc- ton</i>
<i>Full-time</i>									
Professor									
— Doctoral	3	2	1	3		1	1	1	2
— Master's				1			2		
— Other									
Associate									
— Doctoral	3		4		6		7	1	1
— Master's		1				1	1	1	
— Other									
Assistant									
— Doctoral	2	6	1		2	1	4	{2 ^c	2
— Master's	1	1	2				1	}2	1
— Other									
Lecturer									
— Master's		1	1		1				
— Other							1		
<i>Part-time</i>									
Professor									
— Doctoral	2	3					1 ^a		
Associate									
— Doctoral									1
— Master's									
Assistant									
— Doctoral		1		1			7 ^a		
— Master's				3			3 ^a		
Lecturer									
— Doctoral		2			3		1 ^a		
— Master's		3					12 ^a	8 ^b	2
— Other		3	1 ^b			90 ^a	1 ^a		

^aAdjunct professors from school systems

^bSessional

^cEquivalent of four full-time faculty among six assigned part-time

various settings. These four programs appear to have realized the central importance of melding theory and practice in special education teacher preparation.

In other programs certain classes included practicum components (Simon Fraser, Educ. 405-15; Regina, Ed. Psych, 323 and 326; Lakehead, Ed. 4574, 4576, 4577, 4584 and 4585). While recognizing the importance of teaching exceptional students, programs without block practica were wanting in that students tended not to have an opportunity to function as class teachers over sustained periods.

A second method of evaluating the strength of a program is to assess faculty and student involvement. Responses indicated that the most heavily staffed programs were Brandon and Western Ontario, with two full-time faculty each. Simon Fraser, Regina, Lethbridge, and Memorial indicated one full-time faculty member each. Simon Fraser, Regina, and Memorial additionally assigned one, one, and three faculty members respectively to part-time duty in special education. Three programs (Lakehead, 1; Acadia, 4; Nova Scotia Teacher's College, 4) assigned only part-time faculty to special education. In keeping with limited staff assignment minor programs enrolled relatively few students (Regina, 20; Lakehead, 35; U.W.O., 53; Acadia, 34; N.S. Teacher's College, 100 over three years). The University of Victoria did not report faculty or student numbers while Simon Fraser, Lethbridge, Brandon, and Memorial reported faculty numbers only.

DISCUSSION

Both prospective faculty and undergraduate and graduate students in the education of exceptional children should be better able to choose a Canadian university program after reading the information contained in Tables 1 to 5. The size and scope of each program is presented in terms of degrees granted, numbers of classes taught, and qualifications and appointment levels of staff available. Information on the size of each major program in both undergraduate and graduate student numbers is also presented and will assist both potential faculty and students to make more informed decisions about programs.

The finding that virtually all doctoral programs at Canadian universities with major special education programs are under-subscribed was unexpected. With the exceptions of the University of Alberta and OISE, the student capacity of doctoral programs in Canadian universities is very small (see Table 4). One possible explanation for the fact that these smaller doctoral programs are not fully subscribed may be that doctoral students prefer programs in which there are at least a minimum number of fellow doctoral students. It is noteworthy, too, that there is unused student capacity in the diploma and master's programs at UBC, Alberta, and

Laval. Only Saskatchewan appears to be over-subscribed in both its diploma and MEd programs.

A number of anomalies were apparent in the data obtained. It is difficult to understand, for example, how the University of Manitoba, with only four full-time members in special education and offering only 14 half and full classes, can be said to offer both an undergraduate major and a master's degree with and without thesis. York University, with only three full-time faculty and six classes offered, reports that it serves 514 students, 500 of them at the diploma level. The great majority of these students were part-time, rendering York almost entirely a part-time program. As well, there appears to be a sharp distinction between western and other Canadian universities in the matter of clinical support facilities and practicum-based professional preparation programs. Western universities tend to have adopted both while other major university programs have not.

Whether these apparent anomalies are real or a result of incomplete data is difficult to determine. Every effort was made to obtain both complete and accurate information. As noted previously, the information in the present tables was circulated to each respondent for verification prior to printing.

It was not the purpose of this paper to trace the growth of special education professional preparation programs at Canadian universities. Rather it was the intent of the writers to provide as much pertinent, factual information as possible about the programs at a given point in time. Such information provides a base which allows administrators, researchers and students to make a variety of objective program and career decisions for the future. It also provides a stimulant for possible research projects. Such topics as the feasibility of regional doctoral programs larger both in scope and emphasis, programming for profound handicapping conditions and the strengths of full-time versus part-time study in special education may attract the attention of researchers or bodies such as the Council of Ministers of Education in Canada. Certainly there exists a need to examine special education programs at Canadian universities if the current establishment and expansion of such programs are to be rationally based.

REFERENCE

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