Teacher Candidates' Perceptions of School Culture: A Mixed Methods Investigation

Lorenzo Cherubini
Brock University

Abstract

Preservice teacher candidates are assigned to different schools for their practicum experiences and are immersed in a variety of school cultures. Interestingly, though matters related to school culture are discussed in the literature, there is a lack of comprehensive research pertaining to preservice teachers' expectations and observations of school climate during their formal teacher education program. Given that preservice teachers' experiences are intensely impacted by their observations and experiences throughout their teacher training, the purpose of this mixed-methods study was to investigate teacher candidates' beliefs about school climate at the beginning and near completion of their teacher education program. More specifically, the aim of this paper was to determine the effect of the practicum experience on teacher candidates' beliefs about school culture. The findings may induce preservice education faculty and teacher induction providers to evaluate the pedagogical causes that illuminate and implicate the tensions within teacher candidates' expectations of school culture and their observed realities.

Preparing teacher candidates to be competent practitioners is an endemic mandate for faculties of education across North America, and its import is well documented in the literature (Darling-Hammond, Holtzman, Gatlin, & Heilig, 2005; see also Betts, Ruebin, & Dannenberg, 2000; Goe, 2002; Goldhaber & Brewer, 2000; Russell & McPherson, 2001; Wilson, Floden, & Ferrini-Mundy, 2001). Equally prolific is the emerging need to retain highly qualified novice teachers practicing in disadvantaged urban centers (Darling-Hammond et al., 2005; Darling-Hammond & Sykes, 2003; National Commission on Teaching and America's Future, 2003) and in school cultures that resign novice teachers to feelings of powerlessness, isolation from colleagues, and minimal professional interaction (Calabrese & Fisher, 1988; Newberry, 1977; Rosenholtz & Kyle, 1984). School culture is understood as "the prevailing norms and patterns of interaction that exist within the school" (Kardos, Moore-Johnson, Peske,

Lorenzo Cherubini earned an EdD at The University of Southern Queensland, Australia, an MA (American Literature) and BA at McMaster University, and a BEd at Brock University. His specialty is in beginning teacher development with a research focus on post-industrial influences on organizational leadership concepts and school culture. Over the past 16 years he has taught at the secondary school level and served in the roles of guidance counselor, department chair of English and Modern Languages, and school administrator in both the elementary and secondary school panels. Currently, he is assistant professor in the Faculty of Education, Brock University. He can be reached at: Lorenzo.Cherubini@Brocku.ca.

Kaufman, & Liu, 2001, p. 251). Fundamental to school culture and relevant to this research investigation is the notion of "school climate," understood as the underlying attitudes and expectations demonstrated by teachers that have a profound impact upon morale (Vail, 2005). The climate of a school often informs the atmosphere in the classrooms, faculty lounge, offices, and hallways in each institution (Wenzkaff, 1998).

Beginning teachers are acclimatized into the mutual values and social relations of the school as it represents a community of academic and extracurricular programs as well as professional roles (Bryk & Driscoll, 1988; Lee, Bryk, & Smith, 1993). Not surprisingly, Johnson (1990) concluded that a collaborative school faculty improved beginning teachers' pedagogical knowledge. Genuine collegiality, according to Little (1990), extends beyond pleasant social interactions between teachers and constitutes an understood shared responsibility for students' learning (cf., Newmann & Wehlage, 1995). Professional communities, positive social relations, and assumed reciprocal responsibilities augment beginning teachers' practice (Bryk, Camburn, & Louis, 1999; Talbert & McLaughlin, 1996). Hargreaves and Dawe (1990) cautioned that school cultures founded upon contrived and superfluous kinships and affinities may, in fact, be counter productive to new teacher growth.

Purpose of the Study

Preservice teacher candidates are assigned to a number of different schools for their practicum experiences and, as a result, are immersed in a variety of school cultures and their respective climates. Though matters related to both school culture and climate are discussed in the literature, there is a lack of comprehensive research around preservice teachers' expectations of these and their observations during their formal student-teacher education practicum assignments. It is useful to compare student teachers' expectations of school culture prior to the field-teaching placements with their observations subsequent to having been immersed in the schools. Beginning teachers' experiences are "affected by perceptions and expectations formed during teacher training" (Menon & Christou, 2002, p. 98). As such, it is important to form the right set of attitudes in teachers, which necessitates being at least aware of how pre-service training tends to affect attitudes that can impact the school culture and climate of where they are hired.

The purpose of this mixed-methods study was to investigate teacher candidates' beliefs about the culture and climate of schools at the beginning and near completion of their teacher education program. More specifically, the aim of this paper was to determine the effects of the teaching practicum experiences on teacher-candidates' beliefs about school culture. As Guillaume and Rudney (1993) stated:

Through examination of student teachers' perceptions and concerns, an insight can be gained about the problems teachers face and the knowledge they find of most worth. By attending to student teachers' concerns we can further understand the processes students undergo to become teachers. (p. 65)

The results may induce preservice education faculty to evaluate the underlying pedagogical causes that implicate the tensions within teacher candidates' expectations and observed realities of school culture.

Methods

The study's mixed methods research design incorporated quantitative and qualitative means to elicit a comprehensive understanding of the research scenario (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007; Elliot, 2005; Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2003).

Participants

Preservice students enrolled in a professional consecutive bachelor of education teacher-preparation program in a mid-sized southwestern Ontario university were invited to participate in this study. Seventy-five students accepted the invitation (from the 145 originally enlisted), representing a 52% response rate. Two percent of the responses were discarded during the preliminary vetting due to response prevarication. It is imperative to clarify that teacher preparation in Canada rests within provincial jurisdiction. In Ontario, the bachelor of education degree is earned as a second degree and is an eight month long program of study. Students enrolled in this program choose to specialize in one of the primary/junior or intermediate/senior teaching divisions. In self-reported measurement indicators, 63% of participants were female and 17% male; 51% were enrolled in the intermediate/senior qualification program and 41% in the primary/junior divisional qualifications; 65% belonged to the 20 to 29 year old age bracket, 11% to the 30 to 39 year old age category, and 13% of those who responded indicated that they were 40 years of age or older.

Procedure

The triangulated design of this mixed methods study allowed an investigation of the extent to which participant responses from the quantitative items departed from their more in-depth qualitative perspectives. This study involved the concurrent but distinct collection and analysis of both quantitative and qualitative data (of equal weighting) prior to the merging of the two kinds of data during the interpretation process (Creswell, Plano Clark, Gutmann, & Hanson, 2003; Hansen, Creswell, Plano Clark, Petska, & Creswell, 2005). The study examined the expectations and subsequent impressions of preservice candidates regarding the attributes of school culture and climate. The socialization of becoming a teacher is a multifaceted process that not only draws upon student-teachers' cognitive and performance domains, but their affective one as well (Killeavy, 2001). On the basis of a Likert-type scale ranging from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree," participants indicated their expectations of several affective attributes before their initial practicum experience and then ranked the same items after their final teaching practicum near the conclusion of their preservice teacher education program. Each of the six statements began with "During my interning and practice-teaching in schools, I expect that...." The statements were scripted as follows:

- School staff (including teachers, administrators, secretaries, custodians) will be respectful to one another.
- Honesty and compassion will be demonstrated amongst all staff.
- Teachers will be professional in their conversations with colleagues when discussing particular students.
- Teachers will be welcoming and inclusive of students and staff.
- Humor and laughter will exist within departments, divisions, teacher-workrooms, and throughout the school.
- Teachers and support staff will consider the principals and vice principals as team players.

In the qualitative section of the pre-survey, participants elaborated upon their expectation of the possibility that school culture will enable both new and experienced teachers to learn from their practice in environments that promote personal growth. The statement read: "Explain why you either agree or disagree with the following statement: 'Schools will enable both new and experienced teachers to learn from their practice in environments that promote personal growth'." Conversely, the post-survey was used to solicit their descriptive explanations of the types of informal conversations that occurred most often between staff that best represented the school culture. It was stated as follows, "Based on your collective experiences this year in the various schools to which you were assigned, how would you describe the types of discussions and conversations that occurred most often between (i) teacher and teacher, and (ii) teacher and administrator(s)."

The surveys were administered at the conclusion of scheduled classes with minimal disruption to coursework. Course instructors were given a description of the study and the respective instructions to share with those students who chose to participate. Both the quantitative and qualitative components addressed instrument fidelity since they were previously field tested under relatively similar circumstances with different samples of preservice student cohorts (Onwuegbuzie, Witcher, Collins, Filer, Wiedmaier, & Moore, 2007). After each field test, peer debriefing meetings were facilitated as vehicles for external evaluation (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992; Maxwell, 2005; Merriam, 1998). The mixed methods research design enabled more descriptive analyses of participants' expectations and perceptions of school culture. An experienced researcher in mixed-methods design questioned and constructively criticized the findings as they emerged (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The open-ended qualitative questions provided opportunities for participants to further explain or clarify their responses from the Likert-type items. Sample integration legitimation considered the synthesis of inferences that emerged from the qualitative and quantitative approaches into meta-inferences (Onwuegbuzie & Johnson, 2006; Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2006).

Data Analysis

The six statement responses were quantitatively analyzed in terms of means and frequencies before being scrutinized to t-tests to factor significant differences. There were several statistically significant differences in means across the pre- and post-test responses (illustrated in "Findings"). The quantitative responses

were further subjected to multiple comparisons based on participants’ self-reported age, gender, and divisional qualifications.

The open-ended qualitative responses were entered into Ethnograph, software to identify dominant patterns. Grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), as a qualitative analytical mode of analysis, was used to code the respective patterns into emerging themes as they were anchored in the data (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). The process of constant comparison saturated the conceptual relationships into the respective categories (Cherubini, 2007; Glaser, 1978, 1992). The qualitative data was combined and inductively analyzed using this process across age, gender, and divisional qualifications.

Findings

The findings for each of the variables from both the quantitative and qualitative analyses are presented respectively in standard mixed-methods form (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007). Participants’ experiences during their teaching-practicum assignments had a significant effect upon their beliefs of school culture and school climate.

Quantitative Data: A Ranking of Descriptive Means

With respect to participants’ quantitative responses, the descriptive means for each of the six statements were lower in the post-survey than they were in the first administration of the survey. Clearly, the preservice candidates who participated in these surveys had significantly higher expectations of the affective attributes related to school culture and climate prior to their student-teaching practica (as shown in Table 1).

Table 1
Descriptive means for items related to school climate.

Responses	N	Pre-mean	SD	N	Post-mean	SD
Sense of respect amongst staff	75	4.63	.693	75	4.15	.77
Evidence of honesty and compassion amongst staff	75	4.25	1.00	75	3.85	.85
Professional conversations amongst staff	75	4.27	.85	75	3.53	.93
Teachers as welcoming and inclusive	75	4.29	.96	75	3.81	.93
Humor and laughter evident in rapport amongst staff	75	4.27	.81	75	4.20	.68
Administrators considered team players	75	4.11	.93	75	3.70	1.00

The most significant difference between mean scores was in relation to the professional nature of teachers' conversations, while a sense of respect and collegial inclusivity in the school culture also resulted in a significant contrast between teacher candidates' expectations and experiences in schools. The remaining differences, though statistically minimal in comparison, also reflected a general pattern that indicated preservice candidates' expectations as being meaningfully different than the reality they experienced in the various schools.

Significant differences: Two-tailed t-tests. When the data was subjected to two-tailed t-tests at an alpha level of .05, there was a statistically significant difference in four of the six responses, with a fifth t-test result approaching significance (see Table 2).

Table 2

Paired samples test.

Items	Mean	SD	SEM	t	Sig. (2-tailed)
Pair 1 respect – respect 2	.48000	1.00485	.11603	4.137	.000
Pair 2 honesty – honesty 2	.40000	1.10282	.12734	3.141	.002
Pair 3 professional – professional 2	.73333	1.24481	.14374	5.102	.000
Pair 4 welcome – welcome 2	.48000	1.24510	.14377	3.339	.001
Pair 5 humor – humor 2	.06667	1.00449	.11599	.575	.567
Pair 6 team – team 2	.40541	1.37411	.15974	2.538	.013

This trend strongly suggested that prospective teachers' experiences during the teaching practica significantly influenced their perceptions of school culture and climate. These results and trends were not an indictment upon particular schools nor upon any school board since the 75 participants completed their practica in various kindergarten to Grade 12 classrooms dispersed across a vast geographical region in Ontario. It is telling that student-teacher candidates who participated in the surveys believed that evidence of respect amongst staff, honesty and empathy towards students, professional demeanor, and a spirit of inclusivity was far less prevalent in the school climates than they originally expected.

Independent t-test comparisons. It was also of interest to determine if significant differences existed across the surveys in terms of participants' age, gender, and divisional qualifications. Independent t-tests were conducted. Of note, the 26 to 29 and over 40 year old cohorts reported significant differences in their expectations and eventual experiences of respect and honesty as visible components of school culture. The significant differences between participants' ages are located in Table 3. Independent t-tests of multiple comparisons based on gender are also reported in Table 3. The sole statistically significant difference

was in the area of respect as an intangible yet evident presence in the school. A record of significant differences for a multiple comparison of t-test based on participants’ divisional qualifications is also reported in Table 3.

Table 3
Multiple comparisons of age, gender, and divisional qualifications.

Responses	Age	Age	Mean Difference	Sig.
Respect	26-29	40+	.636	.032
Honesty	26-29	40+	.909	.034

Responses	Gender	Gender	Mean Difference	Sig.
Respect	males	females	.589	.003

Responses	Divisional Qualification	Divisional Qualification	Mean Difference	Sig.
Honesty	I/S	P/J	.650	.037
Welcome	J/I	P/J	.758	.029
Teamwork	I/S	P/J	.700	.026

Qualitative Data: A Grounded Theory Analysis

Responses to the qualitative open-ended questions in both the pre- and post-surveys were inductively analyzed by the components of grounded theory and independently coded according to the same variables employed in the quantitative analyses: namely, age, gender, and divisional qualifications. The respective core categories that emerged in the pre- and post-surveys are appended.

Variable 1: Age. The 20-29 age cohort responses for the first survey were coded and saturated into one core category--namely, participants’ focus on teaching as being interconnected to learning. Typical responses included “new teachers will be able to learn from the experienced teachers” and “school will be an environment where we can learn and grow from our practice.” The core category emerging from the second survey (as it related to the 20-29 year old cohort) was identified as social exchanges dominated by small talk. Responses that were characteristic of this category included, “the usual talk [between teachers] was about random issues” and “very casual and laid back conversations between staff for the most part.”

Only 2 of the 8 participants replied to the open ended question in the pre-survey for the 30-39 year old cohort. The majority of participants’ responses in the second survey resulted in the saturation of a core category described as a “distinction between tone and content.” The category represented participants’ observations about both the nature of the subject matter being discussed between teachers and the manner in which it was communicated between them. Survey

participants noted the informality of discussions between staff and the liberty teachers took in public conversations of individual student matters.

The core categories that emerged in the pre- and post-surveys for the 40 year old cohort resulted in some congruity between participants' expectations and perceptions. The pre-survey core category, articulated as a focus on professional reflection and its relationship to practice, consisted of participant responses that included "continual reflection of one's teaching forms better practices and promotes personal and professional growth." Similarly, in the significant category for the second survey, participant observations of the cooperative spirit of discussions suggested that "teachers willingly lent their support to the other teachers especially when they were at a loss about a student in their class."

Variable 2: Gender. When subjected to gender comparisons, there emerged noteworthy distinctions between pre- and post-survey responses. While the vast majority of female participants described their expectations of school culture and climate as being innately connected to benefiting school and student development, over a quarter of them commented in the second survey upon their observations of inappropriate comments about students between teachers and the "negative professional environment" in the schools.

A similar contrast was found for the male population which anticipated in pre-survey responses that learning and professional growth would be strongly associated with teachers' practice (identified as the core category). In post-survey responses, however, the grounded data suggested that dialogue among and between teachers was perceived as a venting mechanisms whereby teachers voiced their concerns and objections with student behaviour and with school administrators' decisions.

Variable 3: Divisional qualifications. The intermediate/senior cohort responses closely resembled the female participant expectations and observations. This cohort also initially anticipated learning embedded school environments that recognized the importance of conducive and collegial professional climates. In their post-survey perceptions, though, nearly half of the intermediate/senior teacher-candidates commented upon the frequency and negativity of teachers' dialogue about the misunderstood students in their classrooms.

The findings from the primary/junior cohort indicated a similar trend. The overwhelming majority of primary/junior candidates anticipated that school climate would explicitly position professional learning on a continuum that would be inclusive of novice and experienced teachers alike. In the post-survey, however, over one-third of these same participants thought that conversations and discussions amongst staff often entailed derogatory comments about teachers and students that did not contribute to a professional school climate.

Discussion

It is evident that, given the statistically significant differences and the qualitative core categories, preservice teacher expectations about school culture are profoundly higher than their observations and experiences in the field; the practice-teaching experience significantly altered their perceptions. In the context of this study, participants clearly anticipated what Zachary (2005) described as the "surround sound" and "undiscussable" (p. 20). Characteristics of school

climate and expected these to have been manifest in a more positive and collegial light. Several significant findings and their implications on educational practice are deserving of further discussion.

To begin, the most statistically significant incongruence—professional conversations amongst staff—relates to the theory that a successful and fluent school climate recognizes, integrates, and binds teachers through a process of genuine interaction and associations (Tomlinson, 2004). Participants' expectations of professional dialogue amongst teachers were substantiated by their qualitative responses. One participant expected that "new teachers will be able to learn by conversing with experienced teachers," while another noted that "the entire staff will be unique and educated people and a lot of sharing of knowledge can take place." Post-teaching practicum reflections suggested a very different reality. As this participant suggested, "I was surprised to hear the amount of non-professional discussion." A different individual candidly recorded, "I often heard teachers speaking poorly of their colleagues," while another referenced "the unprofessional discussion about students." Both the quantitative and the qualitative findings support the research that there is often little professional dialogue between teachers (Scott & Smith, 1987; Templin, 1988; Thomson & Wendt, 1995). Preservice teachers observed an authentic disconnect between professional dialogue as they expected it to be and the "excessive criticism about behaviour students" (as was described by one participant) that they observed.

For the most part, professional dialogue did not encourage conditions and connections to improve teaching practice and further student learning. Instead, the discourse was situated in managerial issues, organizational incongruities, and problematic student behaviour. The focus on these issues is not to suggest that professional dialogue did not exist in these schools; the professional dialogue, however, capture participants' impressions of professional conversation during their 12 weeks in a number of different schools. The lack of professional dialogue was not an isolated observation since participants taught in at least two different schools with the majority of them assigned to three schools. Given that the post-survey was administered after all of their practice-teaching experiences, the findings underscore participants' overall reflections of collegial conversations in the professional culture of schools.

Among the implications are the participants' impressions of the tensions inherent in conversations that potentially stifle productivity and professional development. Participants perceived a discourse of bureaucratic conversation often framed in a deficit-model type discourse. Teachers were observed to be predominantly conversing about the challenges and adverse conditions related to the job of teaching. Of even greater consequence, conversational tensions were neither remedied nor addressed at the conclusion of their teacher education program and participants received their teaching credentials with a rather jaded operational paradigm intact.

The second significant finding included a similar disconnect between participants' observations of the lack of respectful behaviour between staff. Student-teachers time and again anticipated more respectful behaviour in the occupational community and in the daily interactions with others, experiences consistent with Daley (2002). Pre-survey expectations were characteristic of the

following comments, "All individuals come from varied backgrounds and we should respect all individuals regardless of age or experience" and "teaching is a learning process and teachers must be respected regardless if they are experienced or novice" and "school staffs will be part of professional environments where teachers can learn from each other, respect each other, and grow together." The post-survey observations were markedly different. "There was little respect for the teachers around them. It was almost like they were slighting other teachers to make themselves better," remarked one individual. Another commented that "discussions about the principals were disrespectful. It was never about what they [teachers themselves] could do to make things better." Common to all but especially particular in the intermediate/senior cohort, participants expected respect levels amongst teacher to contribute to a positive learning atmosphere conducive to professional collaboration; instead, their post-survey observations were filtered through a far less idealistic lens. While some commented upon the professional support and commitment to student outcomes, nearly half of all respondents noted the lack of professional respect as evidenced in teachers' cynical comments and recurrent focus on negative circumstances. Research suggests that a tolerance for professional respect in a collaborative school climate is an especially enduring characteristic for beginning teachers (Olebe, 2005) because it personally appeals to the social identity of the occupational community (Daley, 2002).

Participants' responses had implications for more experienced teachers who in some cases "believe that they have paid their dues and that new teachers must do the same" and cope with surviving the induction years (Renard, 2003, p. 63). In many instances, participants struggled to identify the components of school culture that were sustaining for all teachers. Absent in these cultures were the layers of engagement to launch new teachers especially into exercising their capacities as contributing members of school communities.

The third finding that was particularly noteworthy was participants' observations of school staff as welcoming to newcomers and accepting of diverse perspectives. Participants stated their expectations that the school climate will recognize and inform the "importance of being supported by other teachers to continually grow as a new teacher." Post-survey reflections were, however, more indicative of this individual's comment: "I realize now that beginning teachers do not always feel invited to staff workshops and are overlooked for professional development that have school-wide importance." Characteristic of the post-survey responses were participants' observations that certain school cultures diminished beginning teachers by making them seem excessively naive. This limitation uncategorically imposes differences in an already dense social milieu in which new teachers are thrust. It not only limits their points of view and contributions as educators, but undermines attempts made to support their growth and feelings of belonging toward achieving collective goals as a unified school faculty (Wong, 2002).

This finding, too, poses significant implications for educational practice. The lack of meaningful inclusivity on staff seemed to disengage the interests of beginning teachers and obviously influenced participants' responses. Moir (2003) underscored the importance of establishing positive relationships between new and experienced teachers in order to situate the novice in an environment that is

most conducive to their professional growth. Practicing teachers and school administrators are charged with the responsibility to mediate the experiences of new teachers during their induction into school culture. As the findings attest, prospective teachers are particularly sensitive to the norms of interaction between teacher colleagues.

There is research that supports the notions that school culture and climate are experienced daily (Zachary, 2005) and pedagogical partnerships founded upon respectful relations sustain better teaching practice (Williams, 2003). Consider, then, the following significant findings: The over 40 years of age cohort anticipated a greater sense of respect, honesty, and compassion between staff than the other cohorts. Although not thoroughly explainable, this anticipation of respect, honesty, and compassion between staff may be attributed to the fact that this demographic of prospective teachers represents more life experience, often pursuing teaching as a second career. Further, the over 40 years of age cohort may be drawing comparisons to their elementary and secondary schooling from a more distant point of reference. Females reported a more profound disconnect than male participants in the area of respect. Whether this is an outcome of an emerging awareness of feminist pedagogy (Coffey & Delamont, 2000; Digiovanni, 2004) or the nuances of a particular group is debatable.

Also notable is a significant related difference between the intermediate/senior cohort and the primary/junior group in terms of honesty as a demonstrable characteristic. This difference is somewhat predictable given students' younger ages and greater sense of dependence on teachers in elementary school and the generally smaller schools where there is a greater opportunity to converse with colleagues about students on a more personal level. The difference in the notion of teachers collaborating and operating as a team with school administrators (in the intermediate and junior cohorts) may also be readily explained as it is consistent with the organizational hierarchy of secondary and elementary schools. Secondary school teachers may tend to interact more with department chairs as representatives, while school administrators may be perceived as somewhat detached from the daily functions of the curriculum-specific departments. The junior division teachers in elementary schools may generally perceive the administration to be in closer solidarity with their concerns in the classroom given their greater accessibility in comparison to the secondary school administrators.

The last significant finding rests with the primary/junior cohort's differences from the prospective intermediate/senior candidates (in the areas of honesty, inclusivity, and sense of teamwork between teachers and administrators). This may be attributed to more intimate elementary school environments that may be more conducive to shared participation (Stolp, 1994; Stolp & Smith, 1994) and collaborative relationships (McCann, Johannessen, & Ricca, 2005; McCann & Johannessen, 2004). In the more departmentalized secondary school setting, it can be inferred that there may be less opportunity to observe teachers demonstrating some of the attributes of school culture under investigation.

Limitations

The study was limited to students from one preservice teacher education program in a Canadian province raises the spectre that the findings are not generalizable. Though political legitimization included the comprehensive implementation of the mixed-methods techniques already discussed, replications of this inquiry with other students from various faculties of education in Ontario would augment its reliability and further acknowledge sequential and conversion legitimization (Onwuegbuzie & Johnson). Finally, while a cross-sectional analysis of preservice teachers' present circumstances provides a simultaneous and comprehensive understanding of various age groups and divisional qualification streams, some selection differences between the cohorts may have biased the results. This may be especially true for the 22-25 and 40 year old (and older) populations considering their differences may have been confounded by the number of years since they graduated from elementary or secondary school.

Summary

The stark difference between participants' pre-practicum expectations and their post-field placement experiences have been illustrated. To a great extent, the findings point to the fact that preservice candidates' practicum experiences in the schools significantly cloud their perceptions of school culture and, in fact, redefines the boundaries of the academic climate. Although preservice teacher candidates no doubt profit from the consolidation of the theory learned at the faculty during their preservice training and the experience of teaching in schools, prospective teachers' perceptions of the issues related to school culture remain somewhat impermeable and intractable. The values and ideologies that fashion school culture inevitably cast a shadow upon individuals' perceptions of educators' behaviour (Tomlinson, 2004). For preservice teacher candidates, their lasciviously intense perceptions of school climate embody a multiplicity of profound ambivalences. It appears that a potential exists for preservice teacher candidates to complete their formal training with this unexplored relationship between the expectations and the reality of school climate that they perceived.

The findings attest to a particular and significant phenomena: namely, the distinctive circumstances of student-teacher practica that profoundly affect candidates' perceptions of school culture. Participants' observations of school climate during their preservice teaching practica are significantly lower than their expectations prior to the field placements. In short, their experience in schools negatively informs their perceptions of school culture. The open-ended qualitative responses are equally persuasive. Participants' reflections are interpolated segments of commentary that allude to this disconnect between expectations and observations.

The study's results typified participants' forthright critical perceptions of school climate. A number of significant implications emerged. For preservice faculty, for instance, the prevailing disconnect warrants retrospection as the potential exists for student-teachers' field experiences to eradicate the influence and subordinate the aim of the organizational theory taught at the faculty of education. It at least begs the question of whether this fundamental divide in preservice candidates is addressed. The onus appears to rest with preservice

program faculty and school board induction providers to acknowledge teacher candidates' multiple significations of experience before, during, and after their field-teaching practicum.

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Appendix A

Core Categories Grounded in the Qualitative Data: Pre- and Post-Surveys

- 20 to 29 year old Cohort
Pre-Survey: Focus on teaching as being interconnected to learning.
Post-Survey: Conversations dominated by small talk.
- 30 to 39 year old Cohort
Pre-Survey: (Insignificant participant response rate).
Post-Survey: Distinguished between tone and content of conversations.
- 40 and older Cohort
Pre-Survey: Focus on professional reflection and how it relates to practice.
Post-Survey: Professional and cooperative discussions between staff.
- Females
Pre-Survey: Expected school culture to be innately connected to benefiting school and student development.
Post-Survey: (i) Supporting and enthusiastic, and (ii) Often unprofessional in conversations.
- Males
Pre-Survey: Learning and professional growth will be very much connected to practice.
Post-Survey: Conversations as venting mechanisms.
- Intermediate / Senior Qualifications
Pre-Survey: (i) Expected learning embedded school environments, and (ii) Recognized the importance of conducive and collegial school environments.
Post-Survey: (i) Professional and supportive of staff and students, and (ii) Prevalent focus and little tolerance for misunderstood students.
- Primary / Junior Qualifications
Pre-Survey: Learning as a continuum that includes new and experienced teachers.
Post-Survey: (i) Conversations were often related to practice, and (ii) Derogatory comments about staff and students.