

Mapping the Field: Examining the Recertification of Internationally Educated Teachers

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Abstract

In this article I examine the structural barriers in the recertification trajectory of internationally educated teachers (IETs) in British Columbia (BC). By applying the Bourdieuan concept of field, I extend from IETs' experiences in the recertification process to institutional and political factors that affect these experiences. I demonstrate how policies and regulations that govern the field as well as the interplay between its main institutional players, namely, the Teacher Regulation Branch, teacher education programs, and school districts, result in unequal opportunities for IETs to be certified and hired as teachers. As a result, IETs' potential contribution to diversifying the teacher force in BC is diminished.

Keywords: internationally educated teachers, teacher education, field, recertification

Une cartographie du champ : la recertification des enseignants formés à l'étranger

Résumé

Dans cet article, j'analyse les obstacles structurels à la recertification des enseignants formés à l'étranger (EFÉ) en Colombie-Britannique. En appliquant le concept de champ de Bourdieu, je pars des expériences des EFÉ quant au processus de recertification tout en tenant compte des facteurs institutionnels et politiques qui jouent un rôle dans ces expériences. Je démontre comment des politiques et des règlements qui régissent ce champ ainsi que l'interaction entre les principaux intervenants institutionnels, notamment la *Teacher Regulation Branch*, les programmes de formation à l'enseignement et les arrondissements scolaires font en sorte que les EFÉ ont moins de chances de recevoir une certification et de se voir offrir un poste d'enseignant. Résultat : la contribution potentielle des EFÉ à la diversification du corps enseignant en Colombie-Britannique s'en trouve diminuée.

Mots-clés : enseignants formés à l'étranger, formation à l'enseignement, champ, recertification

Introduction

Teaching is a common profession among Canadian immigrants (Ryan, Pollock, & Antonelli, 2009; Zietsma, 2010);¹ however, internationally educated teachers² (IETs) have higher underemployment and unemployment rates than immigrants in any other regulated profession. Researchers claim that only 20% of IETs find permanent teaching jobs, and if they are hired, it is mostly as Teachers on Call (TOC) (Zietsma, 2010). This is partially due to the saturated teaching market, particularly in Canada's urban areas;³ yet research highlights various barriers that contribute to IETs' marginalization in the Canadian teaching force (Schmidt & Schneider, 2016).

IETs need to be recertified in order to be able to teach in Canada. The recertification process may vary between provinces and is a full-time training process, which takes between eight months and a year, following a procedure of assessment of foreign credentials. In Canada, the recertification process is under the mandate of teacher education programs (Walsh & Brigham, 2007a). In British Columbia (BC), only two programs out of nine offer a designated program for IETs.

IETs in Canada are still a relatively unexplored field (Bascia, Thiessen, & Goodson, 1996; Beynon, Ilieva, & Dichupa, 2004; Cho, 2011; Deters, 2011; Faez, 2010; Frank, 2013; He, 1998; Mawhinney & Xu, 1997; Medic, 2007; Myles, Cheng, & Wang, 2006; Phillion, 2003; Rosehart, 2013; Schmidt, 2010b; Schmidt & Gagné, 2015; Walsh, Brigham, & Wang, 2011; Wang, 2002).⁴ Most of the literature base on IETs in Canada focuses on the experiences and voices of IETs and unveils barriers within the process of recertification and employment; relatively few studies employ a policy frame (Schmidt,

1 Although it is not as common as engineering, for example (6.2% vs. 27.6%; Deters, 2011, p. 9).

2 Within the Canadian scholarly base, studies employ different terminology for IETs. I use the term "internationally educated teachers" (IETs) since it is commonly used in the teacher education field in BC. Furthermore, the terminology of "immigrant" seems to be imbricated with deficiency, whereas "international" and "education" are more highly regarded concepts.

3 Although teaching is the most common profession in Canada, there is a shortage of teaching positions in the main urban centres (Schmidt, 2010b); however, these are the areas where immigrants tend to settle.

4 Most research on IETs to date has been conducted in Ontario (Chassels, 2010; Cho, 2011; Deters, 2011; Faez, 2010; Phillion, 2003). Less research has been conducted in Manitoba (Schmidt, 2010b; Schmidt, Young, & Mandzukl, 2010), Nova Scotia (Walsh & Brigham, 2007b; Walsh et al., 2011), Alberta (Janusch, 2015; People and Research Division, Professional Standards Branch, 2012), or British Columbia (Beynon et al., 2004; Frank, 2013; Magambo, 2009; Marom, 2016; Rosehart, 2013).

2010b; Schmidt & Block, 2010; Sorano, 2009). By drawing on the Bourdieuan concept of field (1985, 1990), this article aims to extend from IETs' experiences to the institutional and political factors that affect these experiences.

While I reiterate some of the main findings in literature regarding the barriers IETs face during the recertification process, most studies base their findings on data collected from IETs, whereas in this study data were collected from both IETs and professionals associated with the recertification process. In this sense, this study expands the framework from that of individual IETs' experiences to the acknowledgement of the barriers in the recertification process by others who are in positions of greater power within the field.

I highlight the structural barriers in the recertification process of IETs in BC through an extended case study (Burawoy, 1998) of one of BC's two recertification programs—the Teacher Updating Program at the University of British Columbia (UBC). I begin by demonstrating IETs' importance in supporting diversity in the school system, followed by the context of this study. I then present the concept of field as used in this study and explain how it ties to the methodological frame of an extended case study. In the findings section, I present main barriers in the recertification trajectory in BC and highlight their structural and institutional nature. I end with some recommendations for improving the recertification trajectory to support IETs and thus support the diversification of the teaching force.

IETs' Contribution to Diversity in Education

Many studies have shown the importance of diversifying the teaching force and argue that in order to answer the needs of the highly diverse student population, the teaching force should “better reflect the backgrounds, worldviews, cultures, and languages of the students” (Schmidt, 2010a, p. 2). For instance, some claim that teachers of (racial or ethnic) minority groups appreciate the cultural knowledge of students from minority groups and incorporate it into their teaching (Villegas & Lucas, 2002). They also serve as cultural translators and mentors, have high expectations for minority students, create emotional connections, and increase their achievements by using culturally based pedagogies (Bascia et al., 1996; Irvine, 2002; Sleeter & Milner, 2011; Villegas & Lucas, 2002).

Moreover, since teaching is a public profession, it is important for teachers from marginalized groups to hold positions of power (Ryan et al., 2009).

The importance of minority teachers goes beyond that of minority students since “all students can benefit from what [these] teachers bring into the learning environment” (Sleeter & Milner, 2011, p. 83). Sleeter and Milner (2011) explain, “The more homogenous the teachers, the more homogenous the worldviews that are likely to be used to analyze teaching and students’ needs[; this] is particularly problematic when those worldviews and the experiences underlying them diverge from those of students” (p. 83). Hence, in diverse school systems, the “one-size-fits-all” approach actually serves one group of students better than others (Kincheloe, 2010). This is problematic particularly in light of Ladson-Billings’s (2011) argument that diversity in education needs to be understood under the mission of schools to “minimize social differences in academic performance” (p. 395).

IETs can contribute to promoting diversity in the Canadian K–12 school system since they are immigrants; many of them are members of ethnic minorities and/or “visible minorities.”⁵ Their presence is particularly important in urban school systems in which “the cultural characteristics and lived experiences of the majority of new teachers coming into the system continue to be dissimilar to those of many students” (Chapman, 2011, p. 63).

Context of the Study

Canadian society is becoming increasingly diverse. Statistics Canada (2017) projects that “in 2031 nearly one Canadian in two (46%) aged 15 and over will be foreign-born or will have at least one foreign-born parent” (p. 1). Yet “the makeup of the teaching profession remains relatively stagnant, with white, female teachers making up more than 80 percent of the teaching force” (Janzen & Cranston, 2016, para. 1).

In the Greater Vancouver Area by 2031, “Chinese would be the largest visible minority group...[and] would account for approximately 23% of the population of [this area]” (Statistics Canada 2017, p. 2). Yet, currently, Vancouver has the widest gap

5 I use quotation marks because this is a contested term; however, it is used in government documents.

between the proportion of “visible minority” teachers in the teaching force and the “visible minority” citizens in the general population (28% in 2006), as well as the greatest rate of decline between its growth of “visible minorities” in the student population and “visible minority” teachers in the teaching force (7.2% in the years 2001–2006) (Ryan et al., 2009, p. 594).

Taking these statistics into account, it may be surprising that in BC only two teacher education programs (the University of British Columbia’s and Simon Fraser University’s) offer a designated track for IETs (BC Ministry of Education, 2014a). This makes these two programs a more appealing choice for IETs, as they are designed to address their specific needs. The Teacher Updating Program at UBC (hereafter Updating program) is run by the UBC Teacher Education Office (TEO) as part of the teacher education program. It was founded in the 1990s when immigration picked up. Earlier, the number of immigrant teachers was smaller and they did not need to be recertified in BC.

The program offers “qualified applicants the opportunity to update their teaching credentials and to become familiar with recent pedagogy and curricular developments in BC schools” (UBC Teacher Updating Program, 2012, para. 1). It includes mainly pedagogy and methodology courses and a teaching practicum. The courses are assigned based on the applicants’ profiles and the recommendations made by the Teacher Regulation Branch (TRB)—the certifying body in BC. The TRB does not require specific courses, but rather determines its generic topics; every university assigns its specific equivalent courses based on its offerings. In the Updating program, there are no designated courses for IETs as a cohort and they join the regular courses in the Bachelor of Education (B.Ed.) program as individuals (UBC Teacher Updating Program, 2012). Program advisors who are available to discuss individual cases are assigned to the program. The Updating program admits about 10 to 15 students every year into both the elementary and secondary tracks. According to past and recent practicum coordinators, the participants in the Updating program are both men and women, usually in their mid-30s, and of various backgrounds, commonly East Asian, South Asian, and Eastern European.

Conceptual Framework: The Bourdieuan Concept of Field

In order to better comprehend the challenges that IETs face in the recertification process, I believe that Bourdieu's (1985, 1990) work on habitus, field, and social and cultural capital is especially helpful.⁶ According to Bourdieu, different fields (social worlds) are positioned in relation to other fields within a surrounding field of power. This social universe resembles a magnetic field, with economic capital and, to a lesser degree, cultural capital, at its poles; different fields are positioned according to their relative capital. Hence, fields are defined by their degree of autonomy and their location within the field of power (Bourdieu, 1985; Gemme, 2009). In any given field, "the kinds of capital, like the aces in a game of cards, are powers which define the chances of profit" (Bourdieu, 1985, p. 196). Hence, capital has two important functions: to advance members of one group over another, and to serve as the quality distinction of a certain group. The concept of distinction is generated from Bourdieu's critique of the concept of "good taste" (1984). He argues that taste is associated with one's habitus and capital and is not an extraction of individual independent choice. Distinction is not only constructed at the individual level, but is embedded within the social fields. Hence, the fields promote different forms of capital as a way to distinguish themselves from other fields.

According to Bourdieu, disjunctions between habitus and field occur "when individuals with a well-developed habitus find themselves in different fields or different parts of the same social field" (Reay, 2004, p. 438). The IET participants in this study arrived in Canada as immigrants, mostly belonging to ethnic minority groups, with their prospective habitus and capital; however, in order to continue to be employed in their profession, they needed to participate in a recertification process, even if it seemed "not for the likes of us" (Bourdieu, 1985, p. 202). This is important since, for Bourdieu, the match or clash of field and habitus is a major fact that operates unconsciously in the choice-making of agents. Hence, this is a situation of inherent tension between habitus and cultural capital attained by IETs in their home countries and the demands of the fields they are re-entering.

According to Bourdieu, for a field to exist empirically, it must have several characteristics, such as agents who recognize each other, clear rules of membership, defined

6 In this article I build mainly on the concept of field; for an expansion, see Marom (2016).

symbolic capital, regularities, and timeframes. Although under constant neoliberal attack (Wagner & Yee, 2011), the field of higher education is still relatively autonomous and has distinct manifestations of capital. In comparison to the field of higher education, teacher education is a less autonomous field. It is a regulated field in which the gain (being certified as a teacher) is subjected to changing educational policies. Although a heteronomous field, teacher education has clear characteristics that differentiate it from the field of higher education, such as specific credentials (teacher certification), a distinctive timeframe, recognized agents (teacher candidates), and specific features (practicum). However, recertification programs for IETs are not sufficiently defined to be considered a separate field; hence, they are better defined as a subfield of teacher education.

Methodology and Data Sources

This study was designed as an extended case study (Burawoy, 1998), which allowed me to examine the UBC Updating program within the context of the field of teacher education in BC. The extended case study is rooted in a dialogue that extends the case study in four ways: “The extension of observer into the lives of participants under study; the extension of observer over time and space; the extension from micro processes to macro forces; and, finally and most important, the extension of theory” (Burawoy, 2009, p. xv). Throughout all of these extensions, the linking thread is that the case is not an isolated unit but a social space in which history and context are woven together and social forces are being reproduced. As an extended case study, the Updating program was studied in relation to an external field of force, in this case the BC educational field as it is penetrated by such forces as immigration and neoliberalism.

The extended case study is compatible with the conceptual/methodological tools of Bourdieu.⁷ Bourdieu suggests three steps for studying a certain field: analyzing the position of the field within the field of power (in Burawoy’s terms, extending from process to force); mapping the structure of relations between position holders, agents, and institutions (in Burawoy’s terms, extending from the observer to the participants); and

7 Although Burawoy co-authored a book titled *Conversations with Bourdieu*, in which he criticizes some of his main constructs (Burawoy & Von Holdt, 2012), I find that there is a strong connection between the conceptual frames of the two.

analyzing the habitus of the social agents in the field (in Burawoy's terms, extending over space and time) (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, pp. 104–105).

The main site of my study was the Updating program, in which I conducted two interviews with five current IETs, one interview with 11 faculty members, and observed seven classes from five different courses. In order to fully understand the recertification trajectory, I examined how the case extended over time and space. I extended the time backward to the mandatory preliminary stage of credential evaluations that was done by TRB. I also extended the time forward to the period of post-graduation and the job search stage by interviewing five graduate IETs. In addition, I looked at the extension of the case over space, or, in Bourdieu's (1985) terminology, as located in the field of teacher education in BC. I conducted interviews with three employees of the TRB, attended two information sessions at the TRB, and interviewed a faculty member of the only other recertification program offered in BC. I also examined policies and documents related to teacher certification and IETs in BC (Marom, 2015). By using this methodological design, I gained a deeper understanding of the recertification as a complex process that involves several institutions and periods extending over time and space.

This article is part of a larger study, in which I analyzed the recertification process of IETs in BC through the Bourdieuan conceptual frame of capital conversion (Marom, 2016). My main focus was on prevalent conceptions of the “good teachers” embedded in this process and their construction of a particular form of professional capital. In this article I focus solely on the concept of field and its contribution to an understanding of the systemic barriers in the recertification trajectory.

This is an important aspect that emerged during the data collection process. Although my initial plan was to focus on the Updating program, during the interviews IETs shared many barriers they had encountered that went beyond their experiences in the program. I understood that if I wanted to trace the complex nature of the recertification trajectory, I needed to understand how the different barriers manifest during this process, and what role the Updating program played in the bigger field.

There were 10 IET participants in this study: five were enrolled in the program in the academic year 2013–2014, four were graduates of the program, and one was a Teacher on Call (TOC) on a conditional license. The participating IETs came from different backgrounds: seven of the 10 were women, most of them in their mid- or late-30s, with families. Five IETs were visible minorities, and for all of them, English was their second

language. All the participants had higher education degrees and held teacher certificates in their home countries. Most participants arrived in Canada as skilled workers within the last 10 years and with the hope of improving their families' trajectories (two arrived as an outcome of personal relationships). To protect their anonymity, IETs chose or were given pseudonyms. The professional interviewees are identified by their position title.

The Subfield of Recertification in BC

According to Bourdieu (1990), an analysis of a specific field requires the identification of the interactions and power dynamics among its different players. In the recertification process of IETs in BC, three main institutions participate: the TRB, teacher education programs, and school districts. Although seemingly a linear process in which the TRB is in charge of credential assessments, teacher education programs for executing the TRB requirements, and school districts for post-graduation hiring, institutional decisions at the various stages affect and intervene in other stages.

As a unit in the BC Ministry of Education, the most powerful institution participating in the recertification process is the TRB. In 2011, under Bill-12 (the Teacher Act), the BC College of Teachers was dissolved and replaced by the TRB (Teacher Regulation Branch, 2012).⁸ The TRB mandate includes an assessment of applications for certification, the approval of teacher education programs, the issuing of teaching certificates, and the enforcement of standards for certificate holders (Teacher Regulation Branch, 2012).

The creation of the TRB was also a political move that aimed to form an independent regulatory body and to limit the power of the teachers' union. Although BC had what Gideonse (1993) calls a "professional mode of governing teacher education" that gives voices to teacher representatives, the creation of the TRB reflects an ongoing political tendency to limit the power of the BC Teachers' Federation (Grimmett & Young, 2012; Young, 2004; Ungerleider, 2003). This rationale underlies the TRB's former Director of Certification's explanation that, "the problem with the old model is that it was controlled by the teachers' union."

8 Under the same act, the BC Teachers' Council was formed as a partial replacement for the BC College of Teachers. The council is responsible for setting the standards for teachers and comprises elected and appointed members (BC Ministry of Education, 2014b).

In addition, under the Teacher Act a commissioner office was created as part of the TRB, which, according to the former director, “created an unbiased pathway to proper conduct that couldn’t be influenced by the teachers’ union, because their interest is in protecting the teachers’ rights, and it’s not always in the interests of the public.” This answer echoes the prevalent language used by the government in justifying limiting teachers’ representation “as being necessary in the interests of public accountability and public interest” (Young, 2004, p. 24).

During the 16 years of Liberal government, this agenda was further intensified, since, as Ungerleider and Krieger (2009) explain, on most educational issues, “the ideologies of the Liberal government and the British Columbia Teachers’ Federation are situated close to the opposite ends of the spectrum” (p. 285). The Liberals were recently replaced by an NDP and Greens minority government. Furthermore, this perspective is consistent with neoliberal discourses that portray unions as self-preserving organizations and alternatively promote the conception of the individual as a self-standing unit. Hence, it demonstrates that the subfield of recertification is not disconnected from wider circulating dominant agendas such as neoliberalism.

In the next sections I demonstrate how main barriers in the recertification process were created by the construction of the field and the interplay between its main institutional players.

Language Barriers

Literature identifies language barriers as one of the most prevalent barriers in the recertification of IETs. Studies point to issues of language proficiency and accent (including pronunciation and punctuation) (Chassels, 2010; Deters, 2011; Myles et al., 2006; Walsh et al., 2011; Wang, 2002; Xu, 1999), as well as to language as a part of communication skills and the specific usage of a language (e.g., reflective writing, linguistic knowledge) (Deters, 2011; Faez, 2010). Language barriers are often perceived as an individual deficiency; thus, their structural and systemic nature is overshadowed.

The systemic nature of language barriers emerged in the following explanation given by the former TRB director of certification:

Right now every province is different with regard to their language competency requirements. In fact, six jurisdictions within Canada have no language competency requirements at all. So if IETs settle in Manitoba, they could be licensed and teach there for two years, and then if they move to BC, we have language proficiency requirements and we know that they haven't been tested, so we would ask them to establish language proficiency here. And if they don't pass, then we would deny certification. So it seems unfair to them.

Hence, IETs are able to teach in some provinces without going through a language evaluation process, but if they move to a different province, they may not be eligible to teach. In order to solve the inconsistency of language requirements between the provinces, there is an attempt to create Pan-Canadian language requirements. The Registrars for Teacher Certification in Canada (hereafter Registrars) that was created in 1999 under the Council of Ministers of Education, Canada (CMEC) "to deal with questions of common interest, with particular emphasis on teacher-mobility issues" (Council of Ministers of Education, Canada, 2014, p. 6) is currently working on the "development of Pan-Canadian language proficiency assessment tools" (p. 35) to deal with this inconsistency.

The Registrars' approach is consistent with what Bales (2006) refers to as "bureaucratic accountability," which assumes that "[if] all participants are judged by the same criteria...their outcomes will also be the same" (as cited in Higgins, 2010, p. 117). However, as Guo and Shan (2013) assert, Pan-Canadian policies that aim to promote equality can actually become a "technical exercise that serves to exclude immigrants from, rather than include them in, both further learning and professional practices" (p. 466). Hence, whereas Pan-Canadian policies use the term "fair" extensively, fairness is understood as a neoliberal tool employed to reinforce market-driven values such as individualism and competition. This is evident in the inclusion of the teaching profession under the Agreement on Internal Trade (AIT), which imposes governmental standards on teaching and makes it easier for teachers educated in Canada to move between the provinces (BC Ministry of Education, 2010). However, Grimmett and Young (2012) argue that the AIT is a "Trojan Horse" in which, "under the guise of increasing labour mobility," officials in charge of teacher certification overlook the standardization and de-regulation of the teaching profession that "alter[s] the standing of teaching as a profession in itself" (p. 95). Hence, the language requirements of IETs in the recertification process in

BC are tightly connected to larger forces of deregulation and standardization that affect teacher education nowadays.

In addition to these external forces, language barriers were triggered by the distinction between “proper” and “non-proper” language as manifested in the field of teacher education in BC. This distinction was not solely determined by one’s mastery of the language (e.g., vocabulary and grammar), but rather by one’s accent and cultural nuances. Thus, barriers may be even greater for IETs who, in their home countries, conceived of themselves as native English speakers, since in Canada they were considered second-language speakers. As a former program advisor at UBC recalled,

Anybody coming from another country has an accent from our point of view... It is difficult for people from India because they speak English and they see themselves as English speakers, but they have an accent that sometimes is not really accessible to the local students.

Such conception of IETs as English as a Second Language (ESL) speakers was reinforced in the TRB credential assessment requirements, in which the following is stated: “Applicants who have completed any part of their education in countries where the official language is not English or French must meet our language proficiency requirements” (Teacher Regulation Branch, 2012, p. 11). However, IETs from countries such as India, where English is an official language, still need to take the test, as in bylaw P2, where “official English” is interpreted as “essentially the only language used [in a certain country]” (BC Ministry of Education, 2011, p. 18). This is a problematic colonial construction of “proper” language, since English has become indigenized in many countries, and yet speakers of English in countries such as India were considered “non-authentic” English speakers, in comparison to the “true English speakers” of England or the US (Mufwene, 1998).

The level of openness toward diverse accents differed between the main institutions in the field. Whereas at UBC’s teacher education program there was a general acceptance of different accents, it was not necessarily the case in the K–12 school system. For instance, Nur, a native French speaker from France, shared,

At the classroom, I’m often asked by parents, “Are you really from France?” And I know that it is because they Googled my name and it comes out as an Arabic

name... In the first month, some students could not understand my French, and the vice-principal didn't tell me directly but I sensed that he thought that they couldn't understand my French because it was not good enough for the students. He didn't believe I was from France and he was not the only one. It's happening over and over—it is because of my name.

Ewa, who has worked as a teaching assistant for the last 10 years, said,

They wouldn't have problems with hiring people with a British accent, but if you have an Eastern European accent, or you name it, it sticks out and it doesn't work... There is a sort of snobbish approach that you have to have a perfect English in order to be the perfect teacher.

Similar findings were reported in other studies (Deters, 2011; Frank, 2013). For instance, Schmidt, Young, and Mandzuk (2010) argue that “linguistic discrimination remains a formidable barrier for teachers who speak English as an additional language” (p. 449). The former associate dean for Teacher Education at UBC confirmed the existence of differences in the acceptance of language proficiency between the university and schools:

In our circle people may even not find issues with language, but when they [IETs] get to the K–12 system, suddenly there are issues with language... It might be how the school perceives language, what is the best English being offered, whether it is accent, whether it is grammar... Occasionally I wonder if that is a bit racist... They never call it that, but it does cross our mind sometimes.

The former practicum coordinator of the second recertification program in BC at Simon Fraser University (SFU) supported this observation:

When [there are complaints during the practicum] I talk [to school officials] about the fact that some teachers have an Australian accent, so why is it any different? Because obviously it's based on the colour of the skin... Sometimes immediately after the first day of practicum we get a call, “I can't understand what this person is saying”... [There were] situations when school administrators called and said that there had been parent complaints.

Hence, in the field of teacher education in BC there was often an unspoken connection between language—especially accent—racism, and discrimination based on skin colour and ethnicity. The language proficiency requirements conveyed a wider neoliberal conceptualization of fairness that overlooked differences and hierarchies between languages, while in the teacher education field in BC, some accents were more acceptable, or considered “easier to understand” than others. The distinction between “native” English speakers and “others” reproduces linguistic hierarchies, rather than promoting inclusivity and diversity.

Structural Barriers

Structural barriers begin in the credentials evaluation process and continue during the recertification program. Initial barriers consist of a lack of information on the recertification demands prior to IETs’ arrival in Canada and a lack of knowledge of provincial policies and regulations (Council of Ministers of Education, 2014). Barriers in the credentials evaluation process consist of a lack of recognition of foreign credentials, a lack of previous teaching experience in Canada, a mismatch of teaching subjects, procedures such as the need to obtain and translate foreign documents, and the cost of evaluation (Cho, 2011; Myles et al., 2006; Phillion, 2003; Pollock, 2010). Many IETs find it difficult to understand and follow the various time-constraining and demanding requirements in the evaluation process (Mawhinney & Xu, 1997).

An initial barrier is the lack of information and lack of access to information during the early stages of the immigration process. A few professionals at the TRB and at UBC said that the lack of communication and coordination between the recertifying bodies and the immigration authorities was a problem. The former director of certification at the TRB argued:

IETs typically don’t understand...that we require original documents from the source, so they typically end up in this office wanting to give us documents, and because this is an era of documents forgery we cannot collect these documents. It will be better if they know it before they arrive in Canada, because they can arrange for the documents, rather than to try to do it from out of the country.

The limited transparency of information exemplifies the imbricated nature of the immigration process, of which the professional recertification process is only one part. Since multiple institutions execute the entire process, it lacks coherence and may lead to the spread of misinformation. Another barrier in the early stages that was mentioned often by IETs as a challenging and time-consuming task was the gathering of documents required by the TRB for credentials assessments. It took Juranika a long time to gather all the relevant documents from her Eastern European country of origin:

It took me a year to get the right contact person [in the university]. Then I found the right contact, but she was so busy... I kept calling her for months, every day, sending her emails... And one day, by miracle, she picked up the phone, and she said, "Oh yes, you're waiting for a year. I'll do it right away."

Peter echoed this when he mentioned, "I needed to get all the documents. [It was] time consuming. They wanted my transcripts, which are 20 years old." Chassels (2010) similarly argues that "an inability to access employment related to [their] education and experience [is] particularly common among newcomers to Canada who frequently face challenges related to credential recognition" (p. 16).

Another requirement of the TRB is the verification of IETs' teaching experience within the last 10 years. This was another hurdle, especially for IETs with broad previous experience, as Sophia described:

The most challenging and annoying thing was [that] to get my teaching evaluations, I had to call a Latin American country and ask people to give me some references and to fill out the documents in English. I knew it was annoying for them but I had to do it. I had to call my ex-bosses and they were like, "Of course we will do it for you"... But of course I had to call them again and say, "Do you remember? I need to have these documents."

These examples show the importance of advanced access to information and communication between various institutions, because it is much easier to gain access to local documents before one's immigration to Canada. This is important since in some cases, "the challenges with paperwork and transcription forced [IETs] to give up their previous university credentials and obtain [Canadian] certification" (Cho, 2011, p. 140).

Although the TRB evaluators were aware of these difficulties, flexibility was very limited when it came to obtaining original documents. One reason was the fear of document forgery (although when I asked if this happened often, the evaluators could not remember any case in the last few years). In an information session that I attended the evaluator said, “It’s absolutely essential [to obtain the original documents]; we cannot say to someone, ‘Well, just because in your country it is more difficult or more expensive, you don’t have to send transcripts for us,’ because this will make the system unfair.” In this example, “fairness” was interpreted in a liberal context (Guo & Shan, 2013) as the creation of one set of rules without taking into consideration any differences that may affect certain groups more than others in applying these rules. Yet the entanglement of seemingly objective criteria and systemic barriers accumulates to produce discriminatory treatment toward IETs that is embedded within the various stages and practices of the field.

The TRB is the sole authority in the credential evaluation stage, and initiates many professional criteria in the process, as the former director of certification described:

One of the mandates of this government and its administrators is to put more weight on what professional excellence means in the teaching profession... [That is why] we have teaching standards. We use the same set of regulations for all applicants whether they were trained in BC or in Nova Scotia or in Romania. The difference is that many of the requirements that we have wouldn’t apply to Canadian-trained teachers, simply because they are coming from an educational system that is very similar to BC’s.

This quote depicts a top-down, standardized understanding of teachers’ professionalism and a neoliberal concept of fairness. This rationalization also demonstrates an important concept that Bourdieu employs when analyzing a given field: the illusion. It is “a tacit recognition of the value of the stakes of the game and practical mastery of the games’ rules” (Bourdieu & Wacquant, as cited in Gemme, 2009, p. 20). Hence, it is the internalization of the importance of the game and its rules by agents in the field that justifies the necessity of their position and actions.

The TRB evaluation process may result in four outcomes. The optimal one is eligibility for a non-expiring professional certificate. The second one is eligibility for a basic certificate, which means that although not all BC requirements have been met, according

to the AIT, applicants with a valid teaching certificate from other provinces and territories are qualified to teach in BC. The third outcome is eligibility for a conditional certificate, which qualifies applicants to teach for five years, during which time they need to meet all of the requirements. The last outcome is ineligibility for any certificate, which means that applicants do not meet the minimum BC requirements. In this case, the TRB states, “Our evaluation report letter will describe what requirements must be met before we can issue you a certificate” (Teacher Regulation Branch, 2012, p. 17).

According to data collected since 2008, the TRB receives a few hundred IET applications every year; the lowest number was 189 in 2013 and the highest was 520 in 2009, with an average annual number of 400 (Teacher Regulation Branch, 2014). According to the TRB report, in 2012, out of a total of 361 IET applications, 209 were successful, 76 were denied, and 76 were incomplete (i.e., not all the documents had arrived by the time of assessment). The successful category included applicants who had applied for a second time (or, in some cases, even more than two times). The statistics also show that in 2008–2013 (the period in which the data were collected), 19 to 37 applicants applied annually for the second (or more) time. The successful category also included IETs who were entitled to a basic permit. There was no breakdown of the categories according to nationality, race, ethnicity, or gender.

In the case of ineligibility for certification, the TRB provides IETs with a letter stating the desired additions required to be certified as teachers in BC. IETs need to follow the requirements, which may include prerequisite content courses, English courses, teacher education courses, and practicum. The prerequisite content courses and English courses can be taken at any higher education institution in BC, while the teacher education portion can be taken at any of the nine BC-recognized teacher education programs. Teacher education programs have autonomy in assigning and adjusting the courses requested by the TRB. So, while the TRB demands the minimum number of courses according to the respective bylaws (BC Ministry of Education, 2011),⁹ in many cases teacher education programs ask for more. This is definitely the case in the only two designated recertification programs in BC. Although IETs can enroll in any teacher education program in BC, the TRB encourages enrollment in one of the two designated

9 The key policies that regulate teacher certification in BC are bylaw 2: policy 2 and 5 (BC Ministry of Education, 2011).

programs as better suited to supporting IETs' needs. These programs were also named in both information sessions I attended. The TRB evaluators knew that these two recertification programs have additional curricular and practicum demands, accepted these as the mandate of teacher education programs, and even supported these additional demands as a way to ensure better preparation beyond the minimum requirements. The recertification programs offer more credits, broader coursework, and a longer practicum that also make IETs eligible for student loans; however, they take more time, cost more money, and put more pressure on IETs. As the TRB's former director of certification explained:

We can't control [the demands of the recertification programs]... We typically ask for a pretty scarce number of credits. We're looking for the very minimum. I actually believe that the two bridging programs that are fully developed here in BC are much better suited to the individual IET, because their requirements are far beyond what we ask. I think it prepares the individual to a much better extent to enter the school system.

The former director of the TEO explained this relationship from UBC's perspective:

We don't necessarily agree with their [TRB] demands. So we might say, "In our program you also need to take another course, although you were not told you have to do it." We might impose it and we have some push back occasionally. For example, the TRB might ask for a very short practicum of six weeks and we believe that teacher candidates need extended time, so we will push back and talk them into doing something else.

Although from the perspective of teacher education programs it makes sense to aim for what they perceive as a more comprehensive training process, the discrepancy between the requirements of the TRB and the programs has led to frustration among IETs, as Peter shared,

I had to take the full program, which is 30 credits. So of course I feel not good about it because I had to waste my time and I need to waste more money. I wish UBC could follow the TRB requirements. The TRB said 12 credits and six weeks of practicum so that's what you do... The University should follow the TRB recommendations; otherwise, it is a waste of the recommendations.

The inconsistency between the demands of the TRB and the requirements of the programs created a bureaucratic maze for IETs to navigate. As the former program coordinator at SFU stated, “IETs get a letter from the TRB. And it sounds like they can take courses anytime, but we have changed it so they are required to take the courses prior to the program, because we want to set them [up] for success.” However, this demand of the recertification programs created a constrained time frame and put a lot of pressure on IET applicants, since many of them were unaware of this in advance. Nellah recalled,

It was so stressful because the registration at UBC is till the end of July, but then TRB asked me to take two English courses. The TRB said I had five years to do it, but at UBC they said, “You have to finish it before you register.” That was another hurdle, so I said, “Oh God, I will need to come back one year later because it will take me six months.” But then they referred me to an on-line option and I did both courses in one month. It was really stressful because I had to study 15 hours a day. I didn’t see my children, but I had to do it, I couldn’t afford to wait. It was quite frustrating.

Hence, the interrelations between the TRB and the recertification programs created a discrepancy in the requirements, an insufficient transmission of information, and a degree of inconsistency in decisions regarding IETs. The power relations between the institutions in the field were not necessarily experienced on the individual level; all the professionals involved in this study described functional and collaborative working relationships. However, power relations were embedded at the structural level and shaped the recertification process and the experiences of the IETs during its completion. As one of UBC’s practicum coordinators described:

There is a displaced resentment to some extent that we get from IETs... “Why are you making me take these courses?” I don’t want to blame the TRB, but all of those requirements are being set aside by the TRB. We are the messengers. We cannot issue the certification; we are the vehicle to get it.

Bourdieu defines a field as a “playing space, a field of objective relations between individuals or institutions competing for an identical stake” (as cited in Gemme, 2009, p. 20). The examples above demonstrate the nature of the recertification process as a field of

struggle, in which different agents attempt to improve their positions, or in this case, their institutional positions, while also being restricted by the preexisting structure of the field.

Another power relation within the recertification process was between players located on the same level, namely, the two recertification programs. Tracing back the creation of these two programs, it seems that they were developed as an outcome of a shared process. The former head of UBC TEO elaborated:

Originally, there was a financial incentive [to create a designated track for IETs] and the idea was for the program to move from SFU to other universities in BC, so it would serve constituencies in each area. But what happened is that the financial incentive became part of the SFU budget and it has never moved.

As a result of this budget allocation decision, SFU has developed and maintained a model of a separate cohort (or “module” in SFU terms) intended for IETs, whereas at UBC, IETs are integrated into the general B.Ed. program. This process also positioned SFU’s as the default program for IETs. Currently, both the UBC and the SFU programs are mentioned on the TRB website (Teacher Regulation Branch, 2014). However, in the application package for IETs, the PQP remains the only program mentioned by name: “The Simon Fraser University offers a program called the Professional Qualification Program (PQP), which satisfies the requirements of a familiarization program” (Teacher Regulation Branch, 2012, p. 7).

The PQP and the Updating program take in most IET applicants; however, because of the historical trajectory, the PQP model is the only one that is designed as a separate cohort that is fully geared toward IETs. From the perspective of IET applicants, this situation has some disadvantages since, as of recently, the PQP program is being offered only every second year, the UBC program is still considered in many cases only as a second option, and other teacher education programs admit IETs only sporadically. This provincial structure limits the ability of teacher education programs in BC to provide an accessible and comprehensive solution to the recertification needs of IETs. Sophia shared the stresses and exhaustion experienced by many IETs while navigating the different institutions within the recertification trajectory:

I decided to go to SFU, but they have a long list of requirements. So I went and I talked to the person in charge and I told them, “I think I can fill all the

requirements, but the only thing I think I'm not able to do is to volunteer two hours every day in a school. I'm a single mother, I'm trying to do the English six credits, and I need to work. I'm by myself here"... They said, "Well that's the requirements, you have to do it." There was no flexibility... Then they told me, "You have to apply a year before so you need to wait for next year." So I said, "Ok, I'll be patient and do all the other stuff." Then I went again and they told me, "We closed the program for the next year... We're going to do it every two years now"... It was frustrating. So I went to the TRB again and they said, "Why don't you go to UBC?"... I went there and I just needed to finish the six credits in English... I was registered at Douglas College but only for three credits, and by the time I went to UBC they said, "You have to have all the credits in advance." But Douglas had already closed the registration. And then someone at UBC told me, "Why won't you do it in Thompson Rivers and try to do it online?" So I did it online... Three years I've been working on that...

It seems that the historical construction of the recertification process has shaped the power relations in this subfield, which is characterized by a few institutions competing over the resources and attempting to advance their locations. This situation, again, takes the biggest toll on IETs who are newcomers to the field, since navigating this complex system becomes a barrier in itself.

Concluding Thoughts

IETs face many barriers during the recertification and job-finding processes. This is a long process with many breaking points; many IETs decide not to start at all, or to drop out midway through the process. It seems that in order to genuinely deal with the excessive barriers IETs face, cosmetic and sporadic measures are not sufficient and a wider systemic perspective is needed. Analyzing teacher education in BC as a field sheds light on the interrelations of various players in creating barriers within the recertification trajectory. As Schmidt (2010b) suggests,

Efforts to integrate immigrant teachers must go beyond programming approaches to include anti-discriminatory work at the systemic level with all stakeholder

groups. Just as the discrimination preventing immigrant teachers from accessing the system is not limited to individuals, neither does the solution lie in working solely at the program level. (p. 250)

The concept of field is important in demonstrating that many of the barriers IETs face are created not on the individual or single institution level, but at the intersection of institutional spaces. The design of an extended case study enabled me to move from the single recertification program to a systemic and multi-institutional analysis of the recertification trajectory. This focus is timely since although Bourdieu (1984) claims that in France the main site of social reproduction has shifted from education to other social fields (such as the arts), it seems that in Canada education has remained an important site of social reproduction. For immigrant professionals, the importance of credentials and certificates has only increased (Bauder, 2003; Man, 2004; Mojab, 1999; Ng & Shan, 2010; Reitz, 2001).

The findings of this study correspond with a wider phenomenon of devaluation of foreign credentials of immigrants in other professional fields under the supposed neutrality of the “credential and certificate regime” (Shan, 2009). This is “a colonial legacy that downgrades education, training and credentials from non-Western societies, thereby re-inscribing and exacerbating existing inequalities based on age, gender, and race” (Ng & Shan, 2010, p. 181). Similarly, misperceptions of difference and knowledge, which position immigrants as deficient, lie at the heart of the long journey by which IETs can become Canadian teachers. These misperceptions are rooted in “the epistemological conflation between difference and deficiency and the ontological endorsement of objectivist and universal measurement by credentialing bodies” (Guo & Shan, 2013, p. 468).

The recertification requirements expose the historical construction of the certification process as a gatekeeping mechanism that creates a homogenized subfield, in which the “prototypical” teacher is white and a native English speaker (Chapman, 2011; Cochran-Smith, 1995; Sleeter, 2008). As such, the recertification process stands in sharp contrast to the image of the education system as celebrating diversity and promoting multiculturalism as an inherent and integral tenet of Canadian identity (BC Ministry of Education, 2015). As Guo and Shan (2013) argue, “By solely emphasizing Canadian standards, the occupational bodies miss out on an important opportunity that other epistemic views, approaches and practices may contribute to the existing knowledge base

in Canada” (p. 475). As such, this study points to a need to reconstruct IETs’ recertification to acknowledge “the linguistic [cultural] and theoretical knowledge which does not count” in Canadian teacher education (Singh & Huang, 2014, p. 211).

Furthermore, when applying the Bourdieuan frame, the recertification process can be understood as a way to create distinctions between Canadian and non-Canadian teacher candidates. Lareau and Weininger (2005) argue that there is a “need for a broader conception that stresses the micro-interactional processes through which individuals comply (or fail to comply) with the evaluative standards of dominant institutions such as schools” (p. 106). In this case, the certification requirements are formalized as neutral standards that conceal their cultural bias. Teacher candidates are required to pay (materially and symbolically) what Bourdieu calls an “admission fee” in order to enter the field of teaching. Only if they complete the recertification process do they gain the right to belong to the field. This process, however, is constructed in a way that strengthens the homogeneity of the field and turns the multicultural rhetoric into an empty shell; as Schmidt (2010b) argues, “[the] Canadian teaching profession [has a] tendency toward exclusion of non-Whites, immigrants, and linguistic minorities” (p. 285). Hence, the concept of field may be useful for further research on account of its ability to expose the exclusion mechanisms at work in the field of teacher education. Such mechanisms may extend beyond immigrant teachers to exclude other minoritized groups.

The concept of field is also useful in analyzing the governance of teacher education in BC with connection to the larger social field (field of struggle) in a neoliberal climate (Grimmett & Young, 2012). In recent years, neoliberal tendencies, which aim to diminish the self-regulation and self-governance of the teaching profession in Canada, result in shrinking resources for pre-service teacher education. As an outcome, Canadian faculties of education have reduced programming and support for IETs (Schmidt & Gagné, 2015). Although in BC there is still a designated model of bridging programs, the SFU program is currently only offered every other year, and the UBC program does not offer any unique support for IETs.

In the current time of political uncertainty, it is hard to foresee how the field of teacher education will be affected, yet any changes in the field of teacher education will ultimately have implications for the subfield of recertification. The aforementioned Agreement on Internal Trade has been described as “an omnibus, multi-lateral, agreement that represents the application of international free trade thinking and language to the

Canadian domestic economy” (Henley & Young, 2009, p. 21). One could speculate that if an international labour mobility agreement for teachers were to be developed, this would be a positive development for IETs as recertification requirements might be reduced or dropped altogether. However, Bourdieu’s logic of distinction that is core to every field suggests that IETs would likely still be distinguished and marked as “outsiders.”

In the case of the Updating program, I would argue that although UBC does not offer a separate cohort for IETs, some structural changes might be possible in order to make the program more attuned to IETs’ needs. Since SFU is currently offering its program only once every two years, UBC could offer its program in the alternate years and attract more applicants. I would suggest that even a short course or seminar aimed specifically at IETs would be helpful in acknowledging their unique place and in helping them bridge their past and current experiences. I would suggest changing the name from the Teacher Updating Program to a name such as the Teacher Bridging Program, which suggests a reciprocal process and does not imply that IETs’ professional capital is “out of date.”

To conclude, Bourdieu’s concept of field highlights the double-edged barriers that IETs face: while in federal and provincial policies they are marked as “less-competitive” individuals, inside the field they are distinguished as outsiders and are required to overcome barriers that local teachers do not face. This study highlights the importance of understanding recertification as a multilayered process that demands shared criteria, transparency, and accountability of all the main players. Unless an overarching systemic change in the various institutions involved in teacher certification takes place, IETs’ potential to enrich and diversify the teaching force will not be realized.

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