HOW AND WHY DO TEACHER CANDIDATES STRUGGLE?

by

Marija Glisic Petaroudas

A thesis submitted in conformity with the requirements
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
Graduate Department of Applied Psychology and Human Development
Ontario Institute for Studies in Education
University of Toronto

© Copyright by Marija Glisic Petaroudas 2014
HOW AND WHY DO TEACHER CANDIDATES STRUGGLE?

Doctor of Philosophy 2014
Marija Glisic Petaroudas
Department of Applied Psychology and Human Development
University of Toronto

Abstract

The aim of this study is to investigate and understand the types, prevalence, and potential impact of teacher candidates’ struggles, as well as factors and contexts that may relate to the occurrence of struggles. The mixed methods study was carried out in three stages – qualitative, quantitative, qualitative – with teacher candidates and teacher educators from a large Canadian teacher education program as participants. Based on participants’ descriptions and experiences of struggles, I developed a taxonomy of 19 struggles, 10 of which were identified by both teacher candidates and their educators. The struggles included a wide range of behaviours, emotions, skills, and conditions. Teacher candidates also discussed which support systems they use in times of struggles, while instructors explained how they help teacher candidates who struggle. The study positions struggles in a broader and multilayered context that involves teacher candidates, their educators, the preparation program, its structure and elements, policies, social dynamics, and professional norms and expectations. The causes, triggers, consequences, and remediation of struggles are considered in relation to a combination of individual, institutional, and structural factors. The study has implications for teacher education programs, policymakers, and the teaching profession.
Acknowledgments

I believe that any type of accomplishment, whether it be big or small, important or trivial, is never achieved by one person only. Although only my name stands at the beginning of this dissertation, my achievement is a combination of my own work and multitude of supports and encouragements that I received throughout my exciting journey. My immense gratitude first goes to my supervisor Dr. Ruth Childs who has not only provided superb mentoring, support, and encouragement but has been an example of an exceptional scholar and a remarkably selfless inspiring individual. Nothing less of my admiration and appreciation go to my committee members Dr. Kathy Broad and Dr. Monique Herbert who were seriously invested into helping me polish my dissertation to the best possible shape. Thank you very much for all your time, efforts, and involvement.

I would also like to thank my external committee members Dr. Mary Jane Harkins and Dr. Leslie Stewart Rose whose invaluable appraisals and comments aided me with completing the final touches and improvements in my dissertation.

I must not omit to express my gratuity to my friends, colleagues, lab mates, professors, and many wonderful people whom I met at OISE during the course my graduate studies. Some of them became my great friends, and I feel very happy to have them as part of my life. You made my graduate life much easier and more joyful.

My greatest thanks go to those who have been closest to me during the good and the bad times. Enormous thanks to my family, Milos, Vesna, and Selimir Glisic who believed in me even when I was struggling and who supported me on every step of my graduate journey. Neizmerno vam hvala. Finally, gratitude and appreciation that cannot be described by words but can only be expressed in the years to come go to my beloved, kind-hearted husband Andrew Petaroudas. He
lived almost every moment of my dissertation with me, cheered for me, and lifted my spirit when I encountered psychological hurdles. He cried with me, suffered with me, laughed with me, and rejoiced with me when the big journey was over. Because of him and his encouragement and love, I was able to come to the finish line. Thank you from the bottom of my heart, Kounelaki. You are a true blessing in my life. Above all, I would like to thank the Triune God who provided me with many precious opportunities in my life and gave me the talents and strength to persevere all hardships and fulfill my goals and dreams.

Дόξα σοι Κύριε δόξα σοι! Слава Теби Господе слава Теби!
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter 1. Introduction ........................................................................................................ 1
    Construct Definition and Study Objectives ....................................................................... 4

Chapter 2. Existing Research on Teacher Candidates’ Struggles ........................................... 6
    Struggles in Teaching Practica ...................................................................................... 7
    Lack of Content Knowledge .......................................................................................... 7
    Lack of Professional Knowledge and Practice ............................................................. 7
    Classroom Management ............................................................................................... 8

Limitations of the Existing Research .................................................................................. 9
    Context for Struggles .................................................................................................... 11
    Individual and Institutional Discourses ......................................................................... 11
    This Study .................................................................................................................... 12
    Macro Context ............................................................................................................... 13

Chapter 3. Methods ............................................................................................................. 15
    Study Design .................................................................................................................. 15
    Data Collection .............................................................................................................. 18
    Stage 1 .......................................................................................................................... 18
    Stage 2 .......................................................................................................................... 21
    Stage 3 .......................................................................................................................... 22
    Data Analysis ................................................................................................................ 23
    Stage 1 .......................................................................................................................... 23
    Stage 2 .......................................................................................................................... 25
    Stage 3 .......................................................................................................................... 25
    Researcher’s Role .......................................................................................................... 26

Chapter 4. Results ............................................................................................................... 27
    Stage 1 .......................................................................................................................... 27
    Taxonomy of Struggles .................................................................................................. 27
    Support Systems and Help Seeking Behaviours ............................................................ 37
    Recommendations ....................................................................................................... 39
    Communication of Struggles and Their Perceived Impact ............................................ 42
    Program Elements in Relation to Struggles ................................................................. 45
    Stage 2 .......................................................................................................................... 51
    Stage 3 .......................................................................................................................... 53
    Struggles ...................................................................................................................... 53
    Support Systems and Help Seeking Behaviours ............................................................ 60
    Recommendations ....................................................................................................... 61
    Program ........................................................................................................................ 62
    Impact of Struggles and Perceptions of Teaching ......................................................... 65
    Instructors’ Responses to Struggles ............................................................................. 66

Chapter 5. Discussion ......................................................................................................... 68
    Objective 1: To construct a typology of behaviours and conditions linked to teacher candidates’ struggles ........................................................................................................ 68
    Positioning Struggles in Bronfenbrenner’s Ecological Model ......................................... 72
    Professionalism and Professional Socialization ................................................................ 78
Objective 2: To learn about available supports and actions taken by program instructors, program staff, and teacher candidates to alleviate struggles............................................................. 84
Objective 3: To juxtapose instructors and teacher candidates’ perceptions of struggles and their impact............................................................................................................................. 87
Objective 4: To discover what the presence of struggles communicates about the teaching profession........................................................................................................................................ 89
Objective 5: To investigate the development and positioning of struggles in an institutional context, accounting for structure, policies, practices, human relations and internal dynamics .... 94
Comparing Struggles in this Study with Available Literature ................................................................. 92
Policies, Standards, and Decision-making Responsibilities ...................................................................... 94
Individual versus Institutional Discourse ............................................................................................... 97
Limitations ............................................................................................................................................. 98
Directions for Future Research ............................................................................................................. 100

Chapter 6. Conclusion .......................................................................................................................... 101
Implications ........................................................................................................................................ 103
Struggle Prevention and Program Improvements.................................................................................. 103
Policymaking, Responsibility Taking, and Change Initiating.............................................................. 104
Hearing and Acknowledging Different Voices ....................................................................................... 105

References ......................................................................................................................................... 107

Appendix A. Interview Questions Asked to Instructors in Stage 1 ..................................................... 118
Appendix B. Online Questionnaire Administered to Instructors in Stage 2 .................................. 119
Appendix C. Interview Questions Asked to Teacher Candidates in Stage 3 ................................. 122
LIST OF TABLES

Table 1 Organization and Description of the Interview Themes from Stage 1 and Stage 3........ 28
LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1. Representation of the context, methods, and stages of study. ............................................ 17

Figure 2. Different properties of struggles and their classification as they may relate to teacher candidates................................................................................................................................................................. 72

Figure 3. Graphical representation of Bronfenbrenner’s ecological model adapted from Eisenmann et al., 2008 published in BMC Public Health.................................................................................................................................................. i
CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

Recent research suggests that novice teachers face significant challenges in the first several years of teaching (e.g., He & Cooper, 2011; Romano, 2008). Challenges and struggles encountered by beginning teachers in Ontario and North America encompass a range of issues, such as instructional challenges, behavioural issues, and contextual factors, and occur not only in the initial year but in the first several years of teaching (Herbert, Broad, Gaskell, Hart, Berrill, Demeres, & Heap, 2010; Romano, 2008; van Hover & Yeager, 2004). These challenges may pose obstacles to student learning and success given that teacher quality and preparation are key contributors to student achievement (Boyd, Grossman, Lankford, Loeb, & Wyckoff, 2008; Darling-Hammond, 2000).

Herbert et al. (2010) found that five aspects of teaching practices – teaching students with different levels of preparedness, teaching students with exceptional needs, motivating students to learn, classroom management, and teaching students whose first language is not English or French – were identified as major challenges in the first five years of teaching by more than half of novice teachers in Ontario. Although 54% of novice teachers rated their initial teacher education (ITE) programs as good or very good, more than two thirds of them rated the programs’ support for the acquisition of some skills as less than ‘good’ (adequate, poor, or very poor). Findings such as these may encourage other researchers to explore the link between the preparation of teacher candidates in their ITE programs and some of the challenges experienced during the initial years of teaching. Understanding how and why some teacher candidates struggle during their ITE programs may help us better understand why some novice teachers struggle in their first years of teaching (He & Cooper, 2011). For example, struggles may be
understood as representing programs’ failure to adequately train new teachers, teacher candidates’ inability to adjust to and meet the demands of teaching, failures of wider educational policies and practices, or a combination of these factors.

Where, when, and how do struggles of novice teachers originate? Research suggests that the better prepared the teacher candidates are at the end of the program, the more successful and efficacious they will be as teachers (Immerwahr, Doble, Johnson, Rochkind, & Ott, 2007; Wilson, Floden, & Ferrini-Mundy, 2001). Considering what has been presented so far, we should ask, how and why do some teacher candidates experience struggles in their preparatory year in the ITE program?

Struggles of teacher candidates have not been extensively studied (Siebert, Clark, Kilbridge, & Peterson, 2006). However, there are several reasons why the study of teacher candidates’ struggles is important for teacher education and education policymaking.

First, understanding the struggles of teacher candidates could help us better understand ITE programs. The presence of struggles might point to issues related to the structure and organization of the program. For example, it may matter how the courses are conducted, how the practicum sessions are spaced, how much support is provided to teacher candidates, and so forth. Struggles could also suggest that teacher educators are having difficulty successfully delivering the intended curriculum to teacher candidates. Furthermore, struggles could signify that the program is not providing sufficient supports for teacher candidates or that the available supports are ineffective. For instance, researchers in this area have recommended that teacher education programs need not only to provide better supports for teacher candidates who struggle but also to clearly outline the program expectations and criteria (Pellett & Pellett, 2005; Wayda & Lund, 2005).
A second important reason to study struggles of teacher candidates is that through struggles one can learn about teacher candidates and their personal experiences of the program. Struggles could reveal what personal problems and challenges teacher candidates bring into the program and how they deal with them. Some struggles may involve teacher candidates having difficulty acquiring skills and knowledge necessary for teaching and for successful completion of the program. For example, teacher candidates in Hsu’s (2005) study struggled with managing students in a classroom and dealing with colleagues, whereas candidates in Siebert et al.’s (2006) study had difficulties preparing lesson plans and delivering them in a classroom. Specific struggles may also indicate that teacher candidates’ expectations of the program and teaching are different from the requirements and demands of the program. Siebert et al. (2006) found that some teacher candidates in practicum had a different understanding of professional boundaries and teaching from their mentor teachers.

Third, the investigation of teacher candidates’ struggles may be important for addressing systemic and policy issues. Some struggles could indicate that admission policies are not effective at selecting teacher candidates who are best suited for the teaching profession. Other struggles may suggest that an ITE program is enforcing out-of-date norms of teaching. Some struggles may point to attitudinal, perceptual, and generational discrepancies between teacher candidates and their educators. Although most professional programs anticipate that students would spontaneously socialize into the profession (Lai & Lim, 2012), some teacher candidates may have different ideas and understandings of how the profession is or should be, which may create additional grounds for struggles (Teschendorf & Nemshick, 2001).

The above are only some examples of why the study of teacher candidates’ struggles is needed. Before investigating and discussing potential consequences of teacher candidates’
struggles, it is important to first understand the types of struggles that teacher candidates experience during the ITE program and how they may impact teacher candidates during their preparatory year.

**Construct Definition and Study Objectives**

The intent of this study is to investigate and understand the types, prevalence, and potential impact of teacher candidates’ struggles as well as their perceived meaning. For the purpose of this study, I define struggles as any challenges, problems, or difficulties – physical, psychological, cognitive, or situational. In the Merriam-Webster dictionary, the noun struggle is defined as “an act of strongly motivated striving or a long effort to do, achieve, or deal with something that is difficult or that causes problems.” These definitions are well suited for the construct of struggles in this study because teacher candidates’ struggles may manifest in their striving toward completing the ITE program and becoming a successful teacher. Struggle can also be used as an active verb to signify “making strenuous effort in the face of difficulties or opposition,” which in the case of teacher candidates may imply exerting their cognitive, psychological, or physical energy to overcome certain difficulties in order to meet all program requirements and obtain certification. Finally, the word can also function as an adjectival participle and be used to describe a struggling teacher candidate (e.g., Hall, 2009; Pellett & Pellett, 2005), indicating a momentary state of struggle characterizing a candidate. Regardless of the choice of definitional descriptors, the seriousness of teacher candidates’ struggles is usually measured against the requirements and standards of a teacher preparation program and the teaching profession. The more seriously a particular struggle impacts or jeopardizes teacher candidates’ progress and performance, the more likely it is to be of concern to the professions’ stakeholders (Siebert et al., 2006).
The specific objectives of this study are:

1. To construct a typology of behaviours and conditions linked to teacher candidates’ struggles,

2. To learn about available supports and actions taken by program instructors, program staff, and teacher candidates to alleviate struggles,

3. To juxtapose instructors and teacher candidates’ perceptions of struggles and their impact,

4. To discover what the presence of struggles communicates about the teaching profession, and

5. To investigate the development and positioning of struggles in an institutional context accounting for structure, policies, practices, human relations, and internal dynamics.
CHAPTER 2. EXISTING RESEARCH ON TEACHER CANDIDATES’ STRUGGLES

Few research studies have investigated teacher candidates’ struggles. Although I searched databases in Education and Social Sciences, tried out synonyms for teacher candidates such as preservice teachers and teachers in training, used proximal descriptors of struggles such as challenges, problems, issues, I found very few studies relevant to this topic. Some studies focused on teachers who have challenges teaching a particular subject, novice teachers who are integrating into the teaching profession, or the preparation of teacher candidates who face problems as future teachers (e.g., He & Cooper, 2011; Hung & Holen, 2011; Tucker, 2001; van Hover & Yeager 2004). My search indicates that the state of art on this topic has not changed much since 2006 when Siebert, Clark, Kilbridge, and Peterson noted that little was written on the subject of preservice teachers’ struggles. They reported that an ERIC search found very few articles on struggles of preservice teachers, including struggles that led to failure to complete the program.

The small body of existing research on struggles of teacher candidates is usually positioned in the context of teaching practica and mostly in the US (Siebert et al., 2006; Wayda & Lund, 2005). Moreover, none of the past studies on teacher candidates’ struggles yielded explicit categories for types, prevalence, and impact of struggles in the context of the entire ITE program. Although a few studies have presented strategies for identifying and assisting teacher candidates who struggle, they have focused on concurrent programs (i.e., programs in which a teacher candidate earns both a Bachelor of Education degree and either a Bachelor of Arts or Bachelor of Science degree, usually over the course of five years), which may allow enough time for the planning and execution of necessary interventions (Pellett & Pellett, 2005; Sobel &
Gutierrez, 2009). In the following section, I provide a synopsis of most frequently observed and discussed struggles of teacher candidates in a practicum setting.

**Struggles in Teaching Practica**

**Lack of Content Knowledge**

One of the basic expectations of a prospective teacher is to possess enough knowledge on one or more subjects in order to convey that knowledge to students in the classroom. However, some researchers found that teacher candidates lacked both the depth and breadth of content knowledge to adequately respond to students’ questions (Sobel & Gutierrez, 2009), and others found that teacher candidates provided incorrect responses to basic mathematical problems (Livy & Vale, 2011; Quinn, 1997). Many studies that discuss the lack of content knowledge focus on mathematics, as it seems to pose the major challenge with regard to teachers’ content knowledge (e.g., Adams, 1998; van Dooren, Verschaffel, & Onghena, 2002). Teachers who enter the profession lacking the necessary knowledge for teaching may fall into the problematic category of incompetent teachers as described by Tucker (2007). Tucker defined incompetence as “a lack of relevant content knowledge or necessary skills in key areas” (p. 52). It was estimated that between 5% and 15% of teachers in the US perform at the incompetent level because they lack content knowledge and basic teaching skills (McGrath, 1995; Tucker, 1997).

**Lack of Professional Knowledge and Practice**

Although professional knowledge is required in all fields of work, teachers are expected to serve as exemplary individuals in and outside of the classroom and to maintain their professional demeanour at all times (Oktay, Ramazan, & Sakin, 2010; Oliverio & Manley-Casimir, 2005). The definition of professional knowledge for teachers spans multiple domains
and includes a large range of behavioural conduct and cognitive skills (National Commission on Teaching and America’s Future, 1996; Ontario College of Teachers, 2010). Inappropriate dress code, tardiness, flirting with colleagues, and coming unprepared to class are only some of the unprofessional behaviours of teacher candidates mentioned in the literature (Siebert, Clark, Kilbridge, & Peterson, 2006; Sobel & Gutierrez, 2009). However, one should keep in mind that the definition of professionalism should not be limited to immediately observable characteristics such as dress code and verbal mannerisms but should also include traits such as responsibility toward the profession, reflectivity, and empathy. Professionalism assumes that a teacher is not merely fulfilling basic professional expectations but acts as a social agent in a complex educational environment.

**Classroom Management**

Being a point of struggle for even experienced teachers, it is not surprising that classroom management also appears as a challenge in studies about teacher candidates (Erdogan, Kursun, Sisman, Saltan, Gok, & Yildiz, 2010; He & Cooper, 2011). Hsu (2005) found that the most prevalent problem among teacher candidates in practicum was dealing with problems of individual students. Although teacher candidates may know theoretical steps for managing student behaviour, they are not able to execute them well in the classroom, which greatly impacts the delivery of a lesson plan (Siebert et al., 2006). Laut (1999) noted that teacher candidates are more likely to take a non-intervention approach to classroom management compared to more experienced teachers. Teacher candidates themselves express that they do not feel well prepared for this challenge (Hung & Holen, 2012; Pilarksi, 1994). Novice teachers in Ontario also rated classroom management as one of the top five challenges, emphasizing the need to constantly negotiate behavioural problems of individual students and seek most effective solutions (Herbert
et al., 2010). Classroom management struggles may be related to the lack of pedagogical knowledge. For example, inability of a teacher candidate to provide necessary guidance and adjust instructions for students with lower academic ability may lead to students’ behavioural problems (Sobel & Gutierrez, 2009).

In addition to the described struggles, financial and personal issues, lack of motivation, and personal dispositions are also factors that could contribute to teacher candidates’ struggle (Chan, 2002; Sobel & Gutierrez, 2009). As already mentioned, the limitations of the discussed studies are that most focus on one struggle at a time, in a practicum context, in a concurrent program that spans over four or five years, and sometimes only for a particular subject matter. They thus depict snapshots of struggles that teacher candidates may be experiencing. Furthermore, they represent either mentor teachers’ perspectives or students’ perspectives but rarely both. Moreover, the meaning of struggles to the teaching profession and the explicit and implicit messages to teacher candidates are rarely discussed in detail. The lack of a taxonomy and survey of different types of struggles, across different contexts, from multiple perspectives, and with an understanding of their immediate and long-term consequences warrants a more systemic study on teacher candidates’ struggles.

**Limitations of the Existing Research**

As already mentioned, struggles of teacher candidates have been mostly explored in the context of practica in concurrent ITE programs (Hsu, 2005; Siebert et al., 2006; Sobel & Gutierrez, 2009). Researchers have not systematically studied and classified different types of teacher candidates’ struggles, their nature, prevalence, triggers, manifestations, and potential impacts. There has also been a lack of critical examination of what the existence of struggles may communicate about teacher candidates, ITE programs, instructors, and the teaching
profession. The few available studies have acknowledged that teacher candidates do struggle during the ITE program but have hardly moved beyond listing or briefly describing types of struggles and have instead placed a heavy emphasis on remediation and assistance (Chudleigh & Gibson-Gates, 2010; Hsu, 2005; Pellett & Pellett, 2005; Sobel & Gutierrez, 2009; Tucker, 2001). Most of these studies position struggles as problems that need to be fixed to assure the program quality. In particular, scholars present support plans, protocols, and mechanisms for struggle prevention and alleviation in order to assist teacher candidates with performing to the program and professional standards. However, researchers have not explicitly defined struggles nor attempted to classify them and understand their origin, manifestations and deeper meaning to both teacher candidates and the professional community.

In addition, most struggles were described and studied only from the perspectives of program instructors or mentor teachers in practica (e.g., Pellet & Pellet; 2005; Siebert et al., 2006; Sobel & Gutierrez, 2009). The rare study that involved teacher candidates asked them to fill out a questionnaire about how they obtain help when struggling but failed to ask them to describe the very experiences of struggles (Hsu, 2005). One study did focus on personal experiences and struggles of a teacher candidate in practicum describing the candidates’ cognitions and emotions during encounters with students and a mentor teacher, but it only involved a single case and practicum setting (Bloomfield, 2010). A more thorough and objective analysis of struggle would need to include both educators’ and teacher candidates’ perspectives.

Furthermore, the existing research on teacher candidates’ struggles did not holistically examine the properties, presence, manifestations, and impact of struggles in relation to a variety contexts and their elements as well as human dynamics and conventions that operate within those contexts. For example, a struggle of a teacher candidate may have implications beyond
successful completion of the program and may translate to and impact the candidate’s personal life, opportunity to obtain employment, instructional quality in a classroom, relations with students, colleagues, and parents, etc. Moreover, it would be very valuable to discover whether the presence of some struggles communicates the need to modify and improve policies, program structure, curriculum, human relations in addition to only developing support systems. Sometimes in order to effectively implement best supports and interventions, we need to better understand not only struggles but also other mechanisms that operate in concordance with struggles.

**Context for Struggles**

Struggles do not occur in isolation, but rather are positioned in the larger ecological system (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Initially used to situate and explain the study of human development, the ecological model positions a human being in a hierarchical multilayered system, which represents ones immediate and distant environments as well as interactions between and within those environments. In the case of teacher candidates, their ecological system may consist of program requirements and experiences, group dynamics, personal lives, structural changes, economic trends, political situation, and so forth. I will utilize Bronfenbrenner’s ecological model later in the study to organize and analyze different types of struggles. Although one study cannot thoroughly survey teacher candidates’ struggles in all of the mentioned contexts, it is very important to be cognizant of all possible influences in the exploration of struggles, their meaning and influences.

**Individual and Institutional Discourses**

Something to also consider in the study of teacher candidates’ struggles are individual and institutional discourses. Depending on which discourse is taken into account (Luke, 1997),
struggles could be explored and interpreted as personal matters evolving within an individual or as institutional and perhaps systemic challenges that arise in the program due to its structure and norms (Bloomfield, 2010). In addition, interactions among individual and institutional elements may provide yet another lens for analyzing and understanding struggles of teacher candidates. My intent is to conduct this inquiry in a way that will allow the reader to gain insights into both discourses either directly or indirectly.

**This Study**

To begin the study of teacher candidates’ struggles, it was necessary to define parameters within which struggles will be researched. First, I decided to select a consecutive teacher preparation program for studying struggles not only because of the lack of research literature in that program context but also because shorter programs might be more likely to produce struggles that are potentially more serious than those in longer programs. Second, my intention was to survey struggles that pertain to multiple domains and settings such as courses, practica, and personal life in order to gain a broad understanding of their causes, manifestations, and durations. Thus, the inquiry will not only be limited to a classroom environment. Third, struggles will be explored and compared from both teacher candidates’ and program staff and instructors’ perspectives. Fourth, the purpose of this study is not only to identify struggles, construct their typology, and examine their short-term influences but also to stipulate direct and indirect messages that struggles may convey about the standards of the teaching profession and teachers’ candidates ability to become successful. In relation to this, I want to explore ways in which instructors and the program structure may shape the development of struggles, reduce them, or exacerbate them.
**Macro Context**

The consecutive ITE program in which the inquiry will be positioned is one of the most condensed teacher preparation programs in Canada, lasting only nine months. The program admits between 1200 and 1300 students each year who already hold at least a Bachelor’s degree. The admission process is very competitive. In addition to having an average of at least B- in their 15 best undergraduate courses, students must demonstrate the ability to reflect on and learn from teaching-related experiences and an understanding of diversity and equity issues in teaching and learning (Zhang, Glisic, & Childs, 2011). Once in the consecutive program, teacher candidates encounter very fast paced course work. In only nine months (September to June), they must complete three full-year courses, three half-year courses, two practica, and an internship component. The program spans two semesters, consisting of both courses and practica. In the first two months, teacher candidates do coursework, after which they attend a four-week practicum. Upon the completion of the first practicum, candidates return to their courses for about two weeks before the semester ends. In the second semester, teacher candidates attend courses for about two months, followed by a five-week practicum. They return to coursework again for about a month until the end of the second semester. The end of the second semester is followed by a non-evaluated but compulsory internship that lasts an additional five weeks. Given that candidates in the concurrent program have three years to complete the same requirements, it is reasonable to assume that the likelihood of struggles in the consecutive program would be greater due to heightened pressures and time constraints. After successfully completing all program requirements, teacher candidates are granted a Bachelor of Education degree and are eligible to become certified teachers in Ontario.
Because the ITE program under study is very short and intense, it would be of great importance to develop a system for struggle identification and prevention that would be both effective and efficient. Some of the existing support systems in this program, such as Student Services, the School-University Partnerships Office, and the Academic and Cultural Support Centre, offer assistance with academic, personal, psychological, and practicum issues (Chudleigh & Gibson-Gates, 2010). Although Chudleigh and Gibson-Gates (2010) described the continuous efforts of these support services in helping teacher candidates to be successful in their program, they indicated that there is still “a long way to go” (p.115).

In the next chapter, I will describe the methods used to conduct the study and how different stages of the study were developed. Chapter 4 will present the results, followed by the integration and discussion of the results in Chapter 5. In Chapter 6, I will present my conclusions and discuss the implications of the study and potential impacts of struggles.
CHAPTER 3. METHODS

Study Design

Having identified the basic study parameters, I now shift to more precisely defining some methodological specifications. Although methods will be described shortly, it would be helpful to first address the framework of the study and identify the units of inquiry. According to Baxter and Jack (2008), a research approach that examines a phenomenon within its context using multiple data sources could be considered a case study. They suggested that this mode of exploration allows for the phenomenon to be understood from a ‘variety of lenses.’ The purpose of this study is to explore the issue of teacher candidates’ struggles in the context of a teacher preparation program by utilizing multiple data sources. In addition, Yin (2003) explained that this design should be used when a researcher wants to consider contextual conditions because they are relevant to the topic under investigation; when answering “how” and “why” questions; and when the behaviour of the participants cannot be manipulated. All these conditions apply to the current study – my intention is to find out why and how teacher candidates struggle in the context of a teacher preparation program without altering participants’ behaviours or experiences.

Some researchers argue that case study is a research methodology or a type of qualitative design (Baxter & Jack, 2008; Creswell, 2006), whereas others do not consider it to be a methodology but rather a choice of what is to be studied (Stake, 1995). Despite the difference in definitions, this study certainly has characteristics of a case study, and the next important step is to specify what is to be used as a unit of analysis or a case.
Baxter and Jack (2008) indicated that identifying the case depends on what a researcher intends to analyze (e.g., an individual, program, or process). Moreover, they warn about the importance of binding the case by determining what is and what is *not* important to include in a case study. Among several suggested binding strategies, this study would best fit in Miles and Huberman’s (1994) binding model by definition and context (i.e., teacher candidates’ struggles and an ITE program). Therefore, as the main definitional unit of analysis, I identify the struggles of teacher candidates – what they are, how they exhibit themselves, how they can impact teacher candidates and the teaching profession, what messages they convey, etc. As a macro contextual case, I chose one of the largest teacher preparation programs in Ontario for conducting the study of teacher candidates’ struggles. In terms of case counts, this study is an example of a single case with embedded units – the ITE program being a single contextual case, and teacher candidates, instructors and staff being multiple units (Baxter and Jack, 2008). Although I mentioned earlier that I would take into account struggles across multiple settings such as institutional courses, practicum, and private life, all these subcontexts should be considered as part of the ITE program.

Please note that in the classification of the study I used ‘case study’ broadly as a generic approach to exploring the struggles of teacher candidates. Some researchers would equate this with a *methodology* or an overall methodological design. Methodology is usually described as “the overall approach to research linked to the paradigm or theoretical framework” (Mackenzie & Knipe, 2006, p. 3). In order to explore and analyze the struggles of teacher candidates and issues that surround them, I need to utilize different *methods* of inquiry. Methods will refer to systematic procedures or tools used to collect and analyze data regarding struggles (Mackenzie & Knipe, 2006). Furthermore, I will also be mentioning *design* in the context of mixed methods
research (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007), which will have a somewhat different connotation from the overall study design already discussed in the context of case study (Baxter & Jack, 2008). A visual synopsis of the study design, inquiry stages, and methods can be found in the figure below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Macro context: Consecutive ITE Program in Ontario</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Main unit of analysis: Struggles of teacher candidates and related issues</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Method</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stage 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stage 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stage 3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Figure 1. Representation of the context, methods, and stages of study.**

Due to the large number of study objectives and their diverse character, a mixed methods multiple-stage inquiry was the most viable option for addressing all the research objectives. In the first stage of study, I conducted semi-structured interviews, which were followed by an online survey in the second stage. The third stage also involved semi-structured interviews but with a different sample of participants. More information about the design and data collection of each study stage can be found in the following sections.

With regards to the mixed methods design typology, this study employed an exploratory sequential design (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007). The rationale for this design is multifold. First, as already mentioned, the lack of literature on the topic of struggle requires an exploratory
approach as a starting point in the first stage. Second, survey development for the second stage necessitated a particular amount and type of information about struggles, which interviews in the first stage should be able to provide. Third, the construction of a typology of struggles and their perceived impact required in-depth understanding.

Data Collection

Stage 1

Sample. While it might seem that the obvious place to begin a study of teacher candidates’ struggles would be by talking with the teacher candidates, I chose to begin by talking with program instructors and staff instead. This is in part because the instructors and staff have a unique and valuable perspective on teacher candidates’ struggles because (a) they have observed many teacher candidates, (b) they understand the objectives of the ITE program and are able to distinguish between struggles that are a usual part of the process of becoming a teacher and those that are unusual, and (c) they are often able to distinguish between struggles that are caused by a temporary situation (e.g., an unsupportive associate teacher) and those that may signal a more serious and enduring problem (e.g., a teacher candidate’s refusal to accept criticism). That is not to say that all program instructors and staff agree about how teacher candidates struggle and why – the range of views is also important.

In both formal and informal discourse with instructors, program coordinators, and program staff, I learned that they have a lot of first-hand experiences with students who struggle. Although these experiences usually occur in an academic and practicum context (e.g., students performing poorly on assignments, not attending classes or practicum), instructors and counsellors do learn about causes of struggles that are beyond academia. Instructors are often mentioned as valuable resources to whom students turn for help and advice (Alexitch, 1997,
Teacher candidates who struggle in the ITE program are encouraged to discuss their problems with their instructors, coordinators, counsellors, and support staff members and to seek help from them. Thus, it seems very reasonable to inquire about teacher candidates’ struggles from their instructors and program coordinators. I do not claim that experiences and perspectives of instructors are an exact reflection of the actual struggles that the candidates are experiencing. However, it should be an important source of information.

The sample for the first stage consisted of 11 key informants from the consecutive ITE program. I employed a purposive sampling approach to interview people who were able to provide the richest and most accurate information about the study topic (Patton, 1990). In particular, I consulted with the director of the ITE program with the intent to select participants: who had several years of work experience in the studied program; who taught, advised, supervised, or assisted teacher candidates; who had varied academic backgrounds; and who worked in different divisions with different cohorts. Using these criteria, the program director identified 11 individuals based on their involvement, roles, experiences, and contacts with teacher candidates. Most participants worked as instructors, with some of them having additional roles as program counsellors, advisors, coordinators, and former school administrators. Those participants who solely had instructor roles taught one or more courses in the program. Program coordinators had multiple roles. In addition to teaching some courses, they coordinated practicum placements, networked with schools and associate teachers, and supported students during practicum. Counsellors’ primary role was to provide personal support counselling to teacher candidates and to refer them to other services. However, some counsellors also had experience as course instructors. Despite the diverse roles of some participants, I will be
referring to all participants as ‘instructors’ for simplicity, but please keep in mind their other roles in the program.

**Interviews.** I conducted semi-structured interviews with these participants over a 4-week period. The average duration of each interview was 35 minutes. The standard protocol questions can be found in Appendix A. The questions involved different aspects of struggles, such as types, possible causes, short and long-term impacts on teacher candidates, available supports, and suggestions for struggle prevention. Although most participants were asked all of the protocol questions, additional questions and probes were also presented depending on the participant’s role, experiences, and knowledge of teacher candidates’ struggles.

It is very important to mention that after the first few interviews, I started to notice recurring themes pertaining to struggles and supports. As the interviewing continued, it became very clear that almost all participants shared some common experiences and opinions. This convergence of the information provided informal validation that the gathered data were an accurate representation of reality. Please note that I am not referring to validation from a psychometric point of view (Messick, 1989), I am rather applying a more “pragmatic and inclusive” definition of validity as credibility and trustworthiness (Johnson & Turner, 2003, p. 300). In the last three interviews, I was obtaining very little new information, which was a good indication that I reached data saturation (Creswell, 2006). Although Creswell states that a researcher typically collects 20 to 30 interviews in order to reach the saturation point, in this context, 11 interviews were sufficient because the collected data overlapped. Involving additional participants in the study would probably not provide any new information.
Stage 2

*Survey.* The second stage of the study was intended to elicit responses from instructors about general prevalence and seriousness of struggles. For this purpose, I developed a survey guided by the struggle taxonomy that emerged from the interviews in the first stage. The most important sections of the survey asked about how common particular struggles are, how seriously they can impact candidates’ progress in the program, and how adequate the existing supports are. I divided the major struggle domains into more specific struggle segments in order to obtain the estimates of struggle prevalence (Appendix B). The process of survey development was iterative in order to select the most adequate response options that numerically describe struggle prevalence. After consulting with my supervisor and colleagues, I decided to ask instructors to estimate the percentage of teacher candidates who experience particular types of struggles in a given school year by selecting from five categorical increments (see Appendix B). Each category represented an approximate percentage of teacher candidates who struggle ranging from no teacher candidates to more than 10% of teacher candidates. The rationale for the use of percentage response options for struggle estimation instead of some other response scales was that a few interviewees in Stage 1 mentioned percentages when describing the struggles of their students. The survey also asked instructors to estimate the seriousness of teacher candidates’ struggles on a scale from 1 to 4, from 1 being not serious to 4 being very serious. There was also a question that assessed the adequacy of available supports. In addition to six close-ended questions, I included three open-ended questions that asked about actions taken by instructors to support teacher candidates and sought instructors’ recommendations for further struggle prevention.
Sample. Participants for the second stage of the study were instructors in the ITE program who had at least two years of teaching experience. I sent email invitations for study participation to about 100 instructors asking them to complete an online survey. I sent a reminder email, but obtained responses from only 21 instructors.

Stage 3

After conducting the interviews and survey with instructors, there was still one important component missing: experiences and perspectives of the actual teacher candidates regarding their struggles in the ITE program. The data obtained in the first two stages were very useful in gaining an understanding of struggles from the perspective of individuals who work closely with teacher candidates and observe their behaviours and struggles on a daily basis, some of them for several decades. However, it was very important to corroborate instructors’ observations with those of teacher candidates. Hsu (2005) noted that teacher candidates’ problems are usually assessed by surveys that contain predetermined problems and assumed solutions and that very few studies have collected data from actual experiences of teacher candidates. The aim of this stage was to learn about first-hand struggle experiences from teacher candidates by allowing them to respond to open-ended questions and tell their personal stories about struggles.

Sample. In this stage, I interviewed 10 teacher candidates (6 females and 4 males) asking them about their experiences of struggles, help seeking behaviours, and impacts of those struggles. The selection criteria included teacher candidates who at the time of the interviews were enrolled in the consecutive ITE program and were willing to talk about some of their struggles and experiences in the program.

Interviews. I chose to conduct interviews toward the end of the program (in May) in order for teacher candidates to be able to reflect on their experiences throughout the entire
program. The study was advertised on announcement boards in the building where teacher candidates had classes and in a web-based collaborative workspace to which all candidates had access. There were more than 20 teacher candidates interested in participating, but I randomly choose 10 teacher candidates to be interviewed. I conducted interviews via Skype voice call in order to provide additional protection of privacy and increase the comfort level of teacher candidates to discuss their struggles. Interviews involved 11 questions generally inquiring about types of struggles experienced by teacher candidates; causes, intensity, and frequency of those struggles; support systems used by teacher candidates; recommendations for struggle prevention; and impact of struggles on teacher candidates’ progress in the program and future career (Appendix C). On average, interviews lasted 33 minutes, ranging from 20 to 45 minutes. Most participants talked very openly about their own and their peers’ struggles and expressed opinions about existing problems in their ITE program. During the interviews, I noticed that teacher candidates had a lot of similar experiences, complaints, and suggestions, but each candidate also contributed some unique information to the data.

**Data Analysis**

**Stage 1**

Informal data analysis began during the data collection. As I was listening to participants, I was categorizing and making connections. I used the constant comparative method by comparing and contrasting interviews and by fitting information into my virtual categories (Creswell, 1998). Some would argue that this initial analytical engagement might create bias in later analysis. In my case, it had a positive effect because when I began the coding process, I already had a vivid picture of what was available in the data, which helped in code generation.
Coding and thematic analysis involved multiple steps and occurred in two analytical phases. In the first phase I used NVivo 9. I began the coding process by selecting four interviews as a starting point for code development. I purposefully chose the interviews that contained a wide range of information provided by individuals with multiple roles and diverse experiences in the program. I applied a general inductive approach to qualitative analysis by reducing the raw data to codes, themes, and hierarchical organizations (Thomas, 2006). The initial coding consisted of so-called open coding in which, after reading the materials a few times, I started to assign descriptive labels to codes (Creswell, 2006; Miles & Huberman, 1997). This resulted in over 40 codes. The next level of analysis included detecting similarities between codes, merging them together and renaming them into more concrete thematic categories (i.e., axial coding). I then classified specific categories that pertained to a big overarching theme or concept under ‘parent’ themes (Bazeley, 2007). Some parent themes stemmed directly from the interview questions, while others ‘emerged’ from the data. The remaining interviews were coded using the originally generated themes with few modifications and additions.

The second phase of the analysis and ‘re-coding’ occurred more than a year after the first phase. After I derived the codes from the first phase, I mostly focused my analysis and attention on the development of the struggle taxonomy. I paid close attention to classifying struggles that were described and understanding their potential causes and manifestations. As I was reading more literature and expanding my inquiry, I realized that the data were much richer than I initially thought and that there were more themes related to struggles and their impact to be uncovered and understood. Although I had more insight into the topic of struggles, their latent messages and impacts, I was not guided by any particular theoretical framework in my second round of analysis. It was still a semi-inductive approach with the increased researcher’s
awareness about the depth and richness of the data. I was uncovering the second layer of the existing information and was able to examine it more critically. This time, I ignored a few of the previously generated themes because they were not relevant in answering my research questions. Nonetheless, I expanded some of the previous themes and discovered new ones that were essential for addressing all study objectives. The ramification of the struggle theme was very similar to the first phase, but the second analytical phase generated additional themes pertaining to policies, impacts of struggles, and latent messages that struggles convey.

**Stage 2**

Analyses of the survey data included basic descriptive statistics for quantitative questions and thematic organization of the responses to open-ended questions. I examined and compared frequency counts for all questions that were answered on an ordinal scale, attempting to identify response patterns. However, although there was considerable variation in the responses to most of the questions, due to a relatively small sample size, it was not possible to detect patterns. The small sample size did not allow for any inferential statistical analyses of the quantitative data. Thematic classification of the open-ended responses, however, did suggest the existence of common themes and converging responses.

**Stage 3**

By the time I collected teacher candidates’ data, I already had a lot of experience analyzing instructors’ interviews, had well defined research goals, and was very cognizant of recurring and new themes throughout the interview process. I performed coding and thematic analysis using a similar analytical approach described in the previous heading. For the software I used TAMS Analyzer, an open-source qualitative analytical tool with almost identical hierarchical coding features as NVivo but with a simplified user interface.
**Researcher's Role**

Before presenting the results of my analyses, it is important to describe my position and role as a researcher. Although my intention is to present the perspectives and experiences of teacher candidates and their educators, I will inevitably and most likely unknowingly bring some of my personal biases and perspectives into the analysis of the data and interpretation of the results. Although I have sought to interpret the data through several lenses, I acknowledge that my choice of lenses is necessarily affected by my perspective.

I was familiar with the structure and functioning of the ITE program when I began this study, which helped me to better understand the nature of the data. I was also acquainted with the mission, philosophy, and culture of the program as well as the intended learning outcomes for teacher candidates. Moreover, I was involved in a research project about the program’s admission process, which gave me additional insight into the selection process for prospective teacher candidates. However, I had no professional or personal contact with any of my participants (teacher candidates and instructors) prior to the interviews. I have a background in psychology, and I have never attended a teacher preparation program or worked with the teacher population. This could be argued to contribute to a more objective data analysis and interpretation, but I acknowledge that the definition and, indeed, the possibility of objectivity is contested (e.g., Babbie & Mouton, 2001; Guba & Lincoln, 1994).
CHAPTER 4. RESULTS

Stage 1

The interview themes are summarized in Table 1. One can observe in Table 1 that there are five major parent themes: teacher candidates’ struggles, support systems, recommendations, program, and communication of struggles and impact. Each of these themes contains two to nineteen subthemes that define and describe the essence of the parent theme. All of the themes are relevant to the study’s objectives and contribute to explaining different aspects of struggling.

Taxonomy of Struggles

Before I present different types of struggles in detail, I should mention that there was a high degree of corroboration in the identification and description of struggles among instructors. First, the nature and possible causes of the struggles that the participants described included a wide range of factors such as psychological, emotional, social, financial, structural, behavioural, cognitive, and physical. Struggles could also originate in a person or be caused by institutional factors. For some candidates, such as those experiencing psychological struggles, the nature and cause are identical, whereas for others family situation or social background would cause a financial struggle. With respect to the causes, most struggles originated in the past, prior to candidates’ enrolment into the program, but some struggles are caused by or triggered during the program. Instructors (I) described that those candidates who have had serious problems in the past usually carry them to the program:

I 5: And they are coming to the ITE program with that. The program is not creating that; they are coming with it. It’s like coming with a suitcase that’s packed. The suitcase is not going to dissolve just because they are coming to this program. It’s still there, and it’s packed.
Table 1

Organization and Description of the Interview Themes from Stage 1 and Stage 3

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Subthemes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Struggles</td>
<td>Problems and challenges that teacher candidates experience during the ITE program</td>
<td>Mental health and emotionality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Lack of professional conduct</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Lack of self awareness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Misconceptions about profession</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Work load and pace</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>General adjustment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Disabilities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Financial problems</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Family circumstances</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Cultural and language barriers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Lack of substance and busy work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Group work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Conflicts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Lack of job opportunities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Practicum</td>
<td>Teacher candidates’ experiences and struggles in practicum</td>
<td>Theory and practice disconnect</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Teaching practice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Classroom management</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Associate teachers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Practicum preparation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support Systems</td>
<td>Supports and resources available to and used by teacher candidates when struggling (internal and external)</td>
<td>Supportive instructors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Student Services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Accommodations and considerations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Peer and Family</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recommendations</td>
<td>Suggestions of what else the program could or should do in order to provide more effective supports and prevent or reduce struggles and their impact</td>
<td>Improved communication</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Collaboration among instructors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Structural changes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Professional development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Financial assistance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Anticipation of struggles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Social support events</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theme</td>
<td>Description</td>
<td>Subthemes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Program</td>
<td>Program features and structure related to struggles</td>
<td>Standards</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Policies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Counselling out</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Inconsistencies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication of Struggles and Impact</td>
<td>Direct and indirect messages that the presence of struggles communicate</td>
<td>Unsuccessful teacher candidates</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Short and long-term impact of struggles on teacher candidates’ progress in the program, overall well-being, career development, job performance, etc.</td>
<td>Successful teacher candidates</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Potential impact of struggles on other individuals such as instructors and students in K-12 classrooms</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note. Bold: themes from both instructors’ and teacher candidates’ interviews; italics: themes from instructors’ interviews only; plain: themes from teacher candidates’ interviews only.*
The interviews in general revealed that the nature and causes of struggles can be very complex and involve multiple elements. Although having some awareness of struggle causes may be helpful, the emphasis of the first study objective was not to discuss causes but to identify how struggles manifest through behaviours and conditions of teacher candidates.

I identified 19 subthemes that are classified as types of struggles in Table 1. Each instructor identified between three and seven types of struggles, discussing some in a lot of detail and only listing others. As you can observe from Table 1, some struggles are of a more general character (e.g., adjustment), while others pertain to a specific context or set of skills (e.g., teaching practice).

**Mental health and emotionality.** The category that contains the most information and is mentioned most frequently by almost all interviewees relates to the domain of mental health and emotional conditions. Anxiety and depression appear to be the most prevalent and debilitating mental health conditions among teacher candidates, with a number of negative effects on their overall functioning and success in the program:

I 9: The trend is overwhelmingly the teacher candidates who are experiencing difficulty due to anxiety or depression disorders. A significant number of students have one or the other, or both and are really experiencing difficulty in the program to the point of not being able to function in the program … The most difficult by far is the mental health issues – stress, anxiety, and depression – because for students who are suffering from those disorders, they are very frustrated with the fact that they are for all intents and purposes immobilized by it.

I 10: Increasing numbers of candidates suffer from clinical anxiety and clinical depression, and I think that’s true right across North America not just in the ITE program, but in all university programs. And that does get in a way of the candidate’s ability to perform.

There were also rare mentions of candidates who had formal diagnoses of bipolar disorder and different types of schizophrenia. Some instructors guessed that other teacher candidates had specific mental health conditions, although the instructors were not aware of formal diagnoses. Participants also mentioned that they encounter students with emotional, anger
management, and personality problems. They said that due to feelings of being overwhelmed, incompetent, or unsatisfied with the program structure and policies, some candidates exhibit inappropriate behaviours such as extreme anger, yelling, and crying in public spaces.

I 1: Also anger, extreme anger, yelling – yelling in class, yelling at me over the phone or in an office situation. Not yelling because it’s personal, and I have done something, but yelling as an expression of how angry they are, and I see that every year.

I 7: One of them threw coffee at another student; other ones stole my binder from the desk.

**Lack of professional conduct.** The second important type of struggle is the lack of professional conduct. It is surprising that almost every participant mentioned this problem. Some interviewees said that the program assumes teacher candidates know what it means to be a professional, but many candidates do not have an understanding of what professionalism entails and how important it is for their careers. The examples mentioned include a range of behaviours from not coming to practicum on time to arguing with and disrespecting instructors, principals, teacher colleagues, and even students in a classroom. Unprofessional conduct was often observed among and associated with younger students who just finished their undergraduate degrees and perhaps have not had an opportunity to develop professional relationships. One instructor referred to these students as being “millennials” who are still living with parents and have no financial or work responsibilities.

I 1: They have never actually seen themselves, part of their identity hasn’t been as an adult, and all of a sudden we are saying to them not only are you an adult, but you have to behave like an adult, you have to look like an adult, and you have to talk like an adult.

To some instructors, professionalism seemed to encompass embracing a new professional identity as a teacher. It seems that the most important aspects of this professional identity are social relations and communication, which from instructors’ explanations is the most serious professional struggle.
I 5: Because being a teacher is constantly negotiating social relationships. And if you haven’t developed that skill, you will run into all kinds of problems, if not with students then with colleagues.

**Lack of self awareness.** According to some instructors, struggles with professionalism are almost inseparable from candidates’ lack of self awareness. As most instructors defined it, candidates who lack self awareness “do not have an awareness of how they are being perceived by others, how they are being perceived by kids, by teachers, and principals at schools”; “they are unable to relate with classroom colleagues in an effective, collegial manner.” This struggle is perceived by instructors as a serious obstacle that prevents teacher candidates from accepting feedback and from being open to constructive criticism. Candidates who lack self awareness were described as believing that they already know everything pertaining to their courses and teaching and are always right. They often blame others for their unsuccessful performance and think that no one likes them.

I 10: Someone who was always right. The associate teachers were wrong, other lecturers were wrong, and SUPO suggestions were wrong. Any intervention was not welcome or made no difference.

Under this category I also decided to include lack of awareness about certain social, cultural, and historical issues such as the understanding of diversity and equity in schools and classrooms. Some candidates who lived and worked in fairly homogeneous environments struggle with accepting or acknowledging realistic differences among learners and educators. Others are too focused on their own personal identity issues and fail to notice those of others.

**Misconceptions about teaching.** Another type of struggle stems from candidates’ misconceptions about the teaching profession. The interviewees claimed that many of their students do not have a clear understanding of the program requirements and demands of their future profession. Some teacher candidates are unaware of the multifaceted aspects of teaching, heavy workload, time pressure, teaching multiple subjects, burnout rate, and the intensity of the
program. Instructors said that misconceptions and unrealistic expectations can create or trigger psychological or other struggles that can further impair students’ progress in the program. When faced with the reality of teaching, some candidates realize that the teaching profession may not be well suited for them but because of time and financial investments as well as social expectations remain in the program. Two instructors very well described reasons for candidates’ misconceptions about teaching.

I 9: Teachers in their classroom have perfected the fine art of making it look very easy. It looks effortless when a teacher in a classroom is delivering their lesson and providing instructions to students. So when the only experience that an individual has in a classroom prior to coming to our program is as a student, they may not have an adequate understanding of the behind the scenes work that has gone into providing those learning opportunities for students.

I 4: I think teaching is a skill, it’s a strategy and in part it’s performance art. And those [skills] are not wrapped up with [teacher candidates’] academic achievement.

The next set of struggles are grouped according to the setting in which they emerge or become particularly prominent. That setting is one of the most difficult and decisive battlefields for teacher candidates: practicum placement. Many informants said that struggles particularly begin or increase during the practicum placement. They explained that practicum not only represents a contextual change for candidates but also requires them to adopt new modes of performing, learning, and adjusting. In this novel context, teacher candidates are taking on new roles, interacting with children, associate teachers, and colleagues while trying to successfully apply their theoretical knowledge to practice.

**Theory and practice disconnect.** Many instructors discussed the difficulties of teacher candidates to bridge the gap between theory learned in courses and application of that theoretical knowledge in a field placement. They partially blame the structure of courses in the ITE program for not making more apparent and coherent connections between theory and teaching. Instructors also said that some candidates struggle to negotiate conflicting messages that they receive from
course instructors and from associate teachers in their practicum placements. The biggest challenge in this domain seems to be the realization by teacher candidates that teaching in a classroom is indeed different from studying for exams and that they cannot and should not anticipate that the two processes will be identical.

I 4: In a course, you can take a book and take a long time to think about the material and frame your answer, but if you’ve never worked in a classroom, you are confronted with 30 to 35 students who are very different in learning than you are. You may have been successful all your career, and they might have been unsuccessful all of their career, so sort of remembering that the kids that we are responsible for teaching are not always the same as us, and how do you handle it.

Teaching practice. Once in a classroom environment, some teacher candidates face practical issues on how to present themselves as effective and confident teachers. Instructors, especially practicum coordinators, listed teacher candidates’ struggles with lesson planning, material presentation, teaching multiple subjects, attendance taking, student assessment, rapport building, etc. Instructors referred to teaching practice as a set of skills that need to be mastered and properly incorporated into a lesson delivery. Tying it back to the previously mentioned struggle with theory and practice, they said that some candidates are academically successful but encounter great difficulties to effectively teach a class.

I 8: They may have a subject knowledge in math, but they struggle when it comes to any kind of communication with students trying to implement various strategies. They don’t have the technique; some of that technique involves teacher’s presence. They have no sense of commending the attention of others in a variety of ways.

Classroom management. Instructors expressed that teacher candidates’ apprehension about classroom management becomes evident even before going into practicum. It seems that classroom management is the primary classroom concern of teacher candidates, and they often request to have a whole course just on this topic. Although some instructors noted that classroom management is a challenge even for them after a few decades of teaching, they think that classroom management problems may stem from the lack of teaching competence.
I 3: You’ll hear many people talk about classroom management skills, and I would attribute management issues to problems in other areas that are manifested in classroom management issues, and one is lesson planning. If you plan your lesson thoroughly, if you attend to transition strategies, if you have developed an activity or a lesson that meets the diversity of needs, those factors minimize your classroom management issues.

**Associate teachers.** Another struggle related to practica can be the relationship and communication with an associate teacher. Even though it was not mentioned very frequently, this type of struggle may present a serious challenge to practicum progress for some candidates. In some instances, associate teachers are not very effective in their guidance or supportive of teacher candidates, which may contribute to the lack of self efficacy in candidates. One instructor shared how some associate teachers misinform teacher candidates about priorities and the importance of the ITE program.

I 10: Most student teachers come back from their experience saying, “My associate teacher told me that I should not be paying attention to anything I am doing in the ITE program. I should just pay attention to what I am doing here [in practicum].” That, for some students could be a real disorienting process.

**Workload and pace.** Almost all instructors emphasized the intensity of the program, and the amount of work required for both courses and practica. They explained that individual pieces of work and assignments involved in the program do not seem very difficult, but the large number within a limited time frame can create a sense of anxiety and distress. Candidates who do not know how to prioritize and effectively manage their time may fall behind and struggle with the feeling of being overwhelmed and helpless.

**General adjustment.** The pace of the program requires students to be very flexible and to quickly adjust. Instructors said that teacher candidates need not only to adjust to the structure of the program, new work environment and people but also to make structural changes in their private lives and be willing to sacrifice some things in order to successfully complete the
program. Some teacher candidates are able to make necessary transitions and adjustments better than others.

I 1: Every single student is challenged by adjustment in this period, but some of them come with strategies for managing adjustments. Some students never make the adjustment. They just choose a different way of managing, taking a lower mark, blaming somebody else, appealing. There is a whole range that they can choose which masks their lack of adjustment.

The next few struggles are by no means unique to the completion of teacher preparation programs. They may, however, create challenges for teacher candidates or intensify some other struggles experienced during the program.

**Disabilities.** Instructors perceive that there are an increasing number of students with physical or learning disabilities who are enrolled in the ITE program. They were careful to point out that disabilities in themselves are not problematic, especially if appropriate supports are put in place.

I 3: And I also don’t want to suggest in any way that students who are on letters of accommodation are struggling students because they are often the ones that are involved in taking action to support their learning needs, and there are others who may choose not to get a letter of accommodation.

However, because of the nature of some disabilities, some candidates may experience struggles in specific situations or with specific tasks. One instructor provided an example of a student who could not teach for more than three hours without taking rest and lying down, which created additional challenges in the practicum placement.

**Financial problems.** Even at provincially-funded Faculties of Education, teacher candidates must invest considerable funds toward their tuition fees. In addition, teacher candidates are urged not to hold part time jobs because of the demands of the program. This in some cases exacerbates financial difficulties. Other candidates do work part time during the program, which can cause difficulty in finding time to complete assignments and prepare for teaching practica. Moreover, almost all teacher educators commented on the current economic
situation and the lack of teaching jobs, expressing deep concerns for graduating teacher candidates.

**Family circumstances.** Another type of struggle is candidates’ family situations. Some candidates come to the ITE program as part of a change of careers, and many of them have children and spouses. Instructors claimed that both teacher candidates’ progress and their family life could suffer because of each other. On the one hand, some parents who need to drop off their children to school or daycare may be consistently late for class or may not complete their readings. On the other hand, the effort and time required for the successful completion of the program can result in decreased family involvement and experiences of anxiety and disconnection.

**Cultural and language barriers.** Teacher candidates come from a variety of backgrounds and some teacher candidates have difficulties with spoken English and struggle with making their verbal expression comprehensible for students in a classroom. Others have different understandings about education and the role of a teacher.

I 9: In addition to language difficulties or barriers, they experience cultural differences in teaching and learning, and some of them are also subjected to prejudice and discrimination by their associate teachers in the field placement.

**Support Systems and Help Seeking Behaviours**

Next, I turn to discuss support systems that are available and used by teacher candidates as witnessed by their instructors, coordinators, and counsellors.

**Supportive instructors.** A theme that stood out in all interviews is the academic and personal support and help offered by the ITE instructors, coordinators, and counsellors. In addition to assisting teacher candidates in understanding and acquiring content knowledge and completing assignments, instructors serve as emotional and social support for students. They
appear to immensely care about their students’ well being and progress and are willing to take a number of measures in ensuring that teacher candidates receive adequate help. Some of these measures involve reaching out to students, putting preventative measures in place, teaching self awareness and social and emotional development, having extended office hours, collaborating with other instructors, extending deadlines, recommending other supports, and following up with students.

I 10: I try to structurally take into account the way that students struggle and make the course outline responsive to it.

I 1: I try to establish an atmosphere right from the ‘get go’ that I am approachable, and I reinforce that all year. And one time we talked about having a manual, a little manual, it's almost like “What do you do when…?”

Instructors not only talked about supports that they provide but also indicated that their colleagues as well as the program offer a variety of supports. It seemed that their ultimate goal is to offer as much support as possible in order help teacher candidates to become successful teachers.

I 9: I often say that we are in the business of helping our teacher candidates be successful and that we are going to put everything in place that we possibly can to ensure their success in the program while maintaining a healthy mental outlook.

**Student services.** Equally important types of supports that were widely cited are two types of services especially designed to assist teacher candidates with a range of struggles. One of them is the School University Partnerships Office (SUPO) that provides practicum placements and advice and support to teacher candidates with practicum-related issues. The second office is the Student Services, which provides a number of services such as counselling services, accessibility and disability services, a financial office, and the Academic and Cultural Support Centre. Counselors at the Student Services provide professional help and support beyond that offered by instructors and family members. For example, they offer psychological and crisis
counselling, monitoring of students who are struggling, and accommodation and consideration letters. In addition, teacher candidates can obtain help with writing academic papers, preparing for presentations, lesson planning, resume writing, etc. Other types of support that were mentioned are family and peer support, medical help, and other university services.

**Accommodations and considerations.** Instructors said that they as well as the program attempt to provide requested accommodations for teacher candidates with special needs or circumstances. Teacher candidates who come into the program with letters of accommodation from the university’s Accessibility Services are provided necessary accommodations in terms of equipment, technology, space, or other resources. There are also students who have temporary extenuating circumstances and who receive letters of consideration that allow them to take some time off or to hand assignments in late.

I 9: I think that students who experience difficulty in the program would overwhelmingly say that they feel extremely well supported by the program.

With regard to what the program could provide in addition to the available supports, most informants agreed that people who work in the program and its supporting services are doing their best in supporting teacher candidates. As one instructor noted:

I 1: Nothing struck me off the top of my head as something they should be doing that they are not doing or not trying to do. It seems to me that people in this program at the very least try very hard.

**Recommendations**

I will next discuss instructors’ suggestions and recommendations for what could be done by the program in order to minimize teacher candidates’ struggles and their impact. Interestingly, the interviewees had very similar ideas and suggestions.

**Improved communication.** Somewhat related to this is a recommendation for a better description and communication of the program requirements to potential applicants. Many
instructors agreed that it is important to effectively inform prospective teacher candidates about all aspects of the program ahead of time. They thought that teacher candidates should especially be familiarized with the structure, intensity, and demands of the program and understand what is expected of them. This may be particularly helpful to individuals who come into the program with pre-existing problems or conditions:

I 8: Maybe it would be worthwhile having some more information sessions, where people can come and ask individual questions ahead of time before they are accepted or before they choose their cohorts.

I 9: It’s important to somehow communicate to prospective teacher candidates that teaching is one of the most stressful professions, that teaching does have one of the highest burnout rates and to say very clearly that if you have a history of anxiety and depression that being in this program could be particularly challenging for you. So that people then can come in with that mind set.

**Structural changes.** Another type of suggestion for improvement is structural or “programmatic” changes that would involve restructuring some aspects of the program to better fit teacher candidates’ needs, such as lightening the work load, making curricular changes, increasing the availability of administrative and support services, providing better physical space, and decreasing class sizes. Some instructors suggested finding alternative avenues for assessing teacher candidates’ progress that would involve modifying conventional assignments and curriculum and engaging candidates into the learning process in a more meaningful way.

I 6: Can we innovate a bit more so that we can provide both content and instruction in much more pedagogically sound ways? Part of the dilemma is that there are decisions that have been made about efficiency but not about pedagogy. And we at this institution should be very, very mindful about the pedagogical aspect of our work because these are practices that we can both model and that our teacher candidates can utilize for their own teaching.

There were also mentions of lengthening the program to two years in order to decrease its intensity and increase the ‘quality’ of teacher candidates’ preparation. An additional structural suggestion was to permit candidates to only take academic courses and earn a BEd degree without teacher certification. This would be useful for those who are exclusively interested in
theoretical aspects of education and teaching. Yet another proposal was to allow more flexibility for teacher candidates to switch streams (e.g., from elementary to secondary school).

**Collaboration among instructors.** Instructors also emphasized the importance of improving collaboration and communication among themselves in order to make course materials more cohesive and assist candidates in making cross-subject connections. In this way, they believe teacher candidates would be able to better link and use content from different courses.

I 6: For instance, for me even having a conversation with the instructor in Psych Foundations and in the Teacher Education Seminar gives me a sense of what our students are already getting. So I can both reinforce what is already being taught in other classes and teach some other things in my classes.

Instructors complained that collaboration occurs at the individual level only when initiated by instructors. They think that it should instead be systemically embedded into the program structure.

**Professional development.** One more important recommendation to the ITE program was to provide ongoing professional development for all employees who work with teacher candidates in any capacity as well as for teacher candidates. The instructors expressed a need for workshops, seminars, group discussion or any other form of professional development that would equip instructors to more effectively support and aid teacher candidates who experience struggles. Particularly helpful would be professional development related to class structuring, communication with teacher candidates and collaboration with other program staff.

I 3: We have some continued work to do in terms of professional development for faculty and making sure that everybody is equally equipped to provide positive supports and to accommodate the diverse needs of our teacher candidates.

Although the ITE program already has a number of professional development initiatives, it seems that they may not fully meet the needs of the interviewed instructors.
**Financial assistance.** Because of financial struggles that some teacher candidates experience, instructors think that having more bursaries, scholarships, and financial aids would spare some teacher candidates from having to work while in the program and would decrease their stress level and help in adjustment.

**Anticipation of struggles.** Lastly, instructors made clear that a certain proportion of teacher candidates will inevitably struggle in the program and that the program should anticipate struggles and be ready to properly respond to them by putting supports in place. They praised the existing supports and services but said that they may not be enough to serve the large teacher candidate body and that more counsellors are always needed.

I 3: It is our responsiveness that we put those program things in place, but with each new year that comes after that program is in place, that’s a proactive programming, and that is preventative maybe.

**Communication of Struggles and Their Perceived Impact**

All results presented up to this point respond to the objectives related to the construction and description of a struggle typology, available support systems, and recommendations for additional supports. These elements of teacher candidates’ struggles are significant because they provide a starting point in the understanding of teacher candidates’ struggles. They allow one to understand different types of struggles, how they are manifested, in which settings, where and how candidates can obtain help, and provide directions to what steps could be taken toward struggle prevention and minimization. However, if one is to go a step further and examine what the presence of struggles may communicate as well as their potential impact on becoming and being a teacher, we need to dig deeper into the data. As Instructor 2 noted, “when these struggles emerge, it would be useful to try to figure out what they are telling us.”
A number of teacher educators were very direct in expressing their opinions about what certain struggles indicate and how they can impact teacher candidates’ success as future teachers. Other instructors did not express this directly but provided hypothetical scenarios and described indirect communication of struggles.

**Unsuccessful candidates.** Many instructors openly indicated that certain struggles are a serious obstacle to teacher candidates becoming successful teachers. The reasons for this were multifold. First, instructors had concerns for candidates with serious mental health issues and thought that they would not be able to psychologically manage classroom teaching and cope with a high level of stress. Similar concerns were raised for individuals with certain disabilities. Instructors said that if a disability can be managed with accommodations, teacher candidates might certainly be successful teachers. However, if a disability involves a chronic medical condition (e.g., chronic fatigue syndrome) that prevents teacher candidates from being physically available and results in their frequent absence from work, their teaching would suffer.

I 5: If they cannot manage this program, this is a piece of cake compared to their first year of teaching.

Second, instructors had a lot to say about teacher candidates who they perceive to have serious problems embracing the concept of professionalism. They thought that those candidates who acted inappropriately and showed a high degree of irresponsibility, immaturity, and disrespect toward others would not be able to successfully teach children.

Third, candidates who have no awareness of how their words and actions may impact their surroundings were also described as incompetent future teachers. As instructors pointed out, individuals who believe that they ‘know it all’ are not willing to consider new learning opportunities, to collaborate with others, and to adjust to the needs and dynamics of the teaching profession.
Fourth, there were mentions of teacher candidates who struggle with multiple issues and who overall may not be a good fit for a teacher. Instructors did not list a specific type of struggle but explained how from their point of view some teacher candidates do not have the personality of a teacher. For example, they might not be able to connect with children, effectively prepare and deliver lessons, integrate themselves into a school community, or otherwise step into a role of a teacher.

In providing their rationales, most instructors spoke based on their rich work experiences with teacher candidates. Some were bringing up specific individual examples, whereas others were making logical deductions from overall experiences. In some cases, instructors noted that although they think some teacher candidates would not be successful teachers, they could not predict with certainty if someone might change and develop professionally. Thus, they were hesitant to make decisive conclusions indicating that struggles could either disappear or amplify depending on teacher candidates’ work environments, available supports, and their ability and eagerness to overcome those struggles. They brought forward instances of teacher candidates whose struggles continued from the program to a classroom but also some inspiring examples of candidates who successfully dealt with their struggles as teachers.

However, there were instructors who strongly conveyed that candidates with specific types and degrees of struggles have nonexistent chances of working as teachers. Below are citations of two participants who directly connected the observation of certain struggles with the inability to become a school teacher.

I 7: I don’t think they will get a job! When principals are hiring people, they want to hire the very best person they can find – the person with the highest level of skills and the person who will be able to be very successful in the job.

I 8: Because principals are not going to hire someone that they are going to have issues with, and they also want to hire someone who will be the best for the school and the children, and the community.
**Successful candidates.** It is noteworthy that, according to instructors, struggles may present learning opportunities and result in positive outcomes. They expressed that candidates who are resilient and who know how to handle problems and obtain support would be very successful teachers. These candidates will use their struggles as a tool in their teaching career. Because of their experiences in the program, they may be able to better relate to, understand and support their own students. They may also improve their teaching practice due to their struggles and be able to face and resolve future struggles in the workplace. Instructors believe that teacher candidates who are able to handle and overcome their struggles will become very successful teachers.

**Program Elements in Relation to Struggles**

The last segment of findings for this stage is a natural continuation to the previously presented themes. It is concerned with structural and procedural aspects of the examined ITE program that pertain to policies, standards, responsibilities, and critical decisions of failing and counselling out some teacher candidates. The reason for merging these items under the theme of program elements is that they all represent external factors that create the context, content, atmosphere, and requirements under which program staff and teacher candidates ought to operate. Consequently, instructors said that they have no authority over these factors but nonetheless had strong opinions and suggestions because of the importance and impact that the mentioned factors have in teacher education and certification.

**Standards.** It is expected that an initial teacher preparation program would have standards and requirements for successful completion, but it is worth mentioning how these standards may impact the dynamics within the program. More than one instructor noted that Ontario’s Ministry of Education produces a large volume of documents specifying the role and
responsibilities of educators and students in the program as well as specifications of how teacher candidates should be prepared and assessed, and how they should perform in order to obtain a BEd degree. Instructors expressed that it is not easy to keep up with the increased expectations and incorporate them into course curricula. They said that they themselves are struggling with adjustments to some of the increased demands and that it would be helpful if the ITE program provided better support for them. On the one hand program instructors are aware of all the skills that an Ontario teacher should have, but on the other hand it is challenging to provide every teacher candidate, including those who struggle, with an opportunity to succeed in a short period of time and at the same time fulfill all program standards. It seems that there is tension between maximally supporting teacher candidates who struggle and abiding by the highest standards of the program and the Ministry of Education.

Many instructors complained about inflated academic marks in the program. They said that teacher candidates expect to get all A’s and that they as instructors feel pressured to fulfill these expectations, resulting in largely inflated marks. Instructors also mentioned feeling pressured to allowed teacher candidates to hand in assignments late, to re-do their assignments, and to request higher marks. One instructor said it very candidly, “it’s well known to the students that it doesn’t matter what they do; they are all going to pass.” This issue will be further described as part of the policy subtheme.

In relation to standards, every teacher candidate who graduates from this ITE program is recommended for and can obtain teaching certification from the Ontario College of Teachers (OCT). The OCT accredits ITE programs and then relies on the programs to prepare and evaluate teacher candidates who are ready to become certified teachers.

I 7: When we send someone out of here and certify them as being competent, we are responsible for putting individuals in a classroom with children. We have responsibility to the children, which doesn’t seem to be anywhere in the equation.
Some instructors said that although teacher candidates pass the program, they might not be ready to teach successfully.

I 1: And you can tell in body language, and you can tell in tone, and you can tell in the way that they present themselves in terms of developing relationships that they cannot do the job *the way that the job is now defined as a teacher.*

They did mention that many teacher candidates end up working in nonconventional teaching settings, such as tutoring or government agencies, for which they believe the standards are different.

Another aspect of standards that instructors commented on pertains to seconded instructors. These instructors are teachers or administrators in local schools, who are hired by the ITE program for one to three years, with the schools holding their positions for their return. Seconded instructors typically teach practical or technical components of the program curriculum. Seconded instructors are fully qualified to perform their teaching tasks but bring somewhat different experiences and background knowledge from the majority of other instructors. According to the interviewed instructors, seconded instructors contribute their valuable experiences from practice, but their teaching styles are sometimes problematic for university students. The offered explanation is that seconded instructors have little or no experience teaching university students and little knowledge of policies. My interviewees thought that it is the responsibly of the program to provide these instructors with a more thorough training and to familiarize them with the teaching standards of the ITE program.

The final issue related to meeting the program standards was in the domain of disabilities and accommodations. One instructor pointed out how the program is very open and accommodating to persons with disabilities but that sometimes the standards suffer because of the lack of a systematic protocol for how to appropriately implement accommodations.
embracing that notion of what an accommodation is so we are not changing the what in terms of the standards that are required in the program – what needs to be demonstrated in terms of knowledge and competence, but that we are really open to a wide range of how can a teacher candidate demonstrate their knowledge and competencies associated with teaching.

Another instructor urged Student Services to be more cautious when issuing letters of accommodations because they believed that some students were able to obtain them without proper documentation and in this way take advantage of the program resources. Thus, the need for procedural standardization of disability identification was expressed.

**Policies.** Like standards, each teacher preparation program has different policies to ensure the coherence of the program and the success of the candidates. Policies regarding program entry and course work, as well as practicum placement may impact how some struggles of teacher candidates get resolved and alleviated or perhaps in some cases exacerbated. Instructors had a lot to say about different program policies and rules and how they relate to struggles.

Some instructors suggested a more rigorous selection process and admission criteria in order to screen out applicants who are not apt for a teaching career. This suggestion was made with reference to candidates with serious mental, behavioural, and physical problems that these instructors believed would prevent them from becoming successful teachers. There were also suggestions about modifying the admission process and including interviews, which some instructors believed might help in the selection of best teacher candidates. An additional suggestion was a more rigorous policy on checking the authenticity of specific information that could aid with candidates’ acceptance into the program. Some of these suggestions have been considered, but have not been adopted because of concerns about consistency and fairness.

There are some program policies that may not be well known to everyone in the program but that shape the way in which struggling students move through the program. What a few
instructors indicated as a controversial issue in this institution is a policy officially labeled as supplemental privileges. The purpose of this policy is to provide multiple opportunities for students to successfully complete the program requirements. This policy allows teacher candidates to make up for failed exams, assignments, and practicum. However, some instructors perceive this policy as an inability to fail any students and thus refer to it as a ‘no-fail’ policy. They understand it as limiting their academic authority and lowering the programs’ standards. In addition, they perceived that students are allowed to hand in late assignments without penalty and to be absent from classes, and that instructors who intended to fail some students were unable to do so due to the program’s policies and flexibility.

I 7: You cannot fail anybody, not only that but you cannot give them anything under an A. Everybody has to get an A, and nobody fails, doesn’t matter if they never come to class, it doesn’t matter what they do. It doesn’t matter if they don’t do any of the work. They still can pass; you cannot fail them. That’s the policy in this program, which is quite appalling.

Instructors’ dissatisfaction with policies and decision-making was not limited to admissions and courses but was also notable in the decision-making process regarding practica. They argued that associate teachers and especially individuals who work as practicum coordinators and instructors should assume greater responsibility for failing unsuccessful candidates. A few instructors mentioned the ‘hot potato game’ between associate teachers in practicum and instructors and coordinators who work in the program. According to one instructor, an associate teacher may think that a candidate who has passed all courses with A’s must be good for a teaching position regardless of practicum struggles, whereas course instructors may think that a candidate will not be a good teacher but leave it up to the associate teacher supervising the candidate during a practicum to fail him or her. This diffuses the responsibility of both sides, which some instructors say leads to passing some candidates who
are not apt for teaching. Yet, another instructor in describing this process offered an explanation for why it may be difficult to fail an unsuccessful teaching candidate:

I 10: I think the field is waiting for us to screen, and I think that people here are waiting for the field to screen, and so neither one of us is holding up our end of the bargain. So I hear occasionally experience of associate teachers who say, “You sent me this person I really cannot pass them. I would not want my child in this person’s class, but I don’t want to be the person who gets blamed for standing in their way.” I think the norm of the profession is that it takes a very strong person to fail somebody. We have a disposition of second chances and third chances of helping people. And I think intellectually we should acknowledge that it’s privilege, it’s not a right. I think we have a responsibility to work with every student we admit. But I don’t think that admitting everyone is a guarantee they’ll be a good teacher, and I think that that’s hard.

_Counselling out._ The final component of the program theme is the dilemma about whether the program should counsel out some teacher candidates. Some of the interviewees endorsed the idea of continuously helping teacher candidates who struggle and exhausting all support systems in order to assist their formation as teachers.

I 3: I don’t counsel people out of this program. They have the right to be here, and they have the right to try, and I am here to support them in that process.

Other instructors agreed with supporting teacher candidates but were of the opinion that the program had to limit the extent to which teacher candidates should be supported. They thought that the program should be responsible for counselling out some candidates who experience extreme struggles. Some instructors even expressed that the program staff are irresponsible for admitting candidates who would not be able to complete the program successfully due to their pre-existing conditions. They even framed it as an ethical issue.

I 7: I think it’s a disaster. It’s a total disaster. Frankly, I don’t think it’s fair to bring in people who cannot or who are not aware of the demands of the job. I think it’s so unfair to individuals to take their money, when we know that this may not be the vocation for them, especially individuals with disabilities.

This instructor did not advocate for merely expelling teacher candidates from the program but suggested that the program provide counselling for alternative paths and assist candidates with struggles in their transition process.
There were those who held the middle ground and agreed that sometimes, despite having all supports in place, counselling teacher candidates out of the program may be the best solution. One instructor explained that there is a “fine line” between the program’s commitment to inclusion and what is in the best interest of a potential teacher candidate. For example, by attempting to support a candidate with a serious mental health issue, the candidate may still not be able to progress, and thus experience increased frustration, a sense of incompetence and even hospitalization because of the high pressure. Another instructor put it in these words:

I 9: How do we find that fine balance and know what is the limit of healthy and productive support as opposed to that level of support that could actually cause harm to teacher candidates and make them feel worse about themselves.

Stage 2

From the survey data, it was notable that instructors answered almost all questions and utilized all response options, with the distribution of responses varying for different questions. There were certain comments about the inability to answer some of the questions simply because some instructors did not have all information about their students, and only some struggles are made known to them. This was a warning that some of the results may be underestimated. As some instructors suggested, the appearance of no struggles does not necessarily imply the absence of struggles. Perhaps because of this issue, the 21 instructors had different estimates of the struggle prevalence in their classes. There were, however, three types of struggles that received the same estimates from about half of the instructors.

Thirteen out of 21 instructors expressed that between 1% and 3% of teacher candidates have difficulty communicating with their associate teachers, and 11 instructors agreed that the same percentage of candidates have difficulty understanding and applying feedback from their course instructors. Moreover, seven instructors stated that between 5% and 10% of teacher
candidates have difficulty assessing their own professional behaviour. In the same vein, 13 instructors perceived that the lack of candidates’ awareness of their own behaviour can very seriously impede their progress in the program. Twelve instructors thought the same of students with mental health disorders.

Although, there were not too many unified responses for the estimates of struggle prevalence, the survey did provide additional valuable data in the form of comments and suggestions to a few open-ended questions. First, instructors who responded to the survey emphasized certain types of struggles: in particular, the lack of awareness and professionalism. They wrote that some teacher candidates had personality problems and could not relate to their classmates and instructors, and some were not able to communicate and express their concerns in a professional manner. There were mentions of teacher candidates who thought that they did everything right and those who did not know what teaching involves.

Second, the instructors who responded to the survey also indicated that they attempted to provide many different types of supports to their candidates and to accommodate their needs and schedules. There were a large number of positive comments regarding the services offered in the program, and the most praised ones were counselling services and assistance related to practicum. However, there were also acknowledgments of the need of more counselling that would target students who need most help and support. Third, with respect to recommendations, survey respondent suggested increasing professional development opportunities and collaboration among instructors, some structural improvements in the program, and better communication of the program requirements to teacher candidates. There were also suggestions for the increased availability of bursaries and anticipation of struggles ahead of time. Fourth, a few survey participants mentioned that counselling out is desirable and needed in certain
situations. A group of instructors also expressed opinions on program policies and suggested more stringent admission policies as well as stricter rules regarding late assignment submissions.

It is worth noting that instructors who responded to the online survey did not participate as interviewees in Stage 1. However, one can notice that the perceptions of certain struggles, suggestions and comments were very similar between instructors in Stage 1 and Stage 2.

**Stage 3**

A large number of themes derived from interviews with teacher candidates coincide with the themes established in Stage 1. This was anticipated, considering that the intention of both interview processes was to develop a unified taxonomy of struggles that would combine instructors’ and teacher candidates’ perspectives. Because of similar questions asked to teacher candidates and instructors, the hierarchical structure of themes and subthemes was also almost identical. Accordingly, results from both Stage 1 and Stage 3 are merged into one model and presented in Table 1.

**Struggles**

Types of struggles identified by teacher candidates were their very own problems, issues, challenges, and aggravations or those directly observed in their peers. Because of the focus on the self, the experience in accounting different types of struggles was somewhat different than that of instructors. Each teacher candidate described fewer struggles on average than instructors, but because the struggles were personal, they were depicted in detail and with a greater emotional intensity. The following segments of text classify and describe types of struggles encountered by teacher candidates (TC).

**Lack of substance and busy work.** One issue that was a struggle for more than a half of the interviewed teacher candidates was a lot of ‘busy work’ in the program and the lack of
substance or relevant content in their courses. Teacher candidates said that a lot of their instructors were telling stories that were not pertinent to their learning and teaching. TC 4 expressed that the courses “were too fluffy, without enough meat to it.”

A few candidates even perceived many courses as useless without well-defined goals and purpose. Others were not satisfied with the amount of knowledge they received from instructors.

TC 10: I felt that half of my classes, we didn’t learn anything a lot of the times.

TC 9: And that portfolio was full of artifacts and photos, and it did not help me at all when applying for a job.

Although these issues may not appear as struggles of teacher candidates but rather problems inherent in the program, candidates said that they did struggle to accept large amounts of busy work that was not very meaningful and to also learn certain materials and concepts by themselves. A lot of them used the word frustration to describe their feelings.

**Workload and pace.** The struggle that directly relates and maybe overlaps with the previous one is the workload in the program and time pressure. It is of no surprise that a lot of assignments and other program requirements positioned within a limited time frame caused some teacher candidates to feel stressed out, pressured, and overwhelmed.

TC 1: The work is not hard, but there is a lot of work and readings. Being able to get everything accomplished at a satisfactory level [is difficult].

Teacher candidates complained how they struggled to find the balance between professional and personal life, and how personal life was often neglected because of the fast pace of the program. Candidates also noted that the transition between practicum and courses was very sudden without any time for re-adjustment and rest.

**Group work.** This was another feature of the program that resulted in struggles for some teacher candidates. Although teacher candidates had previous experience with group work and
knew how to complete assignments, they struggled with group dynamics, work distribution, idea compromises, as well as with finding time to meet as the whole group. This placed additional stress on some candidates and made them worry because the same grade was assigned to all group members at the end.

**Conflicts.** Teacher candidates described different types of conflicts that were manifested through disagreements, quarrels, hostility, or disengagement. Some conflicts occurred between candidates and instructors or associate teachers, whereas others arose between teacher candidates. There were also internal conflicts within teacher candidates in attempting to understand how one's identity and experiences may be relevant to and fit in the context of teaching. The sources of conflict were often different opinions and perceptions of social justice issues, equity, and diversity, which are integral components of the program’s mandate. There was a general agreement that these social issues are of immense importance to education, but there was disagreement as to how they should be taught and included in the teacher preparation program. There were some candidates who felt that they were ‘forced’ by certain instructors to dig into and expose their social identities against their will and that the process was counterproductive to their development as a teacher.

The following struggles were discussed by teacher candidates in the context of being observed in their classmates.

**Lack of professional conduct.** Interviewed teacher candidates mentioned that some of their classmates acted very immaturely and inappropriately. Examples that were provided were being tardy; disrespecting classmates, instructors, and discussions; playing games; and talking during the class time.
**Lack of awareness.** Teacher candidates also observed that some of their peers lacked social awareness – they did not know how their actions impacted and were perceived by their social environment. Some candidates were described as lacking awareness and knowledge of social issues and even appropriate terminology that they are supposed to use as teachers.

TC 10: There were some people who did not have basic social skills, judgment, and discretion. There were also mentions of candidates who thought that they did not need to be in the program because they knew it all already, which was perceived as shocking by most other candidates who expressed that there are so many things they yet ought to learn.

**Misconceptions about teaching.** The teacher candidates who participated in this study seemed to be well informed and aware of what the teaching profession entails. However, some of their classmates thought of teaching as a “stable 9 to 5 job with good pension benefits” (TC 7). My interviewees said that they expected all their peers to know how demanding teaching can be given that all had to have prior volunteering experience, but it was not the case.

TC 4: There were teacher candidates who came with an idea that teaching is easy. Some people didn’t know what else to be, so they decided to become teachers.

**Family circumstances.** From all my interviewees, I learned that a considerable proportion of teacher candidate population is comprised of mature students who have children. A few of the interviewed teacher candidates are parents themselves and expressed that it was a serious struggle to balance school work and family responsibilities. They stated that scheduling of some classes was not family-friendly and that they had to sometimes be late for morning classes or arrange additional child care during evening classes. One teacher candidate said that he could only begin to work on his assignments and readings after 11 pm.

**Financial problems.** This is another familiar struggle that troubled many teacher candidates. Teacher candidates have to make a significant financial investment into the program
without a guaranteed outcome. One teacher candidate made a decision to sell a house in order to afford attending the ITE program, while another one had to hold two jobs during the program in order to survive.

**Lack of job opportunities.** Financial problems are further aggravated by the lack of job opportunities for novice teachers. None of the teacher candidates whom I interviewed had job offers at the time of the interview (in May), and none of them were hopeful that they would find work as teachers in the near future. They mentioned how many of their peers applied for teaching jobs abroad or are working outside of the teaching field. Some of them applied for Master’s degree programs hoping that a more advanced academic degree may increase their chances of obtaining employment.

The final elements of the struggle theme for teacher candidates are struggles related to teaching practica, which according to the teacher candidates were among the most important struggles.

**Theory and practice disconnect.** Some teacher candidates found that the materials covered in classes did not provide the best preparation for teaching in a classroom. They did appreciate and acknowledge the importance of theoretical elements but felt that some instructors did not know how to relate the application of that knowledge to practice.

TC 7: What they are giving us [in courses] is not necessary applicable and realistic, so there is that inconsistency. Not only are we confronted with the disconnect between theory and practice, but the program doesn’t teach us how to teach these things and is not giving us guidance.

This gap between theory and practice was experienced by teacher candidates when they were placed in practicum settings.

TC 4: “How to do” [questions] in practicum did not really reflect what we were learning in classes.
After coming back from practicum and reflecting on all their courses, some candidates found that materials and assignments in certain courses were completely irrelevant to teaching in a classroom.

**Practicum preparation.** Many teacher candidates explained how they struggled to properly prepare for practicum. They outlined two major reasons for this. The first is the very short preparation period because the program is structured to transition directly from courses to practica. In addition, teacher candidates are not allowed to contact their associate teachers ahead of time and find out what materials will be covered during their placement.

TC 5: You are just thrown there, and associate teachers want to see everything prepared, but you only have two days to prepare for the whole month.

As the second reason for this struggles, teacher candidates outlined inadequate training on how to prepare a lesson plan for their teachables.

TC 6: You were just given a sheet with components that go into it and were told to do it. There are no any kinds of explanations how to do it, why you do it.

Moreover, candidates claimed that an additional stressor in their struggles with practicum preparation is the evaluative nature of the practicum component.

**Teaching practice.** Actual teaching in a classroom was described as one of the most challenging tasks during practica. Almost all teacher candidates explained metaphorically that they had to juggle many balls in the air at the same time. They were able to experience that teaching meant much more than mere delivery of information and included a number of different elements that needed to work in synchrony. Below is only one example.

TC 7: Going into a classroom that is not yours and being challenged by students, and knowing how to assert yourself, not in a powering way but just knowing when to show students I am the one in charge but not stepping on the toes of the associate teacher.

Moreover, teacher candidates said that they had problems with classroom management, creating meaningful assessment tools, projecting voice, and connecting with students.
**Associate teachers.** In addition to experiencing struggles with preparing for and teaching in practicum, individuals who can make these struggles either easier or more difficult are associate teachers. In this thematic section, I only describe the depictions of associate teachers that were perceived as problematic. Candidates talked about different teaching styles and relational dynamics of associate teachers. They did not describe them necessarily as negative but rather difficult to follow or fit into. Others said that their associate teachers did not provide enough mentoring or support, or that some teacher had extremely high expectations. There were teacher candidates who mentioned their own or examples of their peers who had to change their practicum placement because of the serious problems with associate teachers. However, there was one interviewee who regardless of having issues with the associate teacher decided not to leave her placement. First, she wanted to have a reference from that particular school because it was perceived as desirable, and second she was unwilling to speak openly about the issues because of the power differential. This is how she perceived it:

TC 8: Your experience can depend on who this teacher is, how positive they are, how eager they are to teach. I observed some terrible teaching practices, disrespecting students, using derogatory terms, sexist comments, lack of planning . . . what I saw was shocking. And the whole time I had to act as if it was fine because I was there to get a good assessment from that teacher.

While discussing challenges with associate teachers, one candidate indicated that there are not special procedures or criteria that associate teachers have to fulfill in order to become mentors. According to the candidate, this might be one reason for why some associate teachers are incompetent mentors and sources of struggles for some teacher candidates.

**Mental health and emotionality.** At the end of the struggle theme, I ought to mention that issues related to mental health were only observed in other teacher candidates by a few interviewees. They briefly noted instances of anxiety and depression and inappropriate emotional reactivity such as crying and extreme anger by some of their peers.
Support Systems and Help Seeking Behaviours

Peers and family. Almost all teacher candidates had trustworthy peers with whom they would consult about their struggles. Some of them indicated that they had a bigger group of several people that would meet every week and serve as a support group. All teacher candidates stated that peer support was crucial for them and that it was mutual and sincere. A few candidates mentioned that they also used their romantic partners as a source of support.

Supportive instructors. Most teacher candidates felt well supported by their instructors. Every person said that they had at least a few instructors who were very encouraging, understanding, and caring.

TC 6: I felt that all my instructors were very supportive and had a lot of confidence in us. They all made clear that they were there for us to help us with any difficulties.

The following are only some examples of the means of help and support generously offered by instructors: assistance with assignments, flexibility with deadlines, consideration for extenuating circumstances, referral to student services, expression of general care, advising, and sharing of personal stories. Some teacher candidates mentioned that they had very supportive and resourceful associate teachers who helped them a lot during practicum.

Student Services. There were divided opinions about the support offered by the Student Services. Some candidates utilized their help for resume writing, preparing for job interviews and practicum, and expressed a lot of satisfaction with those services. However, there were a few students who said they were not supported by the Student Services when they had serious struggles, with one candidate stating the following:

TC 8: They don't understand what their role is and how dependent teacher candidates are on the information that they deliver. It can have implications on our professional life.
Recommendations

Teacher candidates had similar recommendations for the program improvement to those of the instructors, with the exception of some that directly pertained to them.

**Collaboration among instructors.** Like instructors’ suggestions in Stage 1, teacher candidates urged instructors and the program to know exactly what is taught in each course in order to avoid unnecessary repetition and increase the connection between courses.

TC 5: I think instructors should communicate together and there should be a general plan rather than each professor being on their own. There should be more cohesion between different professors, which would make the whole program more cohesive.

**Improved communication.** Teacher candidates indicated that they would like to have better communication with the program, especially when problems and conflicts arise with their instructors and associate teachers. They also expressed that they would like their voice to be heard more often.

TC 2: Just offering teacher candidates to express their feelings, the way I am right now with you. It would be good to not let these feelings sit with teacher candidates but to express them and make a really good change in the program

**Structural changes.** There were a variety of recommendations for structural changes that would involve reconfiguring the program, academic changes, policy changes, etc. Among many ideas, candidates advocated for increasing the program to two years, adding a third practicum placement or a few days to each existing practicum, integrating two to three weeks of volunteering in a community setting into the program, and having a longer break between courses and practicum. There were also suggestions regarding course curriculum changes, decreasing class sizes, bringing more experienced instructors from the field, having more flexible class schedules, increasing the availability and accessibility of support and resources during practicum placement, and decreasing the ratio of teacher candidates to practicum supervisors.
Mature teacher candidates indicated that creating a group of mature students only for certain courses would be helpful because they would have more things in common and would perhaps have different ways of covering course material and carrying out discussions. For instance, one teacher candidate said that they would not have to spend too much time learning about professionalism but could instead allocate that time to acquiring other skills.

There were also mentions of policies, standards of teaching, and accountability. One candidate summarized it in a couple of sentences.

TC 10: I think there should be interviews, smaller numbers admitted into the program, test for accountability, defined curriculum, clear standards. I think that instructors should maybe be observed and be held more accountable.

**Professional development.** Because the big concern of all teacher candidates was finding employment, some of them expressed a need for more professional development in the form of networking, workshops, and tutorials.

TC 2: The faculty should be sharing more with us, maybe having more speakers or new teachers.

**Social support events.** A few candidates recommended that the program organize informal social events, where teacher candidates from different cohorts can meet and exchange positive and negative experiences, discuss challenges, and make new acquaintances. They suggested a student lounge or library as a gathering place and weekly or biweekly frequency of social events.

TC 4: If the program gives opportunities to discuss things in informal settings, to gather opinions, to be part of solutions rather than problems, then the change can happen.

**Program**

Based on their experiences and observations in the program, teacher candidates wanted to share some of their opinions and complaints. Although I did not specifically ask them to comment on the program, they felt that the interviews were an opportunity to express their
dissatisfactions. They thought that some struggles were the product or inheritance of the program.

*Inconsistencies.* There were different reasons why the program was deemed as inconsistent and somewhat chaotic by teacher candidates. First, as already noted, teacher candidates found the lack of curriculum cohesion and essence quite problematic.

TC 7: I think the quality among instructors is different across the board depending on your subject area or on what that instructor brings to the table. I’ve heard some pretty glaring problems in terms of the instructors and their quality.

Second, some teacher candidates pointed out a serious discrepancy between instructions about teaching received in courses and the institution’s mission statement on knowledge and teaching.

TC 9: The problem with the ITE program is that we were told how we should be teaching, but the model we were given was actually contradictory to program’s mission statement.

TC 7: If we are supposed to infuse our curriculum with certain themes, then a lot of our courses should be infused with the same.

Third, teacher candidates observed that the program’s strong commitment to social justice and diversity was not embraced and well demonstrated by some instructors. Some candidates said that the diversity of opinions was not respected.

TC 10: It was quite a political environment, as if they had a political agenda. It was ironic because they talk about being open. There was a heavy focus on equity, and of course equity is important. But there are times when it becomes a little bit gray whether with hiring practices, scholarships, etc. And if one wanted to debate on it, and it was not in line with instructor or the feeling of the program, it was not as open of a space anymore. There were times when I wasn’t feeling comfortable to offer my opinion on a given topic.

With respect to this issue, teacher candidates noted some instructors’ tendencies to limit the discussion of social issues to only one group. For example, an instructor might discuss the history of racial discrimination in schooling, but be reluctant to discuss discrimination based on gender. Also, a couple of teacher candidates who belong to visible minority groups said that they felt that some of their peers were unfairly blamed and made to feel guilty because of seeming to belong to the visible majority.
Policies. Teacher candidates also had strong opinions on different policies in the program. Some were questioning the validity of the admission process and did not understand why applicants with certain personality issues or with the lack of specific skills were accepted into the program. The following excerpts illustrate it well:

TC 3: I don’t know how these people get in, what they write on their profile questions, and I don’t know what they are going to be like in a classroom, but some of them scare me severely.

TC 7: I think that the program takes for granted that as a teacher candidate you have certain skills and that you can take in knowledge and teach it, distill it for students. But if you are going to teach a specific subject, you do need to be an expert in your area to some extent.

Some candidates questioned the lack of initiative and policies that would counsel out teacher candidates who are not expressing interest or ability to succeed in the program. Many mentioned policies that allow students to skip classes and hand in late assignments for no particular reason.

TC 2: I am not sure if policies are in place, but if a teacher candidate is showing zero interest in student learning and in furthering their development as a teacher, I believe that they should be asked to leave, or maybe given a warning that this is a very serious profession. And if they cannot handle the beginnings of it, they should think about their professionalism.

TC 5: Someone who does get things done on time can become frustrated because you see people not coming to classes and getting the exact same grade as you do.

In addition, there were particular program policies that directly impacted two of my interviewees. One policy matter pertained to being allowed to teach only one subject per practicum. This presented a problem for a teacher candidate who had a rare subject as one teachable that was not offered in the assigned school. The candidate had to accept to teach a subject that was in the same discipline as the original teachable but had very different content.

The second policy issue was also related to practicum and had a big impact on one candidate. There is a policy that states that a teacher candidate can miss no more than four days of practicum. My interviewee missed six days due to hospitalization and wanted to make up for the
two additional days but was not allowed by the program. Instead the program required the
candidate to defer the first practicum and complete it at the end of the program.

Both candidates whose program experiences were directly altered by program policies
acknowledged that the policies needed to be in place but that in their case there was no flexibility
observed with some other policies.

Standards. As a byproduct of candidates’ dissatisfaction with policies and program
inconsistencies, many of them questioned professional standards in the program and perceived
them to be at a much lower level than initially expected from such a reputable teacher
preparation program. The accumulation and interaction of certain problems, struggles, dynamics,
and organizations lead many teacher candidates to believe that they did no receive the education
that a well trained teacher candidates deserves. In addition they felt that the value of their degree
was diminished because of some policies and the lack of accountability in the program allowed
many of their unqualified peers to “get away” with a lot of things and successfully complete the
program.

Impact of Struggles and Perceptions of Teaching

All of the interviewed teacher candidates saw struggles as opportunities for professional
development and learning. Although they admitted having some negative experiences and
struggling in the program, most of them thought it was a path they had to walk toward becoming
a successful teacher. They estimated that struggles would persist or even increase in the first few
years of teaching.

TC 3: The struggles will help me and impact me because I will be able to grow from everything.
And I hope that I will be learning. There will be a lot of struggles when I become a teacher,
maybe even worse ones than I experienced in the program.
Most teacher candidates who participated in this study were well acquainted with the demands of teaching, had realistic expectations and healthy attitudes toward teaching and thus perceived a certain amount of struggles as an integral part of becoming a teacher. However, they speculated that struggles could have negative impact and consequences on those candidates who do not anticipate any difficulties in teaching. Teacher candidates mentioned that many of their peers have unrealistic perceptions about the profession, which was also confirmed by many of the interviewed instructors.

TC 2: I think that teacher candidates should definitely be reminded that this is a vocation for which you have to be mentally, physically, and psychologically prepared every day.

Instructors’ Responses to Struggles

According to teacher candidates’ opinions and observations, instructors perceived struggles as temporary challenges that could be overcome with proper supports. Candidates said that they only received reassurance from instructors and never sensed that instructors saw them as unsuccessful because of struggles.

TC 5: They definitely talk how struggles can be fixed. No professor has ever said, if you do this, you will fail. I don’t think that any professor every mentioned the word failing. They were telling us this is how you get through this rewrite it, and we will give you another chance.

It is important to mention that despite all complaints, struggles, and negative experiences, almost all teacher candidates mentioned that the program itself was not extremely challenging, that overall they had more positive than negative experiences, and that from the perspective of a teacher candidate who will be graduating from the program in less than a month, all struggles and problems do not appear as dramatic as they initially did.

Please note that the results were presented according to the stages in which the research inquiry took place. Although data sources of a mixed-methods sequential study could be integrated at different stages and in several different ways (Yin, 2006), I refrained from
integrating the data in this section and instead chose to textually present “side-by-side comparisons” of results for the sake of the clear and parsimonious organization (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007). However, the data and results will be integrated in the discussion by connecting findings from all three stages and using them to respond to the five major study objectives (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007). In particular, the combination of results from all three stages will be used to address the first and second study objective, the integrated findings from Stages 1 and 3 will be used for responding to the third and fifth objective, and the results from Stage 1 will mainly be utilized in answering the fourth objective.
CHAPTER 5. DISCUSSION

In this chapter, I will combine the results from all three study-stages and move beyond the descriptive analysis to address the study’s research objectives. Furthermore, I will devote attention to discussing incidental findings of this study that may be as important as the answers to major study objectives. In the end, I will offer suggestions and ways in which the findings can be implemented not only for the purpose of struggle prevention but also for improving teacher education programs.

I will organize the discussion by addressing the five study objectives from the beginning of the paper. In order to provide an in-depth response to each objective and answer all salient questions related to struggles, I will also include subsections and subthemes within each objective. Because factors related to struggles are interrelated, it is very difficult to isolate them from each other. For this reason, you may note that when addressing one objective I will touch upon others and that discussion and analysis of certain issues may be spread throughout the entire chapter.

Objective 1: To construct a typology of behaviours and conditions linked to teacher candidates’ struggles

To a large extent, this objective has been addressed in the previous chapter by the classification and detailed depiction of struggles. In addition, I provided a summarized version of the struggle typology in Table 1. The findings indicated that teacher candidates exhibited quite a large range of behaviours and conditions that they expressed as or linked to struggles. For example, some struggles were manifested as feelings of anxiety, anger, discomfort, or confusion, whereas others were displayed as lack of skills for performing specific tasks, or as inappropriate
words and actions toward others. There were also struggles that were completely external to teacher candidates such as financial problems or lack of employment. Some struggles appeared to be only course or practicum related, some occurred in certain stages of the program, while others lasted throughout the program. These findings correspond well with the definition of struggles at the beginning of the paper, where I suggested that the manifestation of struggles could take multiple forms such as psychological, cognitive, emotional, situational, etc. By using this definition I also recognized that struggles (their causes and manifestations) might be internal or external to a teacher candidate, which will be discussed in one of the upcoming sections.

Whether used as a noun, verb or in its adjectival form, most struggles in the study were described in a dynamic context of striving to overcome an obstacle, to learn something new, to adjust to the unknown, to effectively deal with a problematic situation, to complete the program, and to further one’s personal and professional development.

From the counts of the code occurrences in the qualitative analyses, mental health, psychological and emotional problems were most frequently mentioned by instructors (32 times), whereas the lack of course substance and busy work were the most frequent mentions of teacher candidates (10 times). It is important to note that instructors tended to cover more details and emphasize problematic struggles, which probably resulted in the overall higher code counts. However, just because certain types of struggles were mentioned more frequently does not necessarily mean that those struggles were more difficult for teacher candidates. The findings from Stage 1 and Stage 2 indicated mental health problems and lack of self awareness were considered the most difficult struggles by instructors because they could seriously impair candidates’ progress in the program and formation as a teacher. Having said this, it is important to note that instructors in Stage 2 differed in their perspectives regarding the seriousness and
prevalence of certain struggles. To teacher candidates, struggles that occurred during or were related to practicum were perceived as most problematic. However, they were hesitant to classify one type of struggle as the most difficult because each struggle was experienced as difficult at the time of its occurrence. This is an indication that it is challenging to compare different types of struggles and to judge which ones are more or less difficult because only the person experiencing a struggle knows its ‘true’ intensity.

Because of the above reasons, it would be helpful to revisit the definitional properties of struggles and offer a few additional expressions that might be labeled as struggles by some, but perhaps have slightly different connotations. Although I used the term struggles throughout the paper and so did my participants in their interviews, some instances that teacher candidates described as struggles could perhaps be labeled more accurately as temporary tensions or pressures. For instance, a minor disagreement between a teacher candidate and an instructor on how to introduce a new lesson to students could be considered a temporary tension that does not produce a serious or long-lasting struggle. However, frequent conflicts about how to develop and deliver a lesson plan and assessment tools could be much more than a minor tension and cause a teacher candidate to struggle throughout the practicum. Let us consider another example; family responsibilities may create a pressuring situation for a teacher candidate and a momentary difficulty to meet a tight deadline. However, a long divorce process may lead a teacher candidate to miss a number of classes and deadlines and to seriously struggle to keep up with the demands of the program. Tensions and pressures may arise for different reasons and at different time points in the program, but if they are fairly inconsequential and temporary, they might or might not be considered ‘struggles’. When these tensions and pressures, however, persist or result in more serious difficulties or endanger teacher candidates’ progress, they gain a property of
struggles as described at the beginning of this study. These definitional variations are only offered as propositions, and I leave it up to the reader’s discretion to determine which specific situations and conditions could be considered actual struggles, which could be their variations, and which ones could be classified as struggle antecedents and catalysts.

Although in Table 1 and Result Section I organized types of struggles based on descriptions and classifications offered by instructors and teacher candidates, I will now classify different properties of struggles based on the multitude of ways in which they could be studied, partitioned, understood, and related to teacher candidates. Some struggle properties and phenomena in this hierarchical diagram have already been discussed, whereas others will be discussed in the remaining of the paper. Some are analyzed in a great detail, and others are only mentioned. The diagram may provide a framework for thinking about struggles and remind the reader that almost each type of struggle listed in Table 1 may have a different intensity, duration, manifestation, cause, etc. depending on the combination of its properties, support systems, and teacher candidates’ copying strategies.
**Figure 2.** Different properties of struggles and their classification as they may relate to teacher candidates.

**Positioning Struggles in Bronfenbrenner’s Ecological Model**

One way to better explore and understand struggles and their typology is by positioning them in a contextual system in which they emerge and manifest themselves. Although teacher candidates’ struggles in this paper are mostly analyzed through the prism of the ITE program, it would be valuable to consider other settings as well as mechanisms and processes in those settings that may contribute to the development and appearance of struggles. For this purpose, Bronfenbrenner’s ecological model (1974, 1994) would serve as a useful operational framework because it takes into account multiple environmental layers in which an individual is situated.
(please see Figure 3). Given that struggles of teacher candidates have not yet been mapped onto or studied by using any specific models, I deemed the ecological model as the most suitable for the purpose of this study. The advantage of using Bronfenbrenner’s model to analyze struggles is not only its multilayered structure, but its holistic nature that involves a person, multiple contextual systems around the person, processes that occur in those contexts, time, as well as interaction within and between different layers of the model (Bronfenbrenner, 2005; Tudge, Mokrova, Hatfield, & Karnik, 2009). Although initially intended to explain human development, due to its versatility the ecological approach has also found its use in educational practices, family studies, public health, prevention science, and other fields (e.g., Bronfenbrenner, 1976; Eisenmann et al., 2008; Johnson, 1994; McLeroy, Bibeau, Steckler, & Glanz 1988; Tudge et al., 2009). By using the exhaustive information provided in the interviews, I will attempt to map teacher candidates’ struggles onto different layers of the ecological model.
Figure 3. Graphical representation of Bronfenbrenner’s ecological model, adapted from Eisenmann et al., 2008, published in BMC Public Health.

Beginning from the center of the ecological model, one ought to acknowledge a set of struggles that are attributable to an individual. Please note that I am adapting the model to analyze struggles with respect to teacher candidates and the program, without delving into their development and prior life experiences. I am utilizing the structure of the ecological model without necessarily using all theoretical premises related to the model. Based on the study data, it seems that mental health, psychological and emotional problems, lack of self awareness, problems with adjustment, and disabilities are related directly to an individual and are not caused or created by the program. One can certainly speculate about exact sources of these issues, but I am basing my mapping solely on the statements provided by the study participants.

The next set of struggles should be mapped to the first level of Bronfenbrenner’s model, which is called microsystem. This system represents a person’s immediate surrounding and his
or her direct interactions within these surroundings. In the case of teacher candidates, salient structures in the microsystem would be family, program, instructors, and peers. Accordingly, I placed family circumstances, work load and pace, lack of substance and busy work, theory and practice disconnect, associate teachers, practicum preparation, classroom management, program standards, policies and inconsistencies as struggles that emerge in and belong to the microsystem.

However, certain struggles that could be classified as belonging in the program (microsystem) could also be attributed to the teacher candidate. They are lack of professionalism, teaching practice, misconceptions about teaching, group work, and conflicts in the program. The reason why I chose to position these struggles between the individual and the microsystem is that they could originate in both or in the interaction between the teacher candidate and the program. For instance, misconceptions about teaching could be attributed to teacher candidates whose responsibility is to learn about the demands of teaching prior to entering the program. On the contrary, one can argue that it is also the program’s responsibility to inform teacher candidates and present a realistic picture about the teaching profession. As another example, let us consider conflicts with peers and instructors. On the one hand, conflicts could arise because some teacher candidates are argumentative or disrespectful toward others. On the other hand, they could also be the consequence of instructors’ rigidity and lack of acknowledgment and openness to candidates’ opinions. The same could be said for the lack of professionalism, teaching practice, and group work – they might reside in the teacher candidate but could also be present in the program or instructors.

The second environmental level named mesosystem consists of interactions between different elements of the microsystem. In this case, I cannot position any particular struggle in
the mesosystem but could speculate about tensions caused by the interaction between the teacher candidate’s family and program. For example, work load and pace of the program may contribute to teacher candidates not attending to their family responsibilities or to neglecting their friends. In the same way, family circumstances can interfere with candidates’ practicum preparation or assignment completion. Please note that in this context the mesosystem does not serve for the positioning of struggles but rather as a dynamic zone that allows for and explains how different elements of the microsystem can impact each other.

The third level – exosystem – consists of interactions between a person’s microsystem and other systems in which the person is not directly involved (e.g., government, community organizations, extended family, mass media, etc.). In this level, one can place certain program policies that resulted as an interaction between the program and the government bodies. For example, the Ministry of Education determines the number of teacher candidates admitted into the program each year. Teacher candidates believe that the number is too high and contributes to the limited job opportunities. Financial struggles are also part of the exosystem because they are partly determined by the factors in one’s immediate environment and decisions made at the government level.

The highest level – macrosystem – is constructed of cultural norms, values, beliefs, general knowledge, and lifestyles that impact all other levels of the ecosystem. One particular struggle that could be mapped onto this level is cultural and language barriers experienced by teacher candidates who are not familiar with the norms of the Canadian culture and its educational system. This struggle with cultural unfamiliarity would not only refer to foreigners and recent immigrants but also to individuals who were raised in Canada but were perhaps immersed in and strongly influenced by subcultures of their origin or grew up in a rural area with
limited cultural diversity. In addition, some struggles from other levels can also fit in the macrosystem. Whether struggles display themselves at the individual or program level, they can be part of the macrosystem if they result from differing perceptions and beliefs about cultural, educational, and professional norms. For example, a teacher candidate’s conflict with an experienced associate teacher can be caused by the clash between traditional and modern beliefs about teaching, learning, and professional behaviour.

Bronfenbrenner (1979) also defined a fifth level called chronosystem that is supposed to capture changes that occur over time in all systems and in a person. The time reference used in this study is the duration of the ITE program. Teacher candidates talked about their recent struggling experiences that occurred in the last nine months of their lives. They experienced some struggles at certain points in the program but also mentioned ongoing struggles that they believe would persist for the first few years of teaching. However, instructors’ description of struggles was more from an aerial view, capturing struggles of different groups of teacher candidates encountered over a long period (from 4 to 20 years).

The understanding and interpretation of struggles at different layers of Bronfenbrenner’s ecological system may depend on whether one takes a standpoint of an individual or institutional discourse. If teacher candidates’ discourse is considered, than the focus would be on their emotions and cognitions about struggles and attempts to resolve them while maintaining and negotiating personal and professional relations and keeping up with the expectations and requirements of the institutional discourse. In this case, most of the proposed solutions would probably focus on helping an individual teacher candidate in their experience of struggles. If, however, one takes a stance of institutional discourse, personal experience of teacher candidates becomes marginal and the emphasis shifts towards the program and instructors, who take all
possible steps to ensure that the struggles are prevented or minimized. In this case, the solution would probably be seen in program policies, organization, and instructors’ training and delivery of the prescribed curriculum.

**Professionalism and Professional Socialization**

One salient issue that was presented throughout this paper and that poses a struggle in various levels of the ecological system is the perception of professionalism. In Chapter 1, I provided definitions of professionalism and described why this concept is of crucial importance for future teachers. The interviewed teacher candidates did not personally have a problem with embracing professional conduct, but they expressed that some of their classmates did. Instructors mentioned it a lot in their narratives and noted that the lack of professionalism is a serious struggle experienced by some teacher candidates. They were very vocal about some candidates not understanding or not accepting professionalism as an integral component of teaching and teacher identity. It also seemed that instructors already had predetermined notions of what a successful teacher should be and how he or she should act. Part of the reason why some issues related to professionalism and teaching escalate into struggles may be due to perceptual, attitudinal, or perhaps ideological differences between instructors and teacher candidates.

In order to broaden the investigation of this matter, it would be useful to look into the concept of professional socialization. Socialization by itself has been described as the acquisition of knowledge, skills, values and behaviours in the context of a person’s social environment and culture (Harper-Simpson, 1967; Merton, 1957; Weidman, Twale, & Stein, 2001). The process of socialization is considered crucial for the development of one’s identity and social roles (e.g., Adams & Jones, 1983; Erikson, 1959; Mead, 1934). Moving a step further, professional socialization is defined as the process by which a person learns about and accepts the norms,
attitudes, behaviours, and roles of a specific profession (Creasia & Parker, 2007). Although, a large body of literature on professional socialization stems from nursing and social work, the findings could also be applicable to the teaching profession. Because professional socialization is a complex process, it has been studied from multiple perspectives.

First, let us imagine a hypothetical scenario of a teacher candidate who is enrolling into the ITE program, who has already been socialized into society in a specific way and who has a set of beliefs and expectations about the program, instructors, and teaching. This person may hold a strong belief that education should be used to provide opportunities and empower children, especially those of lower socio economic status. However, most instructors and associate teachers may focus on professional conduct, lesson planning, classroom management, and report card preparation without putting too much emphasis on how to teach for social change.

This situation could be analyzed through the prism of sociological research on professional socialization. Lai and Lim (2012) explained that every professional group has standards and values that dictate both individual and professional behaviours and beliefs. In addition, a person enters a professional role by interacting with other members of the profession and by identifying with that role through modeling and negotiation (Creasia & Parker, 2007). Each profession has an agent or agents who initiate and aid in socialization (Teschendorf & Nemshick, 2001). If one were to apply this to teacher education, ITE programs and teacher communities have a set of specifically defined professional standards and recommendations as well as unwritten rules and values. Many teacher candidates do enter into a role of a teacher by observing, interacting with, and modeling their instructors and mentor teachers (agents of socialization), who in turn are supposed to possess complete information about the profession
and be able to convey them properly (Teschendorf & Nemshick, 2001). Furthermore, there are structural and cultural factors that impact how a person socializes into a profession (Grodzki, 2011; Lai & Lim, 2012). For teacher candidates, structural factors would be education legislation, Ministry documents, school policies, etc., whereas cultural factors would entail ideological or stereotypical beliefs about teaching.

Going back to the hypothetical scenario presented earlier, program instructors who emphasize certain skills and concepts in their teaching may be doing so in accordance with the professional standards, curriculum, and their beliefs about the profession. Instructors may think that teacher candidates will easier socialize into the profession if they internalize certain skills and behaviours and replicate them in a classroom. In addition, based on their teaching experience and knowledge about the education system, some instructors may insist on specific ways and techniques of professional socialization believing that they would be most useful to teacher candidates. However, the candidate from this example may accept some guidance and suggestions from the educators but may still choose to embrace a somewhat different idea of professionalism and professional role that is based on his or her life experiences, cultural, and personal beliefs. This in turn may create grounds for conflicts and develop into a struggle for the teacher candidate.

Lai and Lim (2012) argued that the purpose of professional socialization for nursing students is to develop professional identity. According to them, the process begins by replacing students’ predetermined values with the established values of the nursing profession. The acceptance of new values then reshapes students’ behaviours, which results in changes of self-concept and in the establishment of a professional identity. This sounds like a preplanned formula of professional socialization with the aim of developing desired nursing personnel.
Similar processes take place in the field of teacher education. Because teacher education plays a vital role in the training of future teachers, teacher preparation programs bear a lot of responsibility in preparing students to become successful and competent teachers (Darling-Hammond & Bransford, 2005; Gambhir, Broad, Evans, & Gaskell, 2010; Kukla-Acevedo, Streams, & Toma, 2009). In order to socialize teacher candidates into professional teacher roles, programs need to teach them knowledge, skills, and behaviours characteristic of effective teachers (Collinson, 1999; Darling-Hammond, 2006; Darling-Hammond & Bransford, 2005). Each ITE program in Canada clearly outlines professional standards and policies defined by professional institutions and legislative bodies, which specify professional and legal behaviours and responsibilities of a teacher (e.g., Ontario College of Teachers, 2010). In addition, programs have mission statements and documents that indicate learning outcomes for teacher candidates as well as expectations of their professional conducts. The ITE program that provided data for this study allows instructors to choose instructional methods and means of integrating the program expectations into their courses. The program also supplies a document with suggestions and tips to teacher candidates on how to best prepare for their role as future professionals. This is an indication that professional socialization is initiated implicitly at the beginning of the program and expected to be carried out throughout the program by teacher educators.

Based on instructors’ opinions from this study and available literature (Waugaman & Lohrer, 2000), the purpose of professional socialization for teacher candidates is also to accept the professional standards and norms as part of their teacher identity in order to be successful teachers in a classroom. Instructors in this study said that teacher candidates need to know how to behave professionally before going into the work force. They expressed that they convey this to teacher candidates in their teaching and also by describing their personal experiences as
former teachers. As already mentioned, it seemed from instructors’ statements that teacher candidates who behave in accordance with the profession codex and fit into the prototype of a ‘good’ teacher were perceived as successful by their educators.

However, during the professional socialization process teacher candidates may experience struggles for multiple reasons. Based on the current data, some teacher candidates accept and truly believe in the idea of professionalism being presented to them, and thus attempt to fulfill those professional expectations. They may experience some technical struggles in the process but no ideological discrepancies. There is a second group of teacher candidates who have one set of expectations and professional beliefs that they hold throughout the program, but learn how to modify their behaviours to meet the expected standards without necessarily expressing their genuine attitudes. They may experience both technical and ideological struggles because they believe one thing but do another. As some interviewed candidates expressed it, they do and say what their instructors want to see and hear for the sake of completing the program, almost as if they play some type of a professional and institutional game. In this process, nonetheless, some teacher candidates could experience cognitive dissonance, which may lead them to change their attitudes in order to decrease the conflicting state in their minds (Festinger, 1957). This is the process that some researchers argue happens in students during the professional preparation program, which in their opinion may result in a positive outcome (e.g., Lai & Lim, 2012).

A third group of teacher candidates may be characterized as those candidates whose beliefs and expectations differ from some of the mainstream professional norms but who are not willing to compromise their beliefs and thus refuse to undergo the process of socialization in the conventional way. These teacher candidates might not struggle with their ideology but may struggle with following professional recommendations and may have open conflicts with
instructors or associate teachers. Teacher candidates who belong to this group may be perceived by most instructors as struggling individuals who are not well suited for teaching and who are unsuccessful teacher candidates and thus very likely unsuccessful future teachers.

According to the interview statements, some instructors are certain that their experiences as teachers, instructors, coordinators, counsellors, and school administrators enable them to correctly assess whether a teacher candidate will be a successful future teacher. Perhaps some of these estimates are accurate and warranted because there may be teacher candidates whose ideas about the teaching profession are very different and distant from the actual requirements teaching. Besides, it is reasonable to assume that no one knows the profession better than former teachers.

However, what happens with teacher candidates whose beliefs and ideas about professionalism are different from the conventional ones but who would nonetheless be very effective and functional in a classroom? What if some instructors do not view their role to be producing holistic teachers who are socially aware, self reflective, critical agents (Hubball, Collins & Pratt, 2005; Gambhir, Broad, Evans, & Gaskell, 2010)? Although the majority of instructors are professionally socialized to teach differential learning, social justice and diversity in education, they may fail to notice that some of their students are advocating for those concepts in practice but in a different way from the usual one.

The answer to the above questions can easily necessitate a separate dissertation, but it is important to consider them as programmatic or structural problems that may seriously impact not only the emergence but also the perception and definition of struggles. Will teacher candidates who seem to struggle with the understanding of professional conduct indeed be incompetent teachers or would the whole struggle diminish if teacher educators modified their notions of
professionalism and became more open to alternative approaches? Similar to some of the interviewed instructors, Lai and Lim (2012) argued that students who do not internalize professional values would struggle with adjustment in their work placement and would have difficulties finding a job if their attitudes are different from the mainstream professional community. However, Teschendorf and Nemshick (2001) noted that students may struggle with the acceptance of certain professional behaviours and acknowledged the paradox between professional subordination and educational ideas of independency and critical thinking. This study cannot give a definite answer to the questions about professional socialization but can initiate discussion and inspire the reader to carefully consider the phenomenon of struggles in the context of teacher professionalism – what it means and who defines it – when making inferences from this and similar studies.

Objective 2: To learn about available supports and actions taken by program instructors, program staff, and teacher candidates to alleviate struggles

The results of this study indicate that program instructors and staff attempt to be very supportive of teacher candidates and help them deal with struggles. In the interviews, instructors described not only what steps they take when struggles arise but also how they incorporate struggle prevention strategies into their curriculum. Because instructors witnessed a variety of struggles differing in duration and intensity, they seem to be well equipped to assist teacher candidates in an instructor’s capacity. By utilizing their professional and pedagogical knowledge, and by learning through experience and observation, instructors appeared to know what intervention strategies usually worked in specific situations and when it was necessary to refer candidate to other sources of help. Teacher candidates confirmed that their instructors were a great source of help, and despite the fact that many expressed dissatisfaction with some
instructors and their pedagogical approaches, every teacher candidate mentioned at least a couple of instructors who were supportive and understanding in times of struggles.

In addition, both instructors and teacher candidates also referenced an array of assistance offered by the Student Services and Accessibility Services, with counselling services being most frequently mentioned. However, instructors and staff from the Student Services indicated a need for increasing counselling services with the possibility of having specialized counsellors for different types of struggles. When struggling, most teacher candidates are self-initiators in seeking help, but instructors also tend to approach teacher candidates who appear to struggle and offer help and referrals.

Peers were also referenced as a very important support not only in this study but also in other research. Hsu (2005) reported that more than 40% of teacher candidates in practicum seek help from their peers, 25% from family and friends, and only 2% ask associate teachers for help. He thus suggested that ITE programs can create strong cohorts and peer support groups as useful support tools. This is precisely what teacher candidates from this study suggested, indicating that more frequent informal interactions and exchange of ideas with other teacher candidates would provide psychological support and possible coping strategies and solutions for commonly encountered struggles. With regard to peer support in practicum, researchers found that placing more than one teacher candidate in the same school increases peer support and teacher candidates’ satisfaction (Bullough et al., 2002).

Inseparable from the existing support systems were recommendations of what could be added to the program or modified in order to improve its functioning and alleviate certain struggles. Most instructors indicated that they strongly believe that, within its resources, the ITE program is doing everything it can to support teacher candidates who struggle. However, they
expressed that because of the large number of teacher candidates in the program (over 1200) and the limited support systems, there is always room for improvement and expansion. It is noteworthy that teacher candidates’ recommendations for program improvement were almost identical with those of their instructors. This indicates that, despite other differences, both instructors and teacher candidates have the similar perceptions of the gaps in support in the program and directions for improvement. Perhaps the suggested means of implementing the desired changes would be different for the two groups, but that would be the topic of a separate study.

Without discussing every recommendation separately (refer to the previous chapter), I will summarize them as suggestions that every ITE program could take and implement depending on its needs, goals, and resources. I divided the recommendations into two general categories: actions that can be taken prior to the enrolment of new teacher candidates, and those that can be taken during the program.

In the category of prior actions recommended to be taken by the program are: implementing a series of structural changes in curriculum and organizational domains in order to increase program cohesion; improving communication with teacher candidates prior to their enrolment (e.g., informing them about the demands of the program); and anticipating certain struggles and being prepared to effectively deal with them. Having certain changes and support measures available ahead of time may eliminate, reduce, or minimize some types of struggles.

The summary of suggestions of actions for the program to undertake during courses and practica are: encouraging collaboration among instructors; providing more opportunities for professional development of instructors and teacher candidates; improving and expanding the existing services (e.g., counselling); increasing financial support; and organizing more social
events for teacher candidates. The prior actions may decrease the occurrence or intensity of some struggles, and the actions implemented during the program may ensure that other types of struggles (common during certain phases or among particular groups of teacher candidates) are prevented, decreased and effectively addressed in order to prevent their potential impact on teacher candidates’ progress in the program.

**Objective 3: To juxtapose instructors and teacher candidates’ perceptions of struggles and their impact**

This study is an opportunity for the reader to attempt to understand the experiences of teacher candidates’ struggles from two distinct perspectives. From the instructors’ extensive encounters with different candidates over years, one could learn how struggles are manifested in the program, including courses and practica, thus assembling an external picture of struggles. From the teacher candidates’ narratives one could re-live the struggles and empathize with teacher candidates, obtaining in this way a portion of the internal picture. When taken together, different perspectives and aspects of struggles allow for a construction of a more holistic picture, in which struggles are not observed as isolated instances or individual problems but are examined in relation to multiple agents and factors. These relational properties of struggles will be discussed later in this chapter as a response to the fifth study objective.

Interviewing both instructors and teacher candidates not only allowed for the multi-lens examination of struggles but also provided an opportunity for juxtaposing those lenses. From all of the collected data, it was evident that there was a high degree of corroboration between instructors’ and teacher candidates’ perspectives and opinions on a number of issues. First, the majority of struggles were identified by both groups. As already mentioned, the experiences and details of struggles were somewhat different due to different participatory roles, but the general
identification and classification was the same for some struggles and very similar for others. Second, instructors were correctly informed about types of supports that teacher candidates often use when struggling. Third, the two groups had overlapping suggestions on how to implement additional supports in order to prevent struggles. They also had similar complaints about the program policies and standards, as well as suggestions for program improvements. The converging perspectives and opinions of instructors and teacher candidates in many aspects related to struggles may provide some evidence for the scientific soundness of this study (Guba & Lincoln, 1981) or for its credibility (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In particular, the two different data sources (instructors’ and candidates’ interviews) yielding similar results may represent a form of data triangulation (Denzin, 1978; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Although triangulation is often described as involving multiple sources (Denzin 1978), two different sources of information may provide a more ‘accurate’ representation of reality than only one source (Hoepfl, 1997). In addition, instructors’ survey responses could be taken as the third data source that aids in triangulation because the participants were different instructors from those who were interviewed, and their qualitative responses agreed with those of the other two groups. In addition, Patton (1990) proposed that the richness of data and analytical choices also play a role in determining credibility. Although it may be more reassuring for some readers to encounter a higher degree of information convergence between different groups of participants and in this way perhaps arrive to more parsimonious conclusions, methodology scholars (e.g., Denzin and Lincoln, 1994; Lincoln & Guba, 1985) have warned that reality is a social construction and that multiple realities may exist depending on the perceiver. Thus, research findings from multiple sources or methods do not require convergence to “produce some nicely integrated whole” (Patton, 1980, p. 330).
Some perceptual differences between instructors and teacher candidates were noted with respect to the impact of struggles. A few instructors thought that specific struggles might have a long-term negative and serious impact on candidates’ future performance. Teacher candidates believed that struggles experienced in the program might persist beyond the program and be sources of stress for novice teachers, but that the struggles nonetheless served as learning opportunities and did not pose a great risk for successfully completing the program.

It is interesting to note that some divergence in responses was present not only between teacher candidates and instructors but among different instructors. Although most instructors agreed on the types of struggles and preventative strategies, some instructors had differing opinions on issues related to the communication of struggles, some program policies, and counselling out of unsuccessful students. In addition, instructors’ survey responses varied greatly on the estimation of struggle prevalence among students, but this could be due to different subject areas, cohorts, and divisions (elementary or secondary) that instructors teach.

**Objective 4: To discover what the presence of struggles communicates about the teaching profession**

One of the five main study objectives was to discover what the presence of struggles communicates about the teaching profession. This question can be addressed in a few different ways depending on whose perspective is taken. It would be necessary to emphasize instructors’ perspectives because in most cases program educators are close representatives of the institutional discourse. In addition to already having teaching and/or administrative experiences, instructors know well the expected outcomes of ITE programs in terms of not only explicit criteria but also implicit or tacit assumptions about effective or ‘quality’ teaching and what kinds of behaviours or qualities future teachers should possess. Thus, based on their observations of
teacher candidates’ behaviours and struggles, instructors make assessments of how and to what extent particular struggles may impact the teaching profession. As you were able to read in the Results section, some instructors openly expressed that teacher candidates with certain struggles would not be able to obtain jobs as teachers in public schools. According to the data, the following were the most common reasons for such serious statements: (a) teacher candidates who lack self awareness and understanding of professionalism may not take teaching seriously and would not be able to teach to the expected standards, (b) teacher candidates who have serious mental health problems and who do not follow the prescribed therapy would pose risks to children’s safety in addition to not being able to deliver the prescribed curriculum, (c) teacher candidates with particular types of disabilities or conditions may not be able to physically carry out the demands of teaching and may be frequently absent, causing children to have multiple substitute teachers. Some of the instructors’ interpretations of the potential impact of struggles may be justified by the fact that novice teachers often encounter a number of new challenges in the classroom that need to be successfully negotiated (Ducharme & Ducharme, 1996; van Hover & Yeager, 2004). If, in addition to dealing with the new school environment, novice teachers bring with them unresolved struggles, the initial adjustment period may be much more difficult than usual (Romano, 2008). Given the already high drop out rate in the teaching profession in the US (Boe, Cook, & Sunderland, 2008; Fidel & Haselkorn, 1999), novice teachers with a history of struggles may contribute to the increase in the drop out rate. The latter, however, may not entirely apply to the Ontario context because the percentage of teachers who leave the teaching profession in Ontario is lower than that in the United States (Clark & Antonelli, 2009).

Furthermore, some instructors and teacher candidates believe that certain individuals who did not have any of the above described characteristics or conditions and who progressed well in
the program would not be well suited for the teaching profession because of their personalities. They were not able to point to a specific struggle of those candidates but said that they may not have the social skills required to be teachers and that they would not want their children to be taught by these candidates. Although teacher candidates emphasized that instructors never told them explicitly that they could not be successful teachers because of struggles, instructors did express to me quite strong opinions about specific types of struggles. Are instructors accurate in their perceptions of struggle impacts? Are not they the ones who know what types of teacher are needed in the field, or are their statements only personal opinions that may not be shared by school administrators? Whether instructors as representatives of educational institutions and defenders of professional standards can indeed accurately predict how problematic some struggles may be remains open for discussion and more future research.

It is also important to state that there are instructors who truly believe that teacher candidates who struggle should be extensively supported and that, if adequately helped, almost every struggling teacher candidate could successfully complete the program and become an effective teacher. The message that these instructors are sending is that they are in the program to educate and support teacher candidates in all circumstances and to give additional chances to candidates who need them. From their interviews, it appears that struggles are not detrimental obstacles but opportunities for growth that are to be conquered by the collaboration between instructors, program, and teacher candidates. Despite the strong commitment of the program and instructors to assist struggling candidates, there is a pending question to what degree to support a teacher candidate and when and how to perhaps decide that the best solution for the candidate is to leave the program. Discussion on this matter will be presented later as part of the response to the fifth objective.
Comparing Struggles in this Study with Available Literature

Many struggles that were revealed in this study have to a greater or lesser extent been explored in the research literature, but usually with a focus on one or two struggles per study. For example, lack of content knowledge, lack of pedagogical skills, and lack of professional knowledge and dispositions were all identified as struggles among teacher candidates in the United States by Sobel and Gutierrez (2009) and by Siebert et al. (2006). However, the data in the former study were based on yearly evaluation reports and the latter data were derived from interviews with mentor teachers. The same types of struggles were also found among Taiwanese teacher candidates who themselves reported the seriousness of struggles using a questionnaire form (Hsu, 2005). Furthermore, all three studies were conducted in concurrent programs, which usually include more practicum experience than the consecutive program in this study. All of the above suggest that certain categories of struggles experienced in a classroom are common across different countries and program types, which provides some evidence for the universality of struggles.

There is also literature that verifies the existence of other struggles. For example, many teacher candidates view theory as part of courses and real teaching as something that happens in practicum. Bullock and Christou (2009) suggest this view is not supportive of learning and may lead to struggles for teacher candidates. They also found that the sometimes weak connection between theory and practice courses is not only problematic for teacher candidates but also for teacher educators. They suggested that courses on both theoretical and practical aspects of teaching are integral parts of teacher education and that these aspects should be delivered in a well-planned manner that involves collaboration between instructors and openness to student feedback. Yet another struggle that is not only characteristic of this study is teacher candidates’
misconceptions about the program. Miller (2008) also revealed that teacher candidates are often unaware of the demands, complexities, and problems that are usually experienced in the preparation program.

A struggle common to novice students in all academic programs is adjustment to the program and transition to a new environment (Kyalo & Chumba, 2011). Researchers found that individuals who are psychologically better prepared and aware of the program complexities are generally better adjusted to stressful situations (Pancer, Hunsberger, Pratt, & Alisat, 2000). On the contrary, students who are initially fearful and experience stress and anxiety have more difficult adjustment (Jackson, Pancer, Pratt, & Hunsberger, 2000). This is in agreement with reports of both instructors and teacher candidates in the current study. The interviewed candidates seemed to have adjusted and coped well with their struggles because they were aware of the program demands. However, the instructors expressed a lot of concern for the adjustment of individuals with anxiety and depression.

The descriptions of struggle manifestations in the existing literature were also very similar to those provided by instructors and teacher candidates in this study, which also confirms that documents, faculty members, mentor teachers and teacher candidates can all be valuable sources of data. Each probably brings a different perspective and to the study of struggles, but overall it seems that the level of corroboration is quite high. This observation is based on the few available studies; more research is needed.
Objective 5: To investigate the development and positioning of struggles in an institutional context, accounting for structure, policies, practices, human relations and internal dynamics

This objective has been addressed through discussing other objectivities and examining the interwoven and somewhat complicated nature of struggles – their causes, occurrences, manifestations, and impact. From participants’ interviews, it became apparent that the institutional context, in this case the ITE program with all its components and characteristics, plays a very salient role in understanding, experiencing, preventing, or perhaps aggravating some struggles. In applying Bronfenbrenner’s ecological model (see Figure 2), one could also note that the ITE program and its internal processes and external relations with structures in different layers of the ecological model may affect struggles and their potential impact on teacher candidates’ performance in the program, personal life, and teaching.

When thinking about teacher candidates’ struggles in the institutional context, it is worth examining different elements that constitute the ITE program. I already discussed the human factors of the program: instructors, counsellors, program staff, and peers. In the section to follow, I will expand on the program structure, policies, standards, as well as the institutional discourse and the interactions between the mentioned elements.

Policies, Standards, and Decision-making Responsibilities

Some institutional policies are expressed through mandates such as program requirements, completion deadlines, practicum requirements, etc. Other policies seem to be in place in order to develop capacity-building tools that are meant to aid teacher candidates who might experience struggles in certain domains (e. g., non-evaluative practicum). However, there are some policies that are not very obvious to everyone but that may shape the way in which
struggling students move through the program. What a few interviewed instructors indicated as a problematic issue in their program is the already described policy on supplemental privileges, sometimes falsely perceived as ‘no-fail’ policy. Although the policy is intended to provide teacher candidates with multiple opportunities to succeed in the program, some instructors perceive it as an opportunity for some candidates to evade academic and professional responsibilities.

Many teacher candidates had the same opinion and thought that the policy indirectly allowed for lowering of standards and decreased accountability. One may wonder, how does this relate to teacher candidates’ struggles? Due to the existence of supplemental privileges, some struggling teacher candidates could be passing the program without properly identifying and addressing their struggles. In other words, if a struggling teacher candidate has obtained passing marks in all courses, he or she may not even become aware of the seriousness of the struggle and may never get a chance to resolve it. Just as teacher education programs should invest resources and find most effective ways to help teacher candidates who struggle, programs should also be responsible for aiding candidates in identifying their struggles in order to adequately prepare for the teaching profession. The policy on supplemental privileges may discourage some students who struggle with course work to invest time in mastering it, which in turn may decrease their chances in the long run of becoming successful teachers.

A variety of struggles that may occur in practicum have already been presented, but who should have the final decision making responsibility for passing a student who struggles in practicum is yet to be discussed. It seemed that in the studied program both university instructors and associate teachers are very reluctant to take on full responsibility of acting as gatekeepers. As you already were able to read, some instructors viewed the responsibility of failing an
unsuccessful teacher candidate as a ‘hot potato’. In other words, it is easier to pass it on to someone else than to be directly ‘responsible’ for failing a candidate and ‘destroying’ their plans of becoming a teacher.

However, this is not a problem unique to the studied institution. Other researchers have also found that practicum mentor teachers hesitate to fail a teacher candidate for a number of reasons (Siebert, Clark, Kilbridge, & Peterson, 2006). One mentor teacher in Siebert et al.’s study described her internal struggle about whether she should fail her student, and if so when and how she would do it. Another mentor teacher recognized the responsibility to caution teacher candidates about inappropriate behaviours but also talked about the need to avoid conflict. Yet another teacher questioned herself and her mentoring competency and started to attribute her student’s problems to herself. She admitted that her biggest mistake was that she kept unconsciously encouraging the wrong behaviours. There was also an agreement that the line between a struggling student and someone who is not suited to be a teacher is very thin and that the responsibility in deciding is huge, which was also expressed by some of the instructors in this study.

From the experiences instructors described in my interviews and those of mentor teachers in the referenced study (Siebert et al., 2006), one can notice that some members of both groups question themselves in their role as the gatekeepers to the professional community and judges of whether someone is a ‘good’ teacher or not. Although some instructors in this study expressed strong beliefs that teacher candidates with specific struggles are not suited for teaching and should not obtain a teaching degree, it is difficult to predict whether these instructors would actually fail the mentioned candidates if instructors had the ultimate decision-making power. Even if instructors believe that some struggling teacher candidates should be failed from the
program or practicum, it is uncertain whether they would translate their beliefs to practice, especially given research on discrepancy between attitudes and behaviours (e.g., Wicker, 1969).

It is also worth questioning how much influence should instructors and associate teachers have as the gatekeepers, decision makers, and agents of professional socialization (the latter already discussed). Although in North America instructors and ITE programs may be expected to perform all of these roles, in other continents scholars are questioning and moving away from the concept of gatekeepers who fail unsuccessful teacher candidates and are focusing instead on “more humane, trusting, and respectful” assessment of teacher candidates (Rorrison, 2010, p. 505).

**Individual versus Institutional Discourse**

After presenting how specific structures, elements, individuals, and processes of ITE programs may impact and relate to struggles, it is also pertinent to examine how the ITE program as a holistic unit and as a very important educational institution interacts with individual characteristics of teacher candidates in shaping their experiences of struggles. Every teacher candidate comes to the program with a certain set of expectations and ideas about the program, teaching, and education in general, but every teacher candidate also brings his or her personality and lived experiences to the program. When the well-established institutional discourse intersects with an individual discourse of a teacher candidate, the results of the interaction may vary depending on the similarity between the discourses.

Despite the general belief that teacher candidates easily accept the institutionally prescribed norms and identities for them, Britzman (2003) and Bloomfield (2010) warn that some teacher candidates may experience internal struggles produced by disagreements with the institutional impositions. When I discussed professional socialization, I presented expectations
imposed by instructors; now moving a step further I consider the whole institutional apparatus. By having ITE programs prescribe and promote an institutional model of a ‘good teacher,’ an individual teacher candidate may feel pressured to push his or her emotions in the background (Bloomfield, 2009). Whether teacher candidates are adjusting to the program requirements, attempting to align their beliefs with the program expectations, modifying their beliefs and behaviours, rejecting the dominant discourse, or completely internalizing the prescribed norms, they may experience inner struggles and a certain degree of discomfort with the power imbalance.

In negotiating among the dominant institutional discourse in their university-based ITE program, local school culture in practicum, and instructors’ expectations, teacher candidates often remain silent because they are not given an adequate opportunity to express their emotions, beliefs, and life stories (Bloomfield, 2010). A teacher candidate in Bloomfield’s study (2010) expressed that despite not having any academic struggles, she struggled with the emotional experience of her practicum placement and her inability to fully express herself in the practicum. Teacher candidates in the current study also said that their voice was not heard because their opinions were either ignored or there was no opportunity to express them. Consequently they ended up going along with the dominant discourse in order to successfully complete the program. Although inner struggles of teacher candidates may not surface and may not appear to have any negative impact, it is worth noting that the prevalence of the institutional discourse may diffuse the value that the uniqueness of individual experience may bring to the profession.

Limitations

As the majority of studies in social science, this one is also not without limitations. First, the teacher candidates who accepted to be interviewed might not represent all struggling teacher
candidates. Although all of them experienced struggles, more or less serious, it is probable that teacher candidates who experienced the most difficult and detrimental struggles were not among the participants. For example, instructors talked a lot about mental health and emotional struggles, but none of the interviewed teacher candidates described their own struggles with these issues. It is to be expected that teacher candidates who struggled with very serious issues were not willing to participate or to reveal them in the study. It is also expected that some teacher candidates who struggled had withdrawn from the program before the interviews were conducted. For example, Lin, Zhang and Childs (2012) found that financial problems and workload and pace of the program were among the reasons for teacher candidates’ withdrawal from the program.

Second, only 21 out of over 100 instructors responded to the survey in Stage 2, providing a sample that was too small for the use of any inferential statistics. It remains unknown how other instructors would have responded to the survey and to what extent the variance in responses would have changed. Third, the instructors described and evaluated the seriousness of some struggles based on their perceived notions of the professional standards and expected performance. These notions may or may not be the most accurate reflections of the current standards and practices. Fourth, all my participants came from the same program, which to a certain degree may limit the generalizability or transferability of the findings to some other teacher preparation programs. However, given the similarity in the structure and procedures of consecutive ITE programs in Ontario and Canada as well as the occurrence of similar struggles in other types of ITE programs (e.g., Miller 2008; Sobel & Gutierrez, 2009) and countries (e.g., Hsu, 2005), it would be reasonable to assume that the study findings could be applied to other programs. Although this particular program was used as a case study, the nature of many
struggles and issues described here stem from personal, social, structural, and political factors that affect many individuals, programs, and environments.

**Directions for Future Research**

For future research, it would be interesting to interview associate teachers and ask similar questions about struggles that were asked to instructors, but with the focus on struggles in practicum. This would provide yet additional perspective on struggles and would allow for further triangulation of data using one more group of informants. It would also be helpful to interview some of the program’s directors to find out what they think about struggles and how they develop and execute strategies and programs for struggle prevention. Furthermore, if the currently examined program is changed from a one-year to a two-year program, it would be compelling to conduct a similar study that would examine the presence of struggles, help seeking behaviours and recommendations at the end of both academic years and compare the new findings with the current results. The new study would reveal whether extending the duration of the program would make any difference in terms of the occurrence and intensity of struggles and would also inform us on how teacher candidates perceive the new program structure. Lastly, replicating the study by interviewing instructors and teacher candidates in another similar ITE program would provide more solid grounds for evaluating the transferability of the current results (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).
CHAPTER 6. CONCLUSION

The general aim of this study was to investigate and understand the types, prevalence, and potential impact of teacher candidates’ struggles, their perceived meaning, as well as factors and contexts that may relate to the occurrence of struggles. The inquiry had five study objectives and was carried out in three methodological stages (i.e., qualitative, quantitative, qualitative) with teacher candidates and ITE program instructors, coordinators and counsellors as participants. Based on participants’ description and experiences of struggles, I developed a taxonomy of 19 struggles, 10 of which were identified by both teacher candidates and their educators. The struggles included a wide range of behaviours, emotions, skills, and conditions.

Teacher candidates also disclosed which support systems they use in times of struggles, while instructors explained in which ways they help teacher candidates who struggle. Based on both groups’ interviews, instructors seemed to be viewed as very important sources of support. Both groups also provided valuable recommendations for the program improvements that could aid in struggle prevention and contribute to the overall program cohesion. It is interesting that when juxtaposed teacher candidates’ perspectives and description of struggle types concurred with those of most instructors. However, there were some differences in the perception of struggles between the two groups, especially in terms of the message that struggles may communicate and potential impact that they may have on teacher candidates’ future careers. Teacher candidates thought of struggles as temporary obstacle and as opportunities for learning and professional and personal development. However, some instructors perceived the presence of certain types of struggles as an indication of a teacher candidate’s unsuccessful progression in the program and inability of becoming an effective teacher.
In addition, the study revealed that when studying struggles of teacher candidates one needs to be cognizant of different contexts in which struggles occur, and of how each setting, its characteristics, boundaries, and interpersonal dynamics might influence the development and implications of struggles. The findings also suggested that teacher candidates’ struggles might have many different properties and that these properties and their combinations should be carefully considered in the study of struggles and teacher candidates. Finally, the exploratory investigation of teacher candidates’ struggles and issues related to them produced some incidental findings that could have implications not only for individual teacher candidates but also for ITE program organization, functioning, and policymaking.

In terms of contributions to the current state of knowledge in the area of teacher candidates’ struggles, this study has moved far beyond the existing literature in a number of ways. It systematically identified and classified different types of struggles and provided their detailed description. Analyzing struggles in this way was a big step forward compared to the mere listing of struggles or examination of a few selected ones in the available research. This study allowed the reader not only to learn about the types of struggles but also to gain insights into their causes, nature, seriousness, effects, and so forth. Unlike the previous studies that presented only one perspective, usually that of teacher educators, struggles in this study were analyzed from two points of view: teacher candidates’ and their educators’. This not only allowed for the comparison of similarities and differences in struggle perceptions between teacher candidates and instructors but also revealed how both groups understand the deeper meaning of struggles in relation to the teaching profession, preparedness, and professional conduct. The interviews from both groups also provided grounds for the re-examination of the conventional norms, roles, and professional standards and elicited inquiry for possible changes in
those domains. Lastly, the past research focused largely on the identification and development of support strategies that would remediate struggles and aid teacher candidates in fulfilling the desired program performance outcomes. This study, in addition to offering a range of support strategies, positions struggles in a broader and multilayered context that involves teacher candidates, their educators, the preparation program, its structure and elements, policies, social dynamics, and professional norms and expectations. In this way, the issue of struggles gains complex properties and urges the reader to consider their causes, triggers, consequences, and remediation not only in one group or entity but rather in a combination of individual, institutional, and structural factors (i.e., teacher candidates, educators, ITE programs, support services, policies, professional communities, school boards).

**Implications**

The implications of the study could be multifold. However, I will attempt to provide a few brief suggestions for practical applications of the findings while being certain that the reader will be able to generate many more ideas for implications based on different segments of the results.

**Struggle Prevention and Program Improvements**

In order to adequately help students who struggle, it is essential to first recognize the particular struggles they are experiencing as well as the scope of those struggles, and to then implement appropriate preventative and intervention measures. Opinions, complaints, and suggestions provided by teacher candidates and instructors should not be taken only as a critique of the program but could also serve as a reference point for checking how well the program is accomplishing its goals and fulfilling its mission statement. For example, programs can utilize the results of this study to find out how students and instructors in general perceive the program
cohesion, commitment to certain principles, and program efficacy, just to mention a few items that almost every ITE program has on its list. Although ITE programs may already have specific intervention plans for struggling students (e.g., Pellett & Pellett, 2005), the rich feedback from this study can also be used and incorporated to not only prevent or minimize struggles but to improve the program, its quality and functioning as a whole.

**Policymaking, Responsibility Taking, and Change Initiating**

Going a step further, one may wonder who in an organization should be responsible for providing supports, setting guidelines, making decisions, and reviewing program organization and elements that may contribute to or trigger struggles. One can hold responsible or point to policies, program requirements, services, committees, etc., but the people who comprise the organization are its actors and catalysts. It is rarely one person who is responsible for or who has the power to make all decisions. However, if each individual – instructor, counsellor, program director, support staff, practicum coordinator, registrar – adopts and incorporates a strategy or model for struggle prevention into his or her job description, small individual efforts may make big and significant changes at the institutional level.

In suggesting that individuals who work for and represent an institution should make efforts toward struggle prevention, I do not necessary imply that this be done at the level of their personal discourse or agency but that *individual professional* responsibility and accountability be emphasized and exercised more in the context of the institutional discourse. One should also not overlook teacher candidates’ individual discourse in this context. In the same manner that teacher candidates need to adjust and accept the norms of the dominant discourse, the institution needs to be more considerate of embedding teacher candidates’ discourse into the institution. This in turn may contribute to the advancement of the institutional discourse.
In addition, institutional executives and specific governing bodies who do have some decision-making power could develop and influence internal policies and allocation of resources in order to minimize the impact of certain struggles, improve program functioning, and prevent both short- and long-term negative consequences that certain struggles may produce. In this way some institutional efforts may have an impact at the provincial or national level, especially when teacher candidate become teachers and begin to work in schools. I ought to mention that the examined program in the study has individuals who are very involved and invested into finding new ways and technique for preventing struggles, better supporting teacher candidates, and innovating and improving program features and structure. There are a few specialized teams and boards who are combining knowledge and experiences in order to assist the program in selecting, training, and supporting successful prospective teachers.

**Hearing and Acknowledging Different Voices**

This study not only served as a means for discovering what struggles teacher candidates face and how they cope with them but was also a way of reaching out to teacher candidates and instructors and listening to their problems, complains, praises, and suggestions. Almost all participants expressed their gratitude for participating in the study. Instructors thought that the study was needed and that the findings could be used for practical purposes in the program. They were also personally curious to learn about how their students describe and experience struggles.

Teacher candidates were especially thankful and eager to talk about struggles and their view of other factors related to struggles. They felt valued, and they were glad that their individual discourse finally mattered. In particular, teacher candidates said they wished there were more similar types of studies and also earlier in the program that would allow them to...
express their problems, concerns and suggestions with the hope that certain actions could immediately take effect based on their feedback.

In the end the study may aid scholars, educators, stakeholders, and prospective teacher candidates in understanding why and how teacher candidates struggle, what types of struggles they experience, which struggles are the most serious ones, how long the struggles may last, and most importantly what type of short and long-term impact they may have on teacher candidates, the education system, and perhaps students taught by the teacher candidates. The findings also reveal what the presence of struggles may communicate about ITE programs and teacher candidates and how different groups may interpret those struggles. The reader may use the findings to ponder whether the presence or absence of struggles could be indicative of how well a teacher candidate will perform as a future teacher, and whether certain struggles should be perceived as a general warning sign of a candidate’s inability to be a ‘good’ teacher.

The study attempted to holistically examine the phenomenon of teacher candidates’ struggles by investigating the perspectives and perceptions of teacher candidates and teacher educators while accounting for the role that the ITE program and other social and personal agents that may play role in struggle manifestations, prevention, and understanding. As a final note, the author urges readers to carefully and critically consider individual discourses of teacher candidates, individual and professional discourses of teacher educators, institutional discourse of ITE programs, other structures, contexts, and factors, and the interactions between the listed elements when studying, analyzing, or making decisions about teacher candidates’ struggles, their meaning, impact, and implications.
REFERENCES


APPENDIX A.

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS ASKED TO INSTRUCTORS IN STAGE 1

1. What are the most common ways in which your teacher candidates struggle?
2. Describe each in detail and discuss the causes and consequences of these struggles?
3. Which do you think are the most difficult for teacher candidates?
4. Which are the most likely to jeopardize candidates’ progress in the program?
5. Which occur most frequently?
6. Can you think of some other less common types of struggles?
7. As an instructor, what actions do you usually take to help or support your candidates?
8. Do you know of any other sources of help and support that your candidates use when struggling?
9. In your experience, what are some of the most effective types of supports?
10. What should the ITE program do to prevent and minimize teacher candidates’ struggles?
11. Do you think that struggles that students experience during the program will affect their performance later as teachers?
APPENDIX B.

ONLINE QUESTIONNAIRE ADMINISTERED TO INSTRUCTORS IN STAGE 2

As you know, some teacher candidates in the ITE program experience certain types of struggles and challenges during the course of their studies. We would like to ask you, as an instructor, to think about the struggles that you usually observe in your students as you are answering the following questions.

1. How many years of experience do you have teaching (working) in the ITE program?
   Less than 5 __       between 6 and 10 __          between 11 and 20 __         more than 20 __

2. How many years of the overall teaching experience do you have?
   Less than 5 __       between 6 and 10 __          between 11 and 20 __         more than 20 __

Please select the option that best corresponds to your perception of struggles, thinking of your most recent experiences with teacher candidates - within the last year.

Last year, how many of the teacher candidates you taught or supervised had difficulties in each of the following domains?

3. In your experience, out of all struggles that teacher candidates experience how common are struggles in each of the following domains?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cultural or language barriers</th>
<th>No teacher candidate</th>
<th>Fewer than 1 in 100</th>
<th>Between 1 and 3 in 100</th>
<th>Between 5 and 10 in 100</th>
<th>More than 10 in 100</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Difficulty understanding the Canadian educational context</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Difficulty with oral expression</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Difficulty with written work</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Other (please add):</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Adjustment to course work |                     |                     |                        |                        |                     |
| • Difficulty completing assignments |                     |                     |                        |                        |                     |
| • Difficulty understanding feedback |                     |                     |                        |                        |                     |
| • Difficulty applying feedback |                     |                     |                        |                        |                     |
| • Other: |                     |                     |                        |                        |                     |

| Adjustment to practicum |                     |                     |                        |                        |                     |
| • Lack of awareness of their own behaviour |                     |                     |                        |                        |                     |
| • Lack of pedagogical knowledge |                     |                     |                        |                        |                     |
| • Lack of content knowledge |                     |                     |                        |                        |                     |
4. In your experience, how seriously do you think each of these struggles can impact candidates’ progress in the program (both academically and in practicum)?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Difficulty communicating with the associate teacher</th>
<th>Not at all Seriously</th>
<th>Somewhat Seriously</th>
<th>Seriously</th>
<th>Very Seriously</th>
<th>Not Applicable</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Professional conduct</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Difficulty in forming relationships with classmates</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Difficulty in working as a team member</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Difficulty assessing their own behaviour (self-awareness)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mental health and emotionality</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotional over-reactivity</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anger management</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mental health disorders</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financial problems</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family circumstances</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Cultural or language barriers                       |                     |                    |           |                |                |
| Difficulty understanding the Canadian educational context |                     |                    |           |                |                |
| Difficulty with oral expression                      |                     |                    |           |                |                |
| Difficulty with written work                         |                     |                    |           |                |                |
| Other (please add):                                  |                     |                    |           |                |                |
| Adjustment to course work                            |                     |                    |           |                |                |
| Difficulty completing assignments                    |                     |                    |           |                |                |
| Difficulty understanding feedback                     |                     |                    |           |                |                |
| Difficulty applying feedback                         |                     |                    |           |                |                |
| Other:                                               |                     |                    |           |                |                |
| Adjustment to practicum                              |                     |                    |           |                |                |
| Lack of awareness of their own behaviour             |                     |                    |           |                |                |
| Lack of pedagogical knowledge                        |                     |                    |           |                |                |
| Lack of content knowledge                            |                     |                    |           |                |                |
| Difficulty communicating with the associate teacher  |                     |                    |           |                |                |
### Professional conduct
- Difficulty in forming relationships with classmates
- Difficulty in working as a team member
- Difficulty assessing their own behaviour (self-awareness)
- Other:

### Mental health and emotionality
- Emotional over-reactivity
- Anger management
- Mental health disorders
- Other:

### Financial problems

### Family circumstances

5. In your experience, out of all students whom you taught in this last year, what is the percentage of students who experience struggles? (please approximate percentage) 

6. How adequate do you think are the existing support systems in the program in helping teacher candidates who struggle? 


7. As an instructor, what do you do to support your students who struggle (feel free to answer in point form)

8. What supports do you think the ITE program should implement to help alleviate these struggles?

9. Is there anything else you would like to share with us?
APPENDIX C.

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS ASKED TO TEACHER CANDIDATES IN STAGE 3

1. What are the most common struggles that you experienced in the program?
2. Can you describe each of the mentioned struggles in detail?
3. What are the causes and consequences of these struggles?
4. Which struggle is the most difficult for you?
5. Which struggle is most likely to jeopardize your progress in the program?
6. Do you know of any other struggles experienced by your peers?
7. How do you obtain help or support?
8. Do you know of any other sources of help and support that you may use?
9. Do you think that these struggles will affect your future career as a teacher?
10. What should the ITE program do to prevent and minimize these struggles?
11. When your instructors talk about struggles, what do they mean? What do you think they see as struggles? What about the Registrar’s Office?