Evaluation by Teacher Candidates of a Field-Based Teacher Education Program Using Focus Groups

By Hugh Munby, Cinde Lock, Nancy L. Hutchinson, LeRoy Whitehead, & Andrea K. Martin

Introduction

This article describes one aspect of the systematic evaluation of the pilot program[1] at the Faculty of Education, specifically the evaluation based upon focus group techniques. The purpose of the pilot program was not to determine whether or not to proceed with a restructured Bachelor of Education program; rather, the purpose was to uncover problems in the implementation and reception of the new program in the hope that these might be addressed before candidates registered in August 1997. Accordingly, the evaluation of the pilot was aimed at revealing difficulties just as much as it was aimed at assessing the success of the restructured program in meeting the goals established for it.

As shown in this article, focus groups are particularly well suited to this task. Consequently, while the article documents the problems and achievements of

Hugh Munby is a professor, Cinde Lock is a doctoral candidate, Nancy L. Hutchinson and LeRoy Whitehead are professors, and Andrea K. Martin is an adjunct professor, all with the Faculty of Education, Queen's University, Kingston, Ontario, Canada.

the pilot program, the emphasis is on describing the utility of focus groups in teacher education settings. The article opens with a brief review of focus group techniques. This is followed by a description of how the technique was employed in the pilot study's evaluation, and of the data analysis and its results. The final section discusses the data from the viewpoint of the lessons the Queen's teacher education program needs to learn, and from the viewpoint of what the research team has learned about focus group research.

Data Collection with Focus Groups

Program evaluation has been defined as the "systematic collection of information about the activities, characteristics, and outcomes of programs" (Patton, 1997, p. 23). The evaluation of the pilot project for the restructured teacher education program at Queen's University was conducted with this emphasis on systematic data collection. The purpose of this evaluation also paralleled Michael Patton's (1997) views, as information was gathered to make judgments about the program, to improve program effectiveness, and to inform decisions about future programming.

A combination of data collection methods was used in the series of loosely coupled studies that constitute the evaluation of the pilot program: focus group sessions, individual interviews, and written questionnaires. This diversity helped to increase the validity of the research as the strengths of one method compensated for the weaknesses of another (Patton, 1990), and such multi-method triangulation in data collection increases both the validity and reliability of the evaluative information obtained (LeCompte & Goetz, 1982). For focus group discussions specifically, their "independent, self-contained nature is a crucial feature of their ability to contribute to triangulation" (Morgan, 1988, p. 25). The validity and reliability of the pilot program's evaluation were further enhanced by involving different sources for data collection (teacher candidates and associate school teachers and administrators) and by using a team of five researchers to validate meaning, to analyze the data, and thus, to provide multiple perspectives.

Although a variety of data collection methods was used in this research, the intent of this article is to document and interpret the information received from teacher education pilot candidates during focus group sessions that were conducted throughout the pilot program. Specifically, two sessions of eight simultaneous focus groups were conducted with the teacher education pilot candidates during the course of the academic year. Each session was one hour in duration, and the content of discussions was limited to four or five topics in order to collect detail-rich data while avoiding participant fatigue (Morgan, 1988). As shown below, the design of the focus group sessions was guided by the literature on focus groups and qualitative research, with specific attention to comfort with questions, focus group composition, neutral facilitation, and data richness, reliability and validity. This section of the article concludes with an account of each of the two focus group sessions.

Rationale for the Use of Focus Groups

The term "focus group" refers to the interviewing of a purposefully sampled group of people rather than the use of a series of individual interviews (Morgan, 1988). Specifically, a focus group session is a "group interview" conducted in casual surroundings where "participants may speak their minds in an anonymous setting, guided by a moderator who keeps the interview flowing smoothly" (Creason, 1991, p. 3). The purpose of conducting such a session is to enable individuals to stimulate one another in conversation (Flores & Alonzo, 1995). This method of interviewing "involves the exchange of opinions, personal reactions, and experiences among members of the group" (Brodigan, 1992, p. 2). Through this dialogue, discussions become less directed by interviewer questioning, and thus, more revealing and interactive (Brodigan, 1992). Further, by creating a social environment in which group members are stimulated by each others' ideas, a researcher can increase the quality of data collected (McMillan & Schumacher, 1997).

Focus groups are an effective means of soliciting teachers' and administrators' understandings, experiences, and perspectives on a topic of interest such as a new teacher education program (Morgan, 1988). In recent literature, four distinct types of application were identified for focus group interviewing (Brodigan, 1992). First, focus groups may serve as the initial step in the evaluation of a new program. Diane Oberg and Eunice Easton (1995) and Paul Creason (1991) advocated the use of focus groups as an evaluation tool. Alan Moore (1994) included the use of focus group sessions in his evaluation of the new teacher education program at the University of Wyoming. Second, focus groups may be considered as a technique to be used in triangulation procedures to establish confirmation of a finding or to broaden researchers' understandings of a program. Third, information collected from focus groups can aid in the interpretation of surveys. Finally, such sessions may be used alone as a means of investigation. The first three of these applications were utilized in this research as focus group sessions were incorporated into the evaluation of a new teacher education program.

Deborah Bloch (1992) cautioned researchers about the disadvantages of using focus group interviews. She argued that focus groups should not be considered as a substitute for quantitative studies and that the participants chosen tend not to represent a random sample of the population in question. Fortunately, in this case, the small population and high interest level of the teacher candidates in the pilot program resulted in the inclusion of all candidates in the focus groups conducted. Further, not only were focus group sessions not a substitute for a quantitative study, but the wording and comments made during the interviews were used to develop a more effective exit questionnaire. This quantitative instrument was administered to all candidates at the end of the pilot year.

Indeed, for this study, the advantages in using focus groups far outweighed the disadvantages. First, as Bloch (1992) suggested of the quality of group interaction,

"ideas occur and coalesce in a way that is different from what happens during an individual interview or in responding to a written questionnaire" (p. 347). Second, "focus groups are useful when it comes to investigating what participants think, but they excel at uncovering why participants think as they do" (Morgan, 1988, p. 25). Accordingly, focus groups were conducted in this research as a means to collect evaluation data to inform program improvement.

Participant's Comfort with Questions

Patton (1990) suggested that the validity of a participant's response is, to a large extent, dependent upon the individual's level of comfort with interview questions. Further, Andrea Fontana and James Frey (1994) argued that the use of general or easy questions at the beginning of interviews facilitates the development of this comfort level. Accordingly, the initial questions posed in each of the focus group sessions dealt with issues that candidates were familiar with and that were non-threatening. In addition, all questions were designed to be nondichotomous, neutral, and clear (McMillan & Schumacher, 1997; Patton, 1990).

Group Composition

For each focus group session, the candidates were divided into eight groups. Each group consisted of seven to eight candidates, one facilitator, and one note taker. In each case, a heterogeneous grouping of candidates was chosen. Specifically, the candidates were sorted by gender, teaching division (i.e., elementary, or secondary), and Program Focus course ("Issues in the Primary Grades," "International Education," "At-Risk Adolescents," and "Exceptional Children"). Having a variety of individuals in each grouping was important to obtain a range of opinions about the topics discussed and to encourage candidates to express differing attitudes in the focus group sessions (Flores & Alonso, 1995). Further, this heterogeneity was maintained in the second focus group session, although the composition of the groups was deliberately changed.

Neutral Facilitation

Each focus group was conducted by a neutral facilitator who was not a member of the Faculty of Education and who was not personally involved in the experiences of the candidates in the pilot program (Morgan, 1988). Similarly, a neutral note taker, a graduate student, was present to take notes and to monitor the tape recording of the discussion. This individual remained silent throughout the sessions. (The instructions provided to facilitators are in Appendices A and B.) The discussion topics were organized so that the facilitators would follow a similar format and would ask questions in approximately the same order from group to group (Wells, 1974). While the facilitators were instructed to facilitate the flow of discussion, they were also encouraged to create a comfortable, open conversation that allowed for a "natural progression across topics with some overlap between the topics"

(Morgan, 1988, p. 56). This type of group discussion served as a substitute "for the directive questioning which is part of most other approaches to the task of gathering information" (Brodigan, 1992, p. 2).

Data Richness, Reliability and Validity

Allowing the facilitators to focus on the flow of conversation rather than on the recording of data helped to increase the richness of data collected in the sessions (Morgan, 1988). The note takers were responsible for observing the interactions in the group, recording the order of speakers in the discussion, and audiotaping the dialogue. The internal validity of data collected by the note takers was enhanced by minimizing their interactions with the group. Also, the external reliability of the study was strengthened through the use of tape recorders and field notes to allow for the production of verbatim accounts of collected data. The use of such precise means of data collection also increased the external validity of the study (LeCompte & Goetz, 1982).

Further, the provision of clear instructions during briefing sessions with the note takers and moderators enhanced the reliability of the data collection as opportunity for miscommunication regarding the roles and expectations of researchers was minimized (Patton, 1990). Finally, debriefing meetings were conducted at the conclusion of each focus group session with the note takers and moderators. These meetings served to provide multiple perspectives in the preliminary analysis of data as all comments and interpretations were recorded verbatim during these meetings (Morgan, 1988). Comments from the debriefing meetings were helpful in planning the next session of focus group interviews

The Two Focus Group Sessions

The first session was held on October 28, 1996, the first day of the two-week on-campus period at the midpoint of the extended fall practicum. The focus group sessions were held early in the day before candidates had the opportunity to interact extensively with one another and with faculty members in classes. E-mail messages and follow-up telephone calls were used to invite all 62 candidates to participate, and all 62 were present for the eight focus groups, which were conducted simultaneously.

The five main questions of this first session of focus groups were directed at the mechanics of the pilot program. The first question asked about the value of the one-week orientation period at the Faculty of Education that occurred prior to the beginning of the school year. Second, the positive and negative aspects of starting the extended practicum on the first day of the school year were examined. Third, the pilot candidates were asked to comment on the contribution that the field-based courses, "Critical Issues" (CRIT) and "Research, Theory and Professional Practice" (PROF) had made to their practicum experiences thus far. Fourth, the candidates had the opportunity to express their views about the use of electronic

media such as e-mail and listservs as a primary means of communication among teacher education candidates and between the Faculty of Education and the associate schools. The fifth question referred to the notion of the associate school model and its meaning for the candidates in their practicum settings. (Instructions to facilitators and the specific questions are in Appendix A.)

The second focus group session was conducted before classes on the morning of January 6, 1997. This marked the first day of the Winter term and the beginning of the candidates' one-week consolidation period. Participation in this session was solicited by electronic mail followed by a mailed invitation. Of the 62 candidates in the pilot program, 51 were present for this second session of focus groups. The eight focus groups were run simultaneously, as before, with neutral facilitators and graduate students as note takers.

The four questions in this session pertained to the candidates' professional growth. The first question referred to the contribution that the two-week on-campus period made to the professional growth of the candidates. The second question dealt with issues of teacher assessment during the extended practicum. Third, candidates were asked to comment on the value of having a four-month practicum. Specifically, they were requested to comment on their perceptions of professional growth by comparing the first and second two-month blocks of their practicum experience. Finally, the candidates were asked to recommend how the program could be adapted to better enhance the professional growth of future candidates. (Instructions to facilitators and the specific questions are in Appendix B.)

Data Analysis and Results

A certain amount of urgency dictated the approach to data analysis. As the pilot was proceeding, committees in the Faculty of Education were preparing to implement the full program, to begin on August 22, 1997. Additionally, it seemed important to provide pilot candidates with the results of the focus group data so that they would know that their participation was integral to the development of the restructured program. Accordingly, the analysis of data was directed at producing a brief but comprehensive summary of the candidates' views. For Irwin Goodman (1984) such a summary "is a concise refinement of all the data in the report that telegraphs the major findings" (p. 43). Thus the research team's intent was to create a manageable two pages (single-space, 10-pitch) of text which would accurately represent all that was said. This form of data reduction seemed ideally suited to the objectives of the pilot study.

Jarve Bertrand, Judith Brown, and Victoria Ward (1992) presented three approaches for organizing material obtained from focus group sessions. The method used by this research team is representative of a combination of two of these approaches. The first method involved condensing "vast quantities of information into a manageable form" to reduce "the points made by participants to simple

phrases" (p. 204). The second suggested technique was employed by combining the reduced data into a summary that included quotations that were retained during the data reduction phase of the analysis.

Focus group discussions were transcribed verbatim. Each research team member arbitrarily selected a group and began reducing data. For example, one response to Question #3 in January 1996, was "I was definitely more confident entering the second half of the (school) placement." When reduced, this became, "More confident." The response continued, "I think that was due to experience, not due to anything that happened at the Faculty of Education though." This was reduced to "experience." These reductions were then pooled, and then combined into themes that were written as prose accounts, below, that can be read as a long response in the words of the candidates. Given the purpose of the pilot evaluation, the material is organized as recommendations from the pilot for the full program. (Tape recording in two of the eight focus group discussion on October 28 failed. The team's subsequent discussions with note takers revealed that the data reductions from the other six discussions covered the points raised in the two focus groups for which tape-recorded data were unavailable.)

Issues and Recommendations from the Pilot Study, October 28, 1996

Question1: Issues and recommendations for changes to orientation week. Participants felt that better outlines and timetables should be prepared in order to clarify expectations and to avoid overlap. The readings could have been assigned well in advance of orientation week as the candidates found it difficult to complete them during a very hectic and busy week. In addition, the teacher candidates felt that the associate schools and staff needed more preparation to accommodate teacher candidates in the schools. Candidates also wanted to know how the Teachers' Federation protected them in their role during the practicum. Further, many people wished that the practicum handbooks (the "purple books") had been distributed earlier to the candidates, associate schools, and participating teachers. Also, more purple books were needed in the associate schools. Teacher candidates recommended that the orientation week include more emphasis on lesson planning, curriculum, age-appropriate materials, and hands-on activities. Opinions regarding the length of orientation were divided: some felt it was too long and others felt that it was too short. Finally, candidates found that the days of orientation week were too long and too tightly scheduled, and there was a suggestion for more unscheduled time and for more social events.

Question 2: Issues and recommendations for having the practicum begin on the first day of school. The few teacher candidates who did not have a meeting with the staff and administration in their associate school before the first day of school would have appreciated it. Others felt that there should have been opportunities to work with participating teachers prior to orientation week. Also, many believed that

better communication was needed between the Faculty of Education and the associate schools to ensure that participating teachers were well prepared and had prior access to the purple book. Further, many teacher candidates recommended that a separate handbook be produced for the participating teachers, as some seemed unprepared to have teacher candidates in their classrooms at the start of the school year.

Question 3: Issues and recommendations for the CRIT and PROF courses and their usefulness. Teacher candidates felt that the expectations for the assignments were not clearly summarized. Some candidates thought that field-based assignments needed to be more specific, whereas others thought that the assignments should be more flexible for easy adaptation within individual schools. Candidates suggested that some assignments were redundant, and that there was no need for more than a single journal—one reflective journal is enough. Clearly, the assignments required time and, in some cases, the demands on time were overwhelming. The participating teachers need to be told of the competing demands on candidate's time, and principals and faculty liaisons need to be encouraged to help candidates negotiate their work loads.

Question 4: Issues for the use of e-mail and listserv. Candidates were concerned that e-mail and listserv facilities were not available in all associate schools. Candidates who had access felt overloaded with large amounts of seemingly irrelevant messages. As a result, checking e-mail became a low priority for some. Candidates suggested that e-mail only be used for urgent messages, and that the use of titles (e.g., "Message from Rena," "Primary grades," "Social") would indicate which messages were important. Other suggestions included limiting personal messages, omitting original messages in responses, and using separate listservs for elementary and secondary candidates. Other candidates felt that e-mail should be used to seek help with problems and to create a space to discuss events that they had found frustrating. The clear message was that the Faculty of Education should give a workshop on how to use e-mail and listserv efficiently.

Question 5: Issues and recommendations about having associate schools rather than associate teachers. Candidates commented that it was difficult to coordinate common time and suggested that the administration must know that there is to be a common spare. In some cases in secondary schools, no one takes responsibility for candidates getting experience in two teaching subjects. Candidates assigned to two teachers have trouble balancing the expectation that they have discussions with each of them before school and at noon. If two departments are involved, one may not know the extent of the candidate's teaching in the other, so the role of the associate department needs clarification. When candidates are assigned to schools with only a small number of teachers participating, there is overload for some teachers. Teachers and teacher candidates need a contact person in the school to talk to about any problems. Teachers who wish to participate need

to make and keep the commitment and the Faculty of Education needs to check that there are indeed associate teachers in the associate schools. Principals should be encouraged to clearly describe candidate's role in the schools, and there should be a meeting between the faculty liaison and the principal before a meeting with the teachers with whom candidates will work. Generally, communication between schools and the Faculty of Education needs to be improved.

Issues and Recommendations from the Pilot Study, January 6, 1997

Question 1(a): Leaving the school to return to the Faculty of Education for the On-Campus Weeks. Candidates described a range of feelings about leaving their associate schools to return to the Faculty of Education for two weeks in the middle of the practicum. Many said they found it difficult to leave the schools where they were integrated into classes and extra-curricular activities, but "Once I had the two weeks, I was glad I was here." Some expressed their need for professional development, for example, "to be learning why I'm doing all this stuff," and others expressed the need to be "reflecting on what you had done so far and what you were going to change."

Question 1(b). Returning to the school after the two-week On-campus Period at Queen's. About returning to the associate schools, there were two points of view. Many found that they were welcomed, "made me feel like they missed me, it was nice." Teacher candidates elaborated on being received like professionals whose contribution had been missed, and was now more valued. Others found it was "hard getting back into it," and they felt "left behind" by the changes that had taken place while they were away. There were suggestions that candidates and associate schools seek ways to maintain contact about developments that take place in the schools during the candidates' absence.

Question 1(c). The contribution of the On-campus Period to professional growth. The candidates reported that the on-campus weeks contributed to their professional growth in many ways, but they made recommendations for enhancing this contribution. Reflecting on experience and talking with peers "helped bring it back into perspective," and "just comparing experiences was really helpful." The two weeks provided opportunities to "renew our optimism and kind of look forward to the changes we can make," "helped me guide my focus to look for certain things and develop certain skills," and "gave a new way of looking at things, a new energy." Some reported they had received concrete ideas and resource packages, while others wished they had. There were recommendations for more content and structure within classes during the two weeks.

Question2: The process of assessment and its contribution to professional growth. Candidates experienced great variation in the types of assessment of their teaching that took place in the associate schools. This led them to call for more

consistency regarding: the recommendations made to associate teachers, the assessment forms supplied by the Faculty of Education, the role of reference letters, and the work of faculty liaisons. Those who had received frequent, informal feedback from associate teachers and liaisons found it most helpful in promoting professional growth, and described "hints and suggestions" that "gave us something to build on." They thought formal reports (formative, summative, and letters of reference) would be more useful for employment applications than for promoting professional growth. There were suggestions for "more feedback in the first couple of weeks of school," expressions of appreciation for associate principals who followed the performance review process used with the teachers in the school, and suggestions that valuable feedback was obtained by "giving students evaluation forms...they didn't have to sign them." Working with and being evaluated by an associate with "a different philosophy" helped one candidate to "find my own niche." Assessment contributed to professional growth in many ways and to different degrees, depending on the practices used in the associate school and by the faculty liaison.

Question 3: The contribution of each block of the extended practicum to professional growth. There was considerable consistency in the themes that emerged from discussions about the roles of the two blocks of the practicum, before and after the on-campus weeks. In the second half of the practicum candidates saw themselves "as teachers" who were able to take advantage of their familiarity with the school and routines to "challenge yourself" and "really look at things in depth." "In the second block, you got a chance to really know yourself as a teacher." "I was definitely more confident entering the second half of the placement. I think that was due to experience." "The second session was getting to know students better...the exceptional students," and "lesson planning became second nature." By contrast, "In the first bit, I was actually working on seeing myself as a teacher," and "my focus was just on being prepared. How to present myself in front of the class." There were references to the first weeks being "sink-or-swim," while "by the end, [the teachers] were definitely treating me like a colleague."

Question 4: Issues and recommendations for further enhancing professional growth. Teacher candidates made many and varied recommendations for ways the Faculty of Education could further enhance professional development for candidates who follow them. The recommendations included improved communication, as well as adjustments in the content and structure of the program. There were suggestions that the Faculty of Education maintain the current organization of the program and remind candidates about their responsibilities for their own professional development.

Communication among all the individuals and groups involved in the field-based term was a common recommendation across the eight groups. Specific

aspects of communication that were suggested included "better e-mail access from associate schools" and "a one-page summary [sent directly to associate teachers] of what the program is" and of Queen's expectations of associate schools. Clarification and communication about the role of liaison was suggested, including "have what is expected of a liaison" and a "little bit more communication...with our faculty advisor, just to help with that professional growth." The latter came from a candidate who was teaching away from Kingston. There was a suggestion for a survival handbook or web-site through which candidates offered advice to future generations in the program. This might include "helpful hints about how to make oneself welcome in the school.... Staffroom etiquette." Format and content recommendations included "workshops," information about "classroom management, forms of assessment, lesson planning, unit planning, integrated units, time management." Candidates also requested greater "flexibility in assignments" including alternatives to writing reflective journals.

The final two comments in one group focused on the importance of maintaining the overall structure of the program, "Since you were there on the first day of the whole teaching business, the whole school year.... It really helps you because you have to get a sense of yourself, and who you want to teach, and what you want to teach." "When it comes down to it, being in the school is what makes me grow professionally the most. So...just by giving me the opportunity to be in the school [the Faculty of Education] is doing the most part of it." There was a recommendation to individual faculty members to "remind candidates to take responsibility; if they are not happy about something, they should do something about it."

Discussion

This article has documented the use of focus groups in the assessment of the pilot program conducted by the Faculty of Education, Queen's University, in the 1996-97 academic year. As explained above, the pilot's assessment involved the collection of data from teacher candidates to reveal the problems of the restructured program and to generate suggestions for improvement. In addition, the pilot was designed to allow some preliminary answers to questions about learning in and from experience, and about the theme of professional development and growth underlying the restructured teacher education program.

Thus far, several studies have been conducted to assess the pilot program, and others were initiated during the 1997-98 academic year. Focus group discussions, in particular, have been conducted with the teachers and administrators from the associate schools affiliated with the restructured program as well as with the teacher candidates in the Bachelor of Education program (as reported in this paper). In addition, a variety of other methods were used to collect data for evaluative purposes. In fact, toward the end of the Winter term of 1997, the research team sought advice from the candidates about further data collection strategies. Accord-

ingly, individual interviews were arranged with the 11 candidates who expressed a wish to be further involved in the research. These data were supplemented with responses from an exit questionnaire, which was administered to all teacher candidates in the pilot program. Although these other means of data collection were employed, it was generally agreed that the focus groups had succeeded in giving everyone a chance to be heard.

The current article concentrates on reporting the use of and results from focus groups conducted with teacher candidates in the pilot program. It is evident from the previous section that the focus groups provided cogent and full information. Early in the program, candidates directed their comments to the mechanics of the pilot that needed attention. But, by January, when asked to consider their own professional growth, they were able to provide examples of the advantages and disadvantages of particular aspects of the program. Occasionally, this resulted in directly contradictory recommendations, a feature of focus group data for which researchers should be prepared.

By far the majority of recommendations made by the pilot candidates, in the October focus group discussions, were implemented in the full program during the 1997-98 academic year. In this respect, the use of focus groups has been fully justified. Importantly, the promptness with which the administration was able to respond to concerns raised in the October focus groups made real the research team's assurances that candidates' concerns would be heard and acted upon. Those who might be contemplating this form of data collection would be wise to consider carefully how to make manifest the promise of hearing candidates' voices.

As anticipated by the research team, the focus groups allowed candidates to consider questions among themselves and so promoted opportunities for refutation and for confirmation, and responses tended to allow for the development and building of ideas. The significance of offering everyone a chance to participate did not escape the research team. (It was fortunate that all 62 pilot candidates could be accommodated in eight simultaneous focus groups. Those wishing to follow this example will find that careful attention to all planning details is essential for the smooth running of the sessions. Earphones for monitoring recordings should also be mandatory equipment for note takers in situations where interviewing cannot be repeated.)

The present study plainly reveals the value of focus groups as a data collection strategy within the context of loosely coupled evaluative studies. Specifically, focus group research in program restructuring provides benefits to candidates, to instructors, and to program developers. For candidates, the focus group discussions and their analyses assured them that their views were taken seriously. For developers, the results provided much needed information on what it is like to experience reform at such an early stage of program development. The value of this information is directly dependent on one's preparedness to hear criticism.

Note

1. A description of the restructured teacher education program at Queen's University is in Munby (this issue) and Upitis (this issue).

References

Bertrand, J., Brown, J., & Ward, V. (1992). Techniques for analyzing focus group data. *Evaluation Review*, 16, 198-209.

Bloch, D. (1992). The application of group interviews to the planning and evaluation of career development programs. *Career Development Quarterly*, 40, 340-350.

Brodigan, D.L. (1992). *Focus group interviews: Applications for institutional research.* (AIR Professional File No. N43 Win 1992). Tallahassee, FL: Association for Institutional Research.

Creason, P. (1991, April). Focus groups as an evaluation tool. Paper presented at the Asilomar Research Conference, Cerritos College, CA.

Flores, J., & Alonso, C. (1995). Using focus groups in educational research: Exploring teachers; perspectives on educational change. *Evaluation Review*, 19, 84-101.

Fontana, A., & Frey, J. (1994). Interviewing: The art of science. In N. Denzin, & Y. Lincoln (Eds.). *Handbook of qualitative research* (pp. 361-375). Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

Goodman, R.I. (1984). Focus group interviews in media product testing. *Educational Technology*, 24(8), 29-44.

LeCompte, M.D., & Goetz, J.D. (1982). Problems of reliability and validity in ethnographic research. *Review of Educational Research*, 52, 31-60.

McMillan, J.H. & Schumacher, S. (1997). *Research in education: A conceptual introduction* (4th. Ed.). New York: Longman.

Moore, A.D. (1994). *The new teacher education program at the university of Wyoming. Final evaluation report.* (Tech. Rep. No. ZYJ99005). Laramie, WY: University of Wyoming College of Education.

Morgan, D.L. (1988). *Focus groups as qualitative research.* Newbury, CA: Sage.

Munby, H. (1999). Planning, implementing and evaluating a field-based teacher education program: An introduction. *Teacher Education Quarterly*, this issue.

Oberg, D., & Easton, E. (1995). Focus group interviews: A tool for program evaluation in school library education. *Education for Information*, 13, 117-129.

Patton, M.Q. (1990). *Qualitative evaluation and research methods* (2nd ed.). Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

Patton, M.Q. (1997). *Utilization-focused evaluation* (3rd. Ed.). Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

Upitis, R. (1999). Teacher education reform: Putting experience first. *Teacher Education Quarterly*, this issue.

Wells, W.D. (1974). Group interviewing. In R. Ferber (Ed.), *Handbook of marketing research* (pp. 133-146). New York: McGraw-Hill.

Appendix A

Notes For The Facilitators of the October 28 Focus Groups

Facilitator's Role:

A briefing session will be held in room A236 at 9:10. We look forward to seeing you there.

The facilitator's role is to moderate the discussion, to keep the conversation on track, to help participants to talk with one another, rather than engaging in question and answer, and to ensure that all topics are covered in the hour. The topics are described as questions, below. There are five areas to focus on. We recommend giving approximately ten minutes to each question.

Each question has been written as a probe to spark discussion. Read the whole question. Then repeat the first part of the question. Repeat the second part of the question, unless the discussion has already moved to the second part. Question 5 has just one part, and Question 6 is only to be asked if time is available.

It may be necessary for you to cut off unproductive discussion.

Try to obtain as many different points of view as possible on each topic. And try to foster interaction that explores participants' reactions in some depth.

Direct discussion toward concrete and specific accounts of participants' experiences so that the conversations elaborate and are not too general.

It may be helpful for you to know something about the two field-based courses, CRIT and PROF. "CRITical Issues and Policies" covers legal issues, teaching exceptional children and equity issues in education. "Research Theory and PROFessional Practice" is about constructing a professional identity, learning ways to document school experiences, and beginning a life-long process of critical reflection on teaching.

E-mail and listserv is used extensively to communicate between and among the faculty members and teacher candidates—the term we use to refer to our B.Ed. registrants.

Please close the focus group discussions at 10:30 promptly. The teacher candidates have a class to attend.

A 30-minute debriefing session will be held for facilitators in room A236.

Facilitator's Introductory Script—Read, Please or "ad lib" the Ideas:

If you have not signed a consent form, please do so now. And please sign the sign-in sheet that is circulating. You are in a pilot program. Our purpose in this one hour is to get your feedback focusing on five aspects of the program. We will be asking you about your experiences with orientation, with beginning the practicum on the first day of school, with the field-based courses, with e-mail and listserv, and with your associate school.

We are here to learn from you and from your experience.

I just want to review with you the ground rules for our conversation:

- Only one person speaks at a time.
- No side conversations—these obscure the taping and interrupt the speaker.
- It is important that we hear from each of you, and that no-one dominates the time.
- Either you or I will steer the discussion to another topic if conversation

becomes unproductive.

- The note taker will note who is speaking, but will not participate in the discussion.
- There are five questions, so we will allow approximately ten minutes for each question.

The Questions:

1. Now that you have been in your school for two months, can you look back to the orientation week in August and comment on how useful it was? What changes would you recommend?

2. You started the practicum on the first day of school. What was valuable about that? And can you suggest ways to improve the beginning of the practicum?

3. You have been working on two field-based courses, CRIT and PROF, during your practicum. How have these contributed to your practicum experience? And how could we improve the arrangements?

4. We have all been using e-mail (including listservs) to communicate among the schools and the Faculty of Education. How has e-mail worked in supporting your practicum experiences? And how has e-mail worked in meeting your needs?

5. What does it mean to you to be assigned to an associate school rather than to an individual associate teacher?

6. [If time allows] Are there any comments that you would like to make about other aspects of the program?

Facilitator's Closing Script:

Our time is over, so I must ask that we end this conversation. Thank you for participating.

As you may know, there will be other opportunities for you to provide feedback about the pilot.

As you leave, please ensure that you have signed a consent form. And please sign the sign-in sheet that was circulated at the beginning if you have not already done so.

Apendix B

Extracts from the Facilitators' Script for the January 6 Focus Groups

Please sign the sign-in sheet that is circulating.

Our purpose in this one hour is to get your feedback focusing on your professional growth over the four months of the practicum.

We are here to learn from you and from your experience.

Facilitator's Script to Introduce the Questions:

Before the holiday break, we mailed you summaries of the group interviews that were held in October. You also received a communication from the Dean about planned changes to the program that respond to many of your suggestions. In this session, rather than focus on specific issues about the mechanics of the Pilot Program, we want to hear you talk about your professional growth as a teacher.

The Questions:

1.a) What was it like to leave your school to return to the Faculty of Education for the on-campus weeks?

b) What was it like to return to your associate school after your two week on-campus weeks at Queen's?

c) How did the on-campus weeks contribute to your professional growth?

2. Think about all the types of assessment of your teaching that took place in the associate school. You have already talked about some of the problems you encountered during PROF 190. Now we would like to know how the process of assessment contributed to your professional growth.

3. Continuing on the topic of professional growth, think back to September and to your first two month block in your associate school. Now think of the two months after the on-campus weeks. How did each period contribute to your professional growth?

4. In the first three questions, we asked about specific ways in which professional growth has been enhanced by the program. We would like to hear your recommendations about how we could further enhance professional growth for the teacher candidates who follow you.