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Affordances and Constraints to Labour Market Integration and Professional Acculturation:

The Case of International Educated K-12 Teachers
and College Professors in Ontario*

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Overview of study

- internationally educated K-12 teachers and college professors (IETs)
- affordances and constraints to entry into Ontario public education system and professional acculturation
- how IETs were able to overcome barriers & achieve professional success

Research design: Phase 1

Phase 1: In-depth, semi-structured interviews	Elementary (K – 6)	Secondary (7 – 12)	College
IETs seeking entry into system	4 participants	4 participants	Part-time: 6 participants
IETs in the system	New: 4 participants	New: 4 participants	Full-time: 5 participants
	Established: 3 participants	Established: 3 participants	
TOTAL	11	11	11

- **33 IETs from diverse ethnolinguistic and professional backgrounds**

Research design: Phase 2

Phase 2: Case studies	Elementary (K – 6)	Secondary (7 – 12)	College
IETs seeking entry	1 teacher from Jamaica	1 teacher from Kenya	1 PT faculty from Pakistan 1 PT faculty from the Philippines
IETs in the system	1 LTO teacher from Belorussia	1 LTO teacher from Hong Kong	1 FT faculty from Poland 1 FT faculty from Bulgaria

- **data collection lasted at least 1 academic semester; data sources varied, e.g., multiple follow-up interviews, classroom observations, surveys of students, written reflections, & interviews with administrators**

Research design: Phase 3

Phase 3: In-depth, semi-structured interviews	K-12	College
Administrators	5 participants	3 participants
Professional development facilitators & mentors	4 participants	3 participants
TOTAL	9	6

- **15 participants were mostly Canadian-born, L1 English speakers**

Data collection & analysis

- all **interviews audio-taped recorded**, transcribed verbatim & sent to participants for verification
- **content analysis** of textual data (transcripts, field notes, surveys, other documents)
 - meaning units - open coding, constant comparison method
 - identification of frequently occurring categories and themes
 - intercoder and intracoder agreement checks

Overview of findings: Entry

1. **Affordances to entry success**
 - i. Getting an interview
 - ii. Getting an initial teaching position
 - iii. Getting a FT permanent contract

2. **Constraints to entry success**
 - i. Recertification barriers
 - ii. Other entry barriers

Entry 1: Getting an interview

1. Personal contact (15)*
2. Subject specialization (14)
3. Bridging course (12)
4. Timing/Supply & demand (10)

* The numbers in parentheses indicate the number of participants (total = 48) who discussed a particular issue.

Getting an interview: Personal contact

“All four interviews they asked me to come, where the principal, somebody told about me. All (of them) knew about me from their friends or from parents or from another principal. It’s not so easy in Canada if you don’t have some connection. All four principals called me because somebody told (them) about me.”

(Galina – elementary school core French teacher from Russia)

Entry 2: Getting an initial teaching position

1. Interview preparation (14)
2. Professional experience – esp. Canadian experience (14)
3. References – esp. Canadian references (10)
4. Openness to diversity (12)

Canadian references & experiences

“You can give me a stack of, you know, wonderful credentials, but one principal that I know who says, “Oh yeah, she was here. She was great.” That's all I need to hear.”

(Rashad - secondary school administrator)

Openness to diversity

“In my mind, she (the school principal) gave me the opportunity because she looked and she saw beyond my English proficiency. So somehow that lady knew that I was going to be effective in that class.”

(Merida - elementary school teacher from Venezuela)

Entry 3: Getting a full-time position

- Mainly through daily and long-term occasional teaching positions
- Only 4 IET participants in K-12 system were hired for FT positions without first working as a supply or LTO teacher:
 - Rose, Evelyn, Christine, Victor
- None of the IET participants in college system was hired without first teaching part-time

Constraints to entry success

1. Recertification barriers

- i. Problems with documents – access, equivalency, cost (17)
- ii. Test of language proficiency (7)
- iii. Other requirements – additional coursework, mandatory teaching days in subject and divisions (8)

2. Other entry barriers - the flip side

- i. Supply and demand (11)
- ii. Substitute and part-time teaching (9)
- iii. Lack of Canadian experience (9)
- iv. Language issues (6)

Overview of findings: Professional acculturation

1. Constraints to professional acculturation

- i. Differences in language and culture
- ii. Students, classroom management, and dealing with parents
- iii. Differences in teaching and learning styles, and curriculum
- iv. Discrimination

2. Affordances to professional acculturation

- i. Social support & connection with students
- ii. Professional development courses and resources
- iii. Observation and practice
- iv. Beliefs and attitudes

Findings:

Constraints to professional acculturation

1. Differences in language and culture (25, 13)
2. Students, classroom management, and dealing with parents (23, 19, 7)
3. Differences in teaching and learning styles, and curriculum (19, 16)
4. Discrimination (16)

Constraints 1: Language & culture

- accent & pronunciation – across divisions
- colloquial English, e.g., slang used by teenagers
- cultural norms, e.g., political correctness
- popular & youth culture

Constraints 1: Language & culture

“I’d still be scared to talk to a parent because I don’t know whether I’d use the **words** that would make their child look ... [laughs] I think Canadian English is so **nice**. It’s so polite. [laughs] (...) I can see, you have the language, but how to communicate with a person and have them in the right frame of mind to accept what you’re saying and not get aggressive with you. You know?”

(Lucy – secondary school chemistry teacher from Kenya)

Constraints 2: Students, classroom management, & parents

- student diversity: ability, needs, backgrounds
- student attitudes and behaviours, e.g., fighting for marks, lack of interest & motivation
- cheating and plagiarism
- teachers' lack of authority
- lack of respect for teachers
- lack of consequences for misbehaviour

Constraints 3: Differences in teaching & learning styles

- teacher-centred vs. learner-centred classrooms

Constraints 4: Discrimination

- accent
- country of origin
- race

Findings: Affordances to successful professional acculturation

1. Social support & connection with students (37, 21)
2. Professional development courses and resources (32)
3. Observation and practice (27)
4. Beliefs and attitudes (8, 8)

Affordances 1: Social support

- discussed by 37 out of 48 participants
 - mentorship
 - colleagues
 - administrators
 - students
 - school & parent community
 - other support networks, e.g., family members

Affordances 1: Mentorship

“A foreign educated teacher needs mentoring, either an administrator or another teacher. ... He’s honest with you, he tells you what’s good, what’s not so good. He takes interest.”

(Evelyn - secondary school family studies teacher from Austria)

Affordances 1: Social support from colleagues

- Forms of support: advice, teaching materials, help with lesson planning, emotional support
- **Learning unspoken rules from colleagues** about sending misbehaving students to the office:
“Don’t do it too often. You don’t want them [the administrators] to believe that you are unable to handle them [the students].”

(Emily – secondary school family studies teacher from Hong Kong)

Affordances 1: Social support

“I really feel grateful to my kids. And they were not picky at my English at all. Sometimes I made grammar mistakes and they’d just say, “Oh, Miss L., it should be ... ” and I said, “Oh yeah, you’re right.” And they didn’t laugh at me at all. And that was really encouraging. (...) I think maybe first I should thank my [sponsor teacher]. She just encouraged me and she also like the kids to understand people from different backgrounds, and people speak different English, they have accent. She talked about that, about accent and ESL in the whole class, and I think the kids got the idea and really took that seriously.”

(Lin – elementary school teacher from China)

Affordances 2: Bridging course

“I liked it because it dealt with the school system. But also it dealt with actually living in Canada, it exposed you to the culture, it made you aware, it heightened awareness about what you need to do in order to adjust quickly, to fit in, and so on.”

(Audrey – elementary school teacher & teacher educator from Jamaica)

Affordances 3: Observation & practice

- volunteering
- substitute teaching
- observing colleagues
- teaching in private schools

Affordances 4: Beliefs and attitudes

Beliefs

- alignment of beliefs, e.g., Merida, Raj, Susan
- acceptance of Canadian norms, e.g., Evelyn, Lin, Nemo

Attitudes

- “going the extra mile”
- having a positive attitude
- being open-minded
- acceptance of self as language learner

Affordances 4: Acceptance of learner identity

“To everybody I said, ‘Sorry, for my English,’ and then I began to speak. It’s worked well. I don’t know. And they want to help me. (...) Maybe because the first phrase is ‘Sorry for my English, I want to learn it, help me please.’ It’s enough for people.”

(Galina – elementary school core French teacher from Russia)

Discussion & Implications

1. Importance of access to professional communities of practice
 - recertification issues: upholding standards or gatekeeping?
 - use of standardized language tests
 - evaluation of equivalency
 - documentation issues
 - malleability of standards, e.g., Rose's experience
 - Canadian experience and references
 - importance of bridging programs
 - official discourse vs. reality

Discussion & Implications

2. Importance of acceptance by others in a professional communities of practice
 - affirmation of professional identity through mentorship and other forms of social support contributed to successful professional acculturation

Discussion & Implications

3. Negotiating identity and beliefs in the professional acculturation process
 - relationships between identity, beliefs, and membership in a community of practice
 - beliefs are central to a person's identity, and beliefs formed in early life are enduring and mediate behaviour
 - identity and beliefs can be constraints or affordances
 - need to reconcile different conceptions of competence