Exploring Tensions in the Lives of Professors of Teacher Education: A Canadian Context

Salvador Badali
University of Regina

Abstract

This article explores the major satisfactions and frustrations of professors of teacher education from faculties of education in two Western Canadian universities. Data were collected in semi-structured interviews with 31 professors of various ranks. The purpose of the study was to explore the manner in which these teacher educators frame their professional experiences and construct their roles within complex institutional contexts. The findings indicate that although professors view their work as highly positive, there are significant observable tensions in their professional lives. Two major themes characterizing the work of professors are discussed: 1) satisfactions (working with students; delight in teaching; and fulfillment in research writing and scholarship), and 2) frustrations (workload and time press issues; research and scholarship). Overall, results indicate a number of issues: many of the same things that gave them satisfaction as K-12 teachers give them satisfaction as professors; workloads and expectations are increasing; and professors acknowledge the centrality of scholarship as it relates to teaching.

Introduction

This article describes my initial findings on the work of professors of teacher education. Specifically, it explores two major themes, the first pertaining to satisfactions associated with the role; the second relates to reported frustrations. This research is exploratory in nature. The aim of the present study was to identify trends as a basis for future in-depth study.

Scholars have devoted relatively little attention to the study of education faculty as a whole. Even less attention has been paid to the examination of the work and role that professors of teacher education play in higher education. Ducharme and Agne (1982), for example, characterized members of faculties of education as “latecomers to the academic game” (p. 30). Lanier and Little (1986) contend that “when teaching is studied in elementary and secondary schools, teachers are considered too important to overlook. But teachers of teachers – what they are like, what they do, what they think – are systematically overlooked in studies of teacher education” (p. 528). Since Lanier and Little made these comments,

Salvador Badali is an assistant professor currently teaching in the area of Educational Professional Studies at the Faculty of Education, University of Regina, Saskatchewan.
additional studies have been carried out. For example, the Research About Teacher Educators (RATE) studies (1987 – 1995) gathered data about schools, colleges and departments of education, including information about teacher education professors. As well, Ducharme’s (1993) qualitative study of education professors was important because it provided insights into the everyday joys and frustrations associated with academic work. From a Canadian perspective, Russell and Korthagen (1995) shed light on professors’ professional development and growth. More recently, the work of Ardra Cole and her colleagues (1998) is important in explicating some of the tensions teacher educators encounter within institutional contexts.

Becoming a professor means that an individual adopts an identity. This is an important position I take because the process of becoming a professor is complicated, involving the self in relation to broader institutional contexts. A person’s identity is never fixed; instead it is fluid and ever changing and every individual is composed of multiple, often conflicting identities. As Connelly and Clandinin (1999) emphasize,

from a narrative point of view, identities have histories. They are narrative constructions that take shape as life unfolds and that may, as narrative constructions are wont to do, solidify into a fixed entity, an unchanging narrative construction, or they may continue to grow and change. They may even be, indeed, almost certainly are, multiple depending on the life situations in which one finds oneself. It is also common to think that people are somehow or other different people at work from who they are at home or at a social gathering, with their children, and so on. The identities we have, the stories we live by, tend to show different facets depending on the situations in which we find ourselves. (p. 95)

In this article, I explore the manner in which 31 professors of education describe and frame their professional experiences as well as how they construct their roles within the complex institutional contexts in which they work. Although these professors generally rated their work as highly positive and pleasurable, untenured professors were more likely to emphasize significant tensions in their professional lives. These tensions, which will be outlined in some depth in this article, are likely to increase as more untenured professors are hired to replace an aging professoriate.

In this study, I use the term “teacher educator” to refer to full-time faculty members who teach beginning and advanced students in teacher education, and who conduct research or other scholarly activities relevant to teacher education. In the rest of the article, unless otherwise noted, the terms professor, faculty member, professor of education/teacher education are used interchangeably.

Why focus on the experiences of professors of teacher education? First and most important, teacher education is greatly influenced by its substantive ties to elementary and secondary schools, particularly in the use of school sites for field experiences in teacher education programs. This is an important avenue of investigation because the expectations of both those in the world of practice in K-
12 schools and those in higher education institutions influence the role and responsibilities of professors of education. Second, the history of teacher education’s presence in higher education is somewhat ambiguous, complex and in need of clarification. Some of the ongoing debates about the place of teacher education in higher education affect the role and status of all professors who work in education. And finally, the blanket negative critiques of teacher education programs and faculty as being “out of touch with the reality of what goes on in schools” should be re-examined. It is worth noting that the vast majority of the participants of this study were engaged in school-based activities, either through field-based supervision or research projects.

Method
Reality is socially constructed (Berger & Luckmann, 1966; Brown, Collins, & Duguid, 1989). Taking a social constructivist perspective means focusing not only on formal institutions themselves but also on the processes by which individuals experience and make sense of their lives. This is precisely what is attempted in this study, particularly as participants straddle two distinct institutional cultures: K-12 educational settings and the much larger multicultural university. Recognizing that professors of teacher education construct knowledge about teaching and learning is fundamental to understanding the way in which they fulfill their duties in the university context. Individuals do not construct knowledge in isolation. Indeed, the social setting and the interactions within it influence the manner in which individuals construct knowledge about the world.

In presenting professors’ narratives, I build upon the sociocultural theories of learning outlined in Situated Learning (Lave & Wenger, 1991) and Communities of Practice (Wenger, 1998). From these sources comes the notion that learning occurs in communities of practice, and as individuals gain access to a community they become increasingly involved. According to Lave and Wenger, “the form that legitimacy of participation takes is a defining characteristic of ways of belonging, and is therefore not only a crucial condition for learning, but a constitutive element of its content” (p. 35). They suggest that entry to a community results from a process they call “legitimate peripheral participation” (p. 35). This means that an individual gains access to a community through growing involvement over a period of time. Newcomers move from peripheral participation toward full participation. Concurrently, individuals are involved in constructing new identities for themselves. Lave and Wenger state that the key to legitimate peripheral participation is access by newcomers to the community. The period of legitimate peripheral participation in this case is four to seven years for most tenure track personnel. “To become a full member of a community of practice requires access to a wide range of ongoing activity; old timers and other members of the community; and to information, resources, and opportunities for participation” (Lave & Wenger, p. 101).

The congruency between Lave and Wenger’s model (1991) and the professor narratives seemed suitable. As I immersed myself in the data, professors’ experiences seemed to be accurately characterized by sociocultural notions of
"old timer" and "newcomer." Narrative inquiries evolve from a constructivist sociological and educational perspective which posits the notion that knowledge is created by learners in specific settings. This narrative approach is associated with a scholarly tradition acknowledging the centrality of reflection on professional practice (Clandinin & Connelly, 1995; Dewey, 1938; Schon, 1983).

In this study, participants were drawn from two faculties of education in western Canada. Both faculties were of similar size, each housing approximately 50 full-time professors and each offering elementary and secondary concurrent and consecutive teacher education programs. Prospective participants were identified from university websites. A letter of introduction, which outlined the study, was mailed to all prospective faculty at their university addresses. Of the 107 mailed invitations, 14 were returned because of incorrect mailing information. I rejected six individuals because they identified themselves as either sessionals or graduate students. In the end, all 31 professors of education who volunteered were selected for this study. Criteria for selection were that individuals were in full-time appointments, and that each had some K-12 teaching experience. The reason I interviewed individuals with school-based teaching experience was because they are often viewed as more credible by their educational partners, and such a condition reflects the usual experiences of teacher educators. The experiences of these participants range from a first year assistant professor to a department chair with 26 years of experience. There are 14 males and 17 females, 14 full-professors, 9 tenured at the associate level, and 8 untenured assistant professors.

My position as researcher and professor cannot be separated from my position as colleagues to some of the participants. A few of the professors who participated in this study told me they had agreed, in part, because they knew me and saw me as a trusted colleague. They indicated that they might not have agreed to participate otherwise. On the other hand, the majority of professors who did volunteer had no prior knowledge of me whatsoever.

The data source consisted of in-depth, semi-structured oral interviews. All interviews were conducted by the researcher, lasting from 60 to 90 minutes, and were tape recorded and transcribed. The interviews were conversational in nature and built around specific open-ended questions intended to encourage reflection on their roles and expectations as university instructors and scholars. Questions such as the following served as starting points; other questions arose in response to particular comments and, at times, I asked for clarification or expansion.

1. What are some of the effects on your current work in higher education of your earlier years in K-12 schools?
2. How do you think you have changed professionally and personally since becoming a faculty member in higher education?
3. How do you see yourself as a teacher educator? Where do these images come from?
4. To what extent are professors of education different and/or the same as other university professors?
5. Tell me about your scholarship and research.
6. What are the sources of satisfaction in your work?
7. What are the sources of frustration in your work?
8. Looking to the future, could you identify and describe some of the major issues facing faculties of education.

In analyzing the transcripts, I began by reading them several times to identify issues and concepts related to the participants’ work as professors. For each theme, I developed phrases or codes that seemed to capture the essence of what they were telling me. For example, “time press issues,” “approaches to teaching,” “supervising graduate students,” “tenure and promotion,” “university politics,” and “working with colleagues and school-based personnel.” I placed a list of these codes beside columns for each participant, and going through the transcripts again, I noted the pages on which reference was made of each topic. During this process, it became obvious that some themes should be deleted, combined, modified, and new ones added. With the codes and frequencies, I formed a tentative structure of key themes and sub-themes. I then began writing the report, going back to the transcripts to elaborate the themes and gather representative quotations. As the writing process continued, I had to further adjust some themes and modify quotations to represent more accurately the content of the transcripts. At the end of the process, I returned once again to the transcripts, reading them in their entirety to satisfy myself that I had in fact presented the information in a fair and accurate manner. The transcripts had previously been returned to the participants as a member check to ensure that their words and my interpretations represented their thinking. Some changes in wording resulted in some transcriptions, but there was uniform acceptance of my interpretations culled from the interviews.

The methodology employed in this study was qualitative as defined by Punch (1998). I had a relatively small sample of participants, the interviews were open-ended, I made extensive use of examples and quotations in reporting, and my concepts and hypothesis was modified as the analysis proceeded. This study is interpretive in nature. For example, the coding of responses was partly a matter of judgment, and the meaning attached to each code or theme depended on my interpretations of professors’ comments. In making these judgments and interpretations, I was undoubtedly influenced to some extent by my experiences in teacher education over the years.

**Results**

When asked what the major satisfactions were with their work, faculty most often mentioned the following: 1) working with students, 2) delight in teaching, and 3) fulfillment in research, writing, and scholarship. In this article, each of these satisfactions are discussed.

Although faculty made many positive comments about their work there were also frustrations. In the second portion of the article, I discuss two pervasive frustrations: 1) workload and time press issues, and 2) frustrations related to research and other scholarly activities. Underlining many of the participants’ comments is an uneasiness about issues related to tenure and/or promotion.
Sources of Satisfaction

Overall, the participants expressed satisfaction with their work as professors in faculties of education. The following comment was echoed by several individuals, "I love my job, I know I am in the right place doing the right kind of work. I wouldn't trade it for anything." This type of comment is consistent with the findings of other studies (e.g., Axtell, 1998; Howey, 1982) that consistently found that teacher educators and professors in various academic units are very happy with their work.

Working with students.

A major source of satisfaction was found in working with students, particularly in helping them reconcile the often complex and ambiguous nature of teaching and learning. Professors recalled their own journeys in becoming teachers as times of great joy, as well as occasions of stress and anxiety. They said that helping students cope with the transition from student to teacher was often foremost in their minds in their work as professors.

Faculty comments also revealed that their own sense of accomplishment was tied to the successes of their student teachers. In this respect, they resemble their earlier selves as K-12 teachers. Observations, like the following from a female assistant professor, were fairly common across professorial ranks: "It's gratifying to see things come together for my students when they do their practicum. I'm really happy when they are able to consciously put into practice the things that they learned in university-based course work." These professors expected their students to demonstrate a commitment to learning and to professional development, two ingredients they associated with all effective teachers. Wisniewski and Ducharme (1989) remind us that teachers are always in the public eye, which means that professors of teacher education are, by extension, held accountable for the quality of the teaching exhibited by graduates.

According to these professors, working with students in a professional school has additional responsibilities. The "stakes of the game" are extremely high according to a male tenured associate professor: "These graduates are going to be my colleagues one day. It's also a considerable responsibility knowing that my work at the university influences K-12 education in this province." I suspect that professors not employed outside of professional faculties do not view students as potential colleagues except for the few who might pursue graduate level studies. Previous studies about the professional self-esteem of teacher educators (e.g., Reynolds, 1995) have shown that teacher educators believe in their work in preparing future teachers and in their ability to influence the educative process. In addition, these faculty rated their student teachers highly. When I asked them about the performance of student teachers, they indicated that they were very satisfied with the quality of their work, believing that current graduates are well prepared to assume the responsibilities of a beginning teacher.

Delight in teaching.

Teaching is a major source of satisfaction for these professors of teacher education. Most participants viewed themselves as excellent teachers,
particularly in relation to their colleagues in other faculties. Perhaps this is not surprising given their prior backgrounds and experiences as K-12 teachers, an area of research highlighted by other studies (e.g., Ducharme, 1993; Ducharme & Ducharme, 1996; Zimpher & Sherrill, 1996). The following comment from a female associate professor with 12 years experience in higher education was typical. “We should be exemplary teachers given our backgrounds, our passion for teaching, and our commitment to explicating pedagogical mysteries for our students. If we are not good teachers, what hope is there for K-12 education?”

The preceding comment reveals a deep-seated commitment among these professors to modeling “good practice” to student teachers in the belief that it will somehow translate into improved practices in K-12 settings. This linking of practice to pedagogical reform was noted by several participants, in particular from professors whose research agendas focused on the field-based component of teacher education. One female assistant professor said, “We should be role models, leaders, and innovators in our teaching if we expect the same to happen in K-12 classrooms.” These professors say they accomplish this task by making transparent to student teachers their instructional methodologies. This results in a considerable amount of time being spent in debriefing practices in the hope that student teachers will see potential K-12 applications. Guilfoyle (1995) reminds us that student teachers come to classes expecting their instructors to know “how to teach” and to give them the “right answers.”

Approximately half of the participants were involved in graduate-level teaching. Generally, they said that working with graduate students was more satisfying than teaching pre-service teachers. For example, supervising students’ research projects was said to be time consuming but very rewarding intellectual work. A female assistant professor about to apply for tenure and promotion said, “I enjoy teaching graduate classes and serving on thesis committees because the students are usually very motivated, and they have experiential knowledge which makes it easier to engage them. I find it really hard when undergraduate students don’t react to things.” The enjoyment that professors derive from teaching is important to highlight given the significant proportion of time spent in instruction-related activities.

**Fulfillment in research, writing, and scholarship.**

Clearly, these professors are active scholars, they publish in referred journals, they make presentations at national and international conferences, they write books, and they conduct workshops of various sorts. Although only a minority of participants specifically identified research and scholarship as satisfying, those that did agreed that it should be an important part of the work of all professors.

Attitudes toward research and scholarship are related to several factors including: when and where the doctorate was earned, institutional norms and expectations for research and scholarship, administrative leadership, and colleagues’ attitudes towards research and scholarship. A significant finding of this study is that early career professors were generally more at ease with conducting research and other scholarly activities than late career professors. This likely relates to the fact that both universities were engaged in major faculty
recruitment and retention initiatives. For example, at one of the universities in which this study occurred, approximately 50% of faculty are untenured with less than five years of service.

Both male and female untenured professors’ comments suggest that they felt well prepared to make the transition from graduate student to professor. One untenured individual emphasized, “I became a professor because I wanted to do research. I could have taught at a university with a Masters degree but a Ph.D. is a pathway towards full membership in the academic community.” In contrast, some older faculty talked about how different the situation was when they accepted their initial university appointments. According to a male full professor, “Research wasn’t as important then. I had no problem earning tenure and promotion as a result of my contributions to the undergraduate teacher education program.” Several older faculty pointed out that too much emphasis is currently placed on research at the expense of undergraduate programs. By valuing program over research, senior faculty sometimes alienated themselves from newer professors who viewed research as their “ticket to tenure and promotion.” Another male full professor went so far as to say, “To be honest, I preferred the way it used to be. I think much of the research done today makes little difference in terms of improving schools or providing tangible insights into teacher practice or student learning.” A majority of the late-career professors in this study reflected Boyer’s (1990; 1997) and Kennedy’s (1997) notions that research should not be promoted before teaching and service, and that teaching is the fundamental reason for the university. I am not suggesting that untenured faculty disregard or downplay their teaching responsibilities. My point is that given current university norms, younger scholars are aware that they must establish themselves as scholars to earn tenure and promotion.

While most professors of teacher education recognized the importance of conducting and publishing research, all noted that there is a tremendous time press associated with their work. For example, a female tenured professor with just under ten years of experience noted, “I teach six courses per year and I supervise a number of interns. This doesn’t leave me much time to write. I have to do a better job because I am convinced that doing research improves my teaching.” This professor’s comment should remind us that a balanced approach to one’s career is one of the best ways of minimizing the stress and anxiety associated with tenure and promotion. Sorcinelli (1992) reported that newer academics experienced a high level of stress and anxiety especially in relation to the competing demands of teaching and the need to become established scholars.

Sources of Frustrations

While most professors of education were satisfied with their work, they did report a number of frustrations. The following was a typical comment across professorial ranks: “There is a tremendous expectation to conduct research but I spend most of my professional life in teaching-related activities. How am I supposed to accomplish the multiple tasks of being a professor given the competing demands on my time?” Two areas of frustration are discussed next; the first relates primarily to workload and time press issues, the second to
frustrations pertaining to research and scholarship.

Workload/time press.

Regardless of rank, lack of time to accomplish their work was an ongoing complaint of the professors who participated in this study. A recently tenured female professor described her work life as “hectic”:

I am working harder than ever. I don’t see any end in sight. I teach more students, I have more responsibilities in terms of committee work, I’m in the schools regularly working with student teachers and cooperating teachers, and to top it off, I’m worried about the impact that doing more research will have on my personal and professional life.

This complaint is certainly not shared by everyone with whom I have spoken, but the candor and clarity nicely summarize some of the dilemmas that professors of teacher education encounter in their work. Being a professor is a multi-faceted role. Heavy teaching loads, developing courses, integrating information technology, working with preservice students and cooperating teachers, and carrying out research and other scholarly activities leaves little room to add anything more to their workloads. According to a first year female assistant professor, “I work seven days a week. It feels like I’m always working, I hardly have a personal life.” In this comment we see traces of Plater’s (1995) suggestion that the ability to self regulate and control time is a key aspect of success in academia. The importance of creating a supportive network of friends, family, and colleagues is crucial and cannot be overstated.

Several participants noted that they felt busier as professors than they remember being as K-12 teachers. This is an interesting reflection given the school-based folklore that professors have it easy compared to classroom teachers. Most professors, like this male assistant professor, noted that “the class contact part is the most visible aspect of the role, but I spend countless hours behind the scenes planning, grading assignments, and conferencing with students and colleagues.” Until the 1980’s, faculty work was usually discussed in terms of teaching, research, and service. Clearly, these three categories are insufficient to capture the current work of professors. Other categories have been suggested. For example, Gideonse (1989) analyzed the work of faculty across five categories: teaching, scholarly activity, advising, service, and administration/governance. Over time, the RATE category has expanded to include: preparation for class, teaching undergraduates, research, administration, advising, committees, teaching graduate students, and in-service. The findings of this study are consistent with Sorcinelli (1992) who reported an increase in stress levels among new faculty. With unclear or unstated goals, many newer faculty have difficulty knowing how much is sufficient for tenure and promotion. The never-ending and relentless pace of work can be quite devastating for faculty who have been enculturated into a “high stakes” academy. Whitt (1991, p. 185) points out that new faculty are expected to “hit the ground running” from the very first day on the job. The most well adjusted professors in this study seemed to understand the
rhythmic dimensions of academic life and to work within cycles to maintain a balance in their work lives.

The consensus of participants was that current levels of staffing are insufficient given the increased workload expectations. Some individuals suggested that faculties of education should hire more full-time professors and sessionals in the hope of lessening teaching workloads. Some experienced faculty recalled teaching fewer numbers of students when they began their careers. According to a male full professor about to retire, “It seemed more civilized then, not like the rat race today.” But hiring more sessionals may not be the answer because working with part-time individuals can be even more time consuming. Another male full professor with prior university administrative duties suggested that “sessionals do not usually possess a complete understanding of the overall program. They are not privy to all the intricacies of what goes on behind the scenes. They come and go but we are here for the long haul.” While professors acknowledged the important contribution that sessionals make to a teacher education program, they pointed out that they require support in their role, and they are typically the ones that are expected to provide that support. According to a male assistant professor hoping to apply for tenure and promotion in two years time, “this translates into more meetings, more planning sessions, more of everything, taking me away from my research.”

It is important for faculty in professional schools to maintain significant relationships with the field of practice, and this requires a major time commitment. Some faculty complained about supervising student teachers. Given the current expectations for their work in higher education, some argued that field supervision is not an effective use of their time. For those that held this view, the following comment from a male associate professor with many years of K-12 teaching experience was typical: “It would be better to contract this type of work out. Sometimes I lose a whole day by visiting just one student teacher. It’s simply not an effective use of my time.” Overall, professors’ comments revealed a dual commitment to K-12 education and the academy, sometimes causing tension in their work. Their espoused attitudes about improving K-12 education and the manner in which they situate themselves in academia have important implications for how they interpret their primary responsibilities as professors of education.

The perception of credibility from field-based colleagues is a related issue. Recognizing that these professors were once classroom teachers, it is unsettling for some professors when student teachers view them as “out of touch” with contemporary classroom practice. This idea was expressed succinctly by a female associate professor many years removed from her high school teaching assignment, who said:

I tell them things about teaching in my course and they seem to be a little suspicious. It’s like they don’t want to believe me. Then they go out to schools and cooperating teachers will be doing the same types of things I’ve demonstrated. They come back to the university saying they saw some really great stuff. Why don’t they believe me when I show it to them?
Earlier in this article, I noted that professors reported satisfaction in the relationships they established and maintained with students. However, there were elements of the relationship that caused various levels of frustration. For example, some professors expressed surprise and disappointment when working with preservice students they viewed as unsuitable for a career in teaching. Generally, they expected every student they worked with to demonstrate a high professional standard and disposition towards teaching and learning. When this was not the case they did not relish having to counsel students out of the program. This tension - the tension between being a supporter and being an evaluator of student performance - was problematic for these professors. These faculty found the role complicated because of their previous careers as K-12 teachers, several pointing out that there is an “obligation to the profession to ensure that only the very best teachers graduate from the program.” According to this group of teacher educators, maintaining high professional standards is crucial if meaningful education reform is to occur. Other professors said it was best for student teachers to voluntarily withdraw from programs. They said they did not feel comfortable deciding someone’s future so early in their development. A female assistant professor and prior elementary teacher said, “It’s not easy to know if we’re doing the right thing in demanding a student withdraw, particularly if their grades are adequate. What I mean is we usually are conflicted when they have a problem in their field placements but they might be strong academic students....then what do we do? Bow to professional pressures to kick them out or emphasize their academics and hope they improve over time?”

Research and scholarship.

Research related activities are the single greatest source of stress reported by these professors. For example, many faculty described what they viewed as “unfair expectations for their scholarly output” in relation to colleagues in other academic units. A male associate professor noted:

We are expected to do more and more research, but I don’t see the SSHRC [Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council] piece of the research pie getting bigger. Our colleagues in the Natural Sciences have access to more funding than we can ever dream about.

Professors acknowledge that competition for research dollars is fierce. In order to increase their chances of securing funding, several strategies were employed by professors, including this advice from a male associate professor: “Team up with someone who has already been successful in getting money. Even if you are not particularly interested in a project, get your name on the grant.” Most professors acknowledged the importance that major funding agencies place on the applicants’ scholarly reputation and “proven track record of research.” In the context of this study, the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC) was the most sought after external source of funding for research and scholarship, and perceived to be the most rewarded in terms of tenure and promotion.
Several professors were critical of what they described as the "excessively narrow focus" of major funding agencies. A female assistant professor with close ties to K-12 educational settings said:

SSHRC [Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council] funding is great but it's not the only way to fund research projects. For those of us that conduct much of our research in field settings, it is problematic because our type of research seems to be less valued. I can honestly say that I have generated a great deal more money from other places than SSHRC.

A majority of assistant and associate professors said they began the funding application process with "failure" on their minds. For example, one experienced male associate professor admitted, "I have never been successful in securing funds from SSHRC. I hate the process because I know my chances are poor. I know this sounds like a defeatist attitude but it is based on many years of disappointment." A majority of the professors in this study emphasized that they required only modest sums of money to carry out the research they were interested in. For those professors, funding is more easily obtained from places other than SSHRC including school boards, teacher federations, and federal human resources departments.

Some professors report that by engaging in research and scholarly activities it takes them away from what they perceive as their primary role, teaching. The most extreme position came from a male associate professor who said:

If I secured a major research grant, more likely than not it would mean using some of the money to hire an individual to do some or all of my teaching. Hiring a sessional for this purpose would be against my philosophy and commitment to undergraduate teacher education. I would feel guilty not teaching. I know research is important but I would struggle with not teaching. I suppose I might come to regret this attitude when I apply for promotion.

Some faculty clearly emphasized different dimensions of their role. While all held that scholarship was essential in the contemporary university, they defined their scholarly contributions differently. Most late-career professors relished the freedom to choose research projects that they were truly interested in rather than doing research as something necessary to earn tenure. Scholarship was often defined and inextricably linked with teaching. In contrast, for a majority of untenured faculty, scholarship was more narrowly defined in terms of published refereed articles and books.

Securing funding for research is only part of the problem. Professors of all rank made numerous comments about not having adequate time to engage in research and scholarship given the current expectations for their work. A female associate professor said, "There are not enough hours in the day to complete all of the things related to teaching and service, as well as doing research." When I asked professors for suggestions about ways to facilitate their research function,
the following comment from a male full professor was typical, "What I require most is a substantial block of time to do nothing else but write. No interruptions, no distractions, just time, plain and simple." When speaking about this type of tension, a female associate professor noted:

When I get busy, the first thing that suffers is my research. I'm annoyed because it is a big factor in securing tenure and promotion. I don't have a choice about teaching. I have to teach but research is more elusive...I can't push aside my teaching, but research is clearly a different matter.

Doing research, then, "on the fly" was typical for almost all of the professors who participated in this study. They indicated that they were forced to use their personal vacation time to work on research projects, contributing to even higher levels of anxiety and stress than might otherwise have been the case.

The "publish or perish" debate, then, is clearly a source of stress for faculty. All professors talked about accumulating "enough articles" before it was safe to apply for tenure and/or promotion. This is especially problematic for members of professional schools like education because faculty are expected to forge professional relationships with their school-based colleagues. For many education faculty, this means spending substantial amounts of time in school settings. As professionally enriching as this experience can be, it essentially removes faculty from campus and it does not typically result in the type of scholarly publication potentially most valued by tenure and promotion committees. Also, in contrast to academic disciplines, the primary role of a professional school is to prepare graduates for practice, not for scholarship. This purpose can widen the gap between an education professor's own scholarship and the need of training students for teaching in K-12 settings.

Keep in mind that when I asked professors why they left K-12 education for a career in the professoriate, almost all said that they were motivated out of a sense of duty to prepare better teachers, not to be scholars and conduct research. For many of the older faculty, having to conduct research is not something they easily adapted to. Untenured faculty were more likely to acknowledge the value of being active scholars. They viewed their teaching as important but their comments reveal their belief that it will be their research records that will be most important in earning tenure and promotion. Some of these faculty talked about their scholarship quite apart from their teaching. For example, an untenured individual highlighted the teaching-research tension: "If I am successful in securing funding, the first thing I will do is request a reduced teaching load so that I can get on with the real work." Many of the untenured professors I talked with indicated that they were reluctant to discuss their preferences for research with their tenured colleagues because they feared a backlash. They worried about being cast as outsiders, for not conforming on undergraduate program issues.

Concluding Discussion
Although this was an exploratory study of 31 professors of education, readers will nevertheless recognize many of the issues raised by these participants. Their
experiences highlight an academic life revolving around commitment to teaching, scholarship, and service. While these professors were generally satisfied with their work in higher education, several tensions surfaced. Professors arrive in higher education with high expectations for the role; namely fulfilling their teaching duties and developing active research agendas. When barriers prevent this from happening, it is understandable that they might begin to question their own abilities. For some, it is the impostor syndrome; others blame institutional structures and hierarchies.

What have we learned from this study and what can be done to lessen the tensions? First, recognize that many of the same things that gave the participants satisfaction as K-12 teachers gives them satisfaction as professors; namely, working with students, being involved in the institution and community in which they work, and feeling that they can make a difference in the lives of others. In other words, they are committed to their work as professors, and to improving K-12 education.

Second, these professors view themselves as exemplary teachers. However, new faculty receive mixed messages about the importance of teaching. Tierney and Bensimon (1996) identified the fundamental lesson learned by untenured faculty was that “teaching is not that important; if it were, there would be more discussions about what constitutes good teaching” (p. 65). Further, new faculty must structure their work and allocate their time in congruence with the reward structure of their institution. They are compelled to arrange their activities in the interests of efficiency in order to achieve the most productive use of their time. Given the complexity and increasing demands being made of teacher educators’ work, professors should have more say in emphasizing either a teaching or research focus. For example, a new professor may wish to concentrate on developing new courses and teaching over the first few years of his or her career, whereas another beginning professor might focus on his or her research agenda. Both would be in tenure track appointments but the criteria used to award tenure and/or promotion would be weighted differently.

Third, workloads are increasing. Complicating the matter further is the belief that much of the work is invisible. These faculty expressed concern that they were not always adequately rewarded for their professional contributions (e.g., field supervision, committee work), as well as pointing out high levels of fatigue associated with teaching greater numbers of both undergraduate and graduate students. Given that levels of stress and anxiety appear to be increasing among academics, serious attention needs to be paid to assisting professors in finding a balance between their personal and professional lives. Some of these professors described the importance of taking care of themselves to avoid the negativity and pressures they experienced, but as Collay (2002) reminds us, “risking life and metaphorical limb to obtain membership in a club that is built often by chewing up the inhabitants...not only diminishes the individuals whose lives are damaged, but leaves little hope that the academy can be changed” (p. 103).

Fourth, professors acknowledge the centrality of their scholarly responsibilities though they say that it is not something that should be divorced from teaching and community service. However, if advice is given on how to live
your life as an academic, the message is often to focus on publications and grant
writing and to minimize time spent on other activities. While most institutions
expect faculty members to engage in a variety of activities, it is scholarship (e.g.,
publications, grants) that counts most towards tenure and promotion. This fact
often causes professors to question the value of their own interests, further
perpetuating the “publish or perish” mentality. This tension is particularly present
for newer faculty and for any academics who invest significant amounts of time
and energy working in community-based settings.

Considering these tensions as a whole, perhaps it is time to consider
sabbaticals earlier in one’s career, more targeted mentorship and orientation
programs for faculty, a shorter tenure track phase, and even the elimination of the
associate rank.

A number of questions are raised as a result of the study. The following are
Suggestions for further research regarding professors’ experiences in teacher
education:

- To what extent do generational and age differences among teacher
  educators impact how they conceptualize their role in teacher
  education?
- Do women and minority faculty experience the academy
differently than the dominant male faculty?
- What differences exist between elementary and secondary teacher
  educators in terms of workload and duties?
- Is stress on the rise among professors of teacher education? If so,
  what coping strategies are likely to lessen the anxiety?
- How do professors employed at research intensive universities
  experience their work in comparison to professors employed at less
  research intensive institutions?
- What are some viable alternatives to current tenure and promotion
  models?

References
Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press.
Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching.
Educational Researcher, 18(1), 32-42.
Teachers College Press.
Collay, M. (2002). Balancing work and family. In J. Cooper & D. Stevens (Eds.), Tenure in the
sacred grove: Issues and strategies for women and minority faculty (pp. 89-106). Albany:
State University of New York Press.


