

Cohorts in the Elementary/Middle Years Program

(Approved June 2009; updated Feb 2013; updated Sept 2014; updated Jan 2018)

A Brief History

In the early days of the current program (that began in the late 1980s) there was little connection between the school experience and the campus experience. Supervision of teacher candidates was primarily the responsibility of sessionals hired specifically for that role. Occasionally, tenured professors supervised as well to fill out their loads.

Geographically-based generalist cohorts

In the early 1990s, a group of Surrey elementary teachers and administrators approached UBC with a novel plan. Could the students be placed in clusters of schools with one faculty advisor so that conversations could occur? Could there be funds designated for professional development of both teacher candidate and school advisor? Could we break the egg-crate model of practicum supervision? This was the beginning of the elementary project model that over time was taken up in Richmond, Delta, Langley and Coquitlam (middle years). In this model, two courses (Principles of Teaching and Communications) were taught by the faculty advisors (seconded-teacher adjuncts or sessionals), giving students a mentor who moved with them from campus to the schools. Groups of 36 teacher candidates had a common timetable, at least one common instructor, and practica in the same geographic area/s. School advisors were brought together regularly to discuss issues of supervision.

Thematic cohorts

The first elementary thematic cohort to appear was Community of inquiry in Teacher Education (CITE). This cohort involved instructors from the Department of Curriculum Studies and included both teachers and teacher candidates in the conversation about teacher education in a community of inquiry. Other thematically based cohorts initiated by faculty members followed: Problem-Based Learning (PBL), Fine Arts and Media (FAME), Early Literacy Cohort, Self-Regulated Learning, and more recently Teaching English

Language Learners (TELL), Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) and French Language & Global Study (FLAGS). In addition, the Humanities and Social Justice cohort was a secondary cohort that existed for a number of years.

Where are we now?

In recent years, effort has been made to ensure that there is at least one elementary or middle years cohort in each of the lower mainland school districts and that the Inquiry Seminar instructor is a seconded teacher from that district or a tenure-track faculty member.

What have we learned?

The cohort structure provides many advantages including:

- increased tenure-track faculty involvement in the undergraduate program;
- enhanced relationships with school districts due to targeted secondment of master teachers;
- increased coherence for teacher candidates, due mainly to having a strong course-practicum link due to seconded teacher adjuncts.

CREATE

The intention of the Community to Re-imagine Educational Alternatives in Teacher Education (CREATE) proposal was to create a program that focuses on inquiry, social justice and diversity, and links to schools and community. It was the belief of the committee that the cohort structure was well suited to the re-imagined program and that, indeed, many of the current cohorts would continue in the revised program. Cohorts for which there was leadership provided by a tenure-track faculty member, an effort to communicate with instructors who share the same group of students, and strong links to local school districts provide a meaningful experience for faculty, seconded teachers, teacher candidates and teachers in the field.

Guidelines for the Formation of New Cohorts

The following guidelines and criteria for the formation of cohorts are used to review their creation, rotation, revision and retirement.

Initiation of a New Cohort

Before writing a proposal, tenure-track faculty members who wish to initiate a new cohort should consult first with the Associate Dean, Teacher Education in regard to the theme, its link to program themes and interest/availability of school district(s). The proposal will be shared with the Teacher Education Advisory Committee* whose role is to provide advice to the Associate Dean re: the proposal. The proposal must include the following:

1. Commitment of a faculty member or members who intend to provide leadership, vision and direction for the cohort and also to teach at least one course for the cohort.
2. Rationale for the proposed theme of the cohort including an analysis of the needs of a potential partner district/s (or the teaching field in general), link to BEd program tenets and/or teaching field in general, and grounding in educational research. Note that the TEO must be involved in the selection of a district in any given year.
3. Evidence that the field experience will be linked to on-campus courses and that the school will be regarded as a learning community.
4. Evidence that the proposed theme will engage teacher candidates.
5. Evidence that the proposed theme will engage teachers in classrooms.
6. Intention to designate a coordinator for the cohort who, in conjunction with the Director, will provide cohort oversight (cohesion between field and campus, a strong relationship with school district, cohesion among cohort instructors).

Consideration of the questions guiding a cohort's review should also take place.

Cohort Sustainability

Successful cohorts in the past have demonstrated the following characteristics: school board involvement, a recognized process for selection of schools, one (or more) seconded teachers from the district who work with the cohort, and regular meetings of instructors in the cohort. The Teacher Education office will endeavour to support all cohorts by encouraging:

- school board involvement in the selection of partner schools;

- seconded teachers from the district who work with the cohort both on campus and in schools;
- a process whereby schools apply to take part in the cohort;
- regular team meetings of instructors working with the cohort.

Cohort Review

A review involving key members of the cohort team and the Teacher Education office should be undertaken every two years. Factors to consider:

1. Is the school district committed to the cohort? Has a system been established for the selection of partner schools? Are systems in place to select schools that are in tune with the goals of the cohort?
2. Does the cohort theme continue to align with school district and/or Ministry of Education priorities?
3. Are regular team meetings held to plan, implement and reflect on goals of the cohort and whether they are achieved?
4. Are there teachers with master's degrees related to the theme in the school district interested in becoming faculty advisors/instructors for the cohort?
5. Internal/self review. Is the cohort meeting the goals set in the initial proposal? Ideally these would be public (research articles, conference presentations, poster sessions, web presence, etc.).
6. Is there evidence that teacher candidates value their experience in the cohort? This may include a survey of graduates or school advisors.
7. Is there evidence that school districts value the cohort's theme (by providing practicum placements, interviewing and/or hiring grads)?

Cohort Rotation/Retirement

Cohorts may be rotated or retired if one or more of the following conditions apply:

1. Absence of tenure-track faculty involvement with the cohort,
2. Shift in school district and/or Ministry of Education priorities,
3. Length of time the cohort has been offered,
4. Student preference (low priority for cohort registration).

Cohort Combination

Cohorts may be combined when there are more cohort themes than number of students permit. Combinations are made by taking the following into consideration:

1. Congruence of themes,
2. District (multi-district) impact,
3. Faculty member collaboration,

* committee name changed in 2015 from Working Group on Teacher Education to Teacher Education Advisory Committee