TEACHER EDUCATION ACCORD: Values and Ideals of the Teaching Profession in Canada

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A NEW PAN-CANADIAN ACCORD RENEWS THE CONVERSATION ABOUT teacher education and teacher professionalism. Deans of Education, through the Association of Canadian Deans of Education (ACDE), have outlined a set of Pan-Canadian education initiatives based upon shared values related to teacher preparation, educational leadership and educational research across Canada. The accord, recently ratified, includes a set of cutting edge guiding principles on teacher education and a commitment to joint efforts on key issues in Canadian education, such as graduate education, educational research, data sharing, teacher mobility and educational leadership. The initiative arose in response to a common interest in advancing education in Canada in ways consistent with our strengths, our diversity, our needs and, in particular, our commitment to ensuring the effectiveness of programs that advance the teaching profession. This joint effort responds to calls for the creation and sharing of data on educational matters, and to our commitment to more fully engage our education faculties in these efforts.

THE FIRST ACCORD: TEACHER EDUCATION

The Accord on Teacher Education is the first of several to be developed. It is a broad statement of objectives and goals, developed during two years of collaboration and debate, and is intended to guide and foster teacher education rather than prescribe specific programs. These principles for teacher education are intended to be respectful of the profession and informed by leading edge ideas in education. The Accord was endorsed unanimously at the ACDE annual meeting in October, 2005, and all 27 deans, directors, and chairs of education at the Congress of the Humanities and Social Sciences at York University in May, 2006 became signatories as well. Others will have the opportunity to sign the Accord at the annual meeting in Ottawa in October 2007. Provision has been made for revisions to the Accord every three years.

ACDE ENCOURAGES FACULTIES AND SCHOOLS OF EDUCATION TO CONSIDER THESE PRINCIPLES IN THE DEVELOPMENT AND EVALUATION OF THEIR TEACHER EDUCATION PROGRAMS.
By endorsing the Accord, ACDE emphasizes that becoming a teacher is a life-long learning process that enhances both the profession and individual teachers’ abilities. It purposely avoids the word “standards,” choosing instead to focus on principles that may be broadly interpreted, that are generative, and that will support professional growth and inquiry. ACDE encourages faculties and Schools of education to consider these principles in the development and evaluation of their teacher education programs. At the same time, the Accord challenges the practice of some provinces in which the regulating bodies of the teaching profession have developed a “checklist” approach to accreditation that reduces teachers’ professional knowledge, discernment, and experience to a list of competencies and skills.

The development and ratification of these principles represents an historic agreement on Pan-Canadian education directions. The agreement respects Canada’s tradition of provincially-bound education initiatives without shying away from cross-provincial agreement on selected initiatives and the principles. Its ratification marks a first proactive step for Canadian faculties of education and has attracted attention from teacher educators and policy makers around the world, including deans of education in the United States, the Asia-Pacific region and Europe, who see it as a major step forward for teacher education and the professionalism of teaching.

THE FUTURE OF THE ACCORD
ACDE views the Accord as, first and foremost, a statement that will engage as many people as possible – teachers, governments, universities, parents and parent groups, students, educators, and university-based educational researchers – in an ongoing dialogue on teaching and teacher education. This is already happening at academic conferences, within faculties of education, and in meetings with school boards and governments, creating the first focused national discussion on principles of teacher education in Canada. The discussion provides opportunities for individual faculties and departments of education to view their programs in light of a Canadian perspective and gives the public, government and educational agencies and other stakeholders a tool to consider teacher education programs with regard to this national statement.

The Accord is also being used a reference for accreditation and academic program review. Because the principles are broadly framed, they can be applied to initial teacher education programs according to the unique nature and context of each institution. While the Accord provides a strong framework of normative principles for initial teacher education, faculties and departments of education can judge their programs with these broad principles without sacrificing particular, innovative approaches. For example, in considering the principle that “an effective teacher education program encourages teachers to assume a social
and political leadership role,” a teacher education faculty can consider how this principle is best realized, whether in course content, in specialized modules, in field experiences, or in the mission and/or goals of the program.

**THE PRINCIPLES OF THE ACCORD**

The twelve principles advance the following values and ideals: the teacher as a professional, a life-long learner and a social activist; the power of teaching and learning; the values of respect, inclusion, globalization and diversity; the value of collaboration with educational and public communities; and the importance of strong content knowledge and pedagogical knowledge. At a minimum, the principles provoke important discussions and the possibility of joint efforts on issues central to the advancement of teaching and learning across the country among faculties and departments of education, at government levels, and within associations and organizations such as the Canadian Teachers’ Federation and Canadian Education Association. Taken in their entirety, they constitute a renewed vision of the teaching profession and teacher education in Canada.

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**ROB TIERNEY** is Dean of Education at University of British Columbia and a past president of ACDE. It was during his term as president that ACDE embarked on the Accord process. ACDE welcomes discussion, debate, and commentary on the Accord from all educational partners. Remarks sent to acde.edu@ubc.ca will be reviewed and discussed by ACDE members at their annual meeting.

**Note**

1 The Association of Canadian Deans of Education, which includes deans, directors, and heads of education at universities and university colleges provides initial teacher education and graduate education, engages in educational research, and participates in educational policy development. ACDE considers and addresses issues of public education in collaboration with other education associations such as the Canadian Teachers’ Federation, the Council of Minister of Education (Canada), Canadian Education Association, and school districts. Such issues include sufficient research funding to inform policy and practice and to advance knowledge, data sharing, teacher mobility, conditions of teaching and learning, and delivery of teacher education.