

United States and Canada teacher accreditation standards and preparation curriculums on student mental health: A comparative case study

ELIZABETH LEVINE BROWN, GEORGE MASON UNIVERSITY

KATE PHILLIPPO, LOYOLA UNIVERSITY

SUSAN RODGER, PH.D., WESTERN UNIVERSITY

KAREN WESTON, COLUMBIA COLLEGE



Introductions



Who is in our audience?

Teachers and student mental health

Feast *and* famine

What are your experiences of teachers and student mental health?

Study Purpose

Teacher Awareness

- Teachers are aware of the strong relationship between students' social-emotional functioning and academic success.¹

Teacher Capacity

- Overwhelmingly, however, teachers feel that they lack the capacity to provide students with the social and emotional supports and interventions that many students need in order to be successful in the classroom.²

Study Purpose

Teacher Preparation

- Historically, teacher education programs have focused on preparing teacher candidates to know the subjects they teach and how to teach them, with little attention paid to preparing them to address students' mental health needs.³
- Excluding mental health education from preparation programs may lead to a significant mismatch between the policies and mandates that currently exist and the realities of today's classroom.
- However, regarding mental health, there is a dearth of research documenting the current preparation practices and the policies and mandates that inform these practices.
 - Feast and famine stories suggest a range of teacher learning experiences

Current Context of Teacher Preparation

U.S.

- Traditionally a four-year undergraduate degree program for initial certification/licensure
- Many states offer alternative routes to licensure
- NCLB and Race-to-the-Top: brought accountability and increased emphasis on subject matter knowledge
- Shift toward TP accountability based on performance of graduates, including learning outcomes in their classrooms (primarily test score gains)

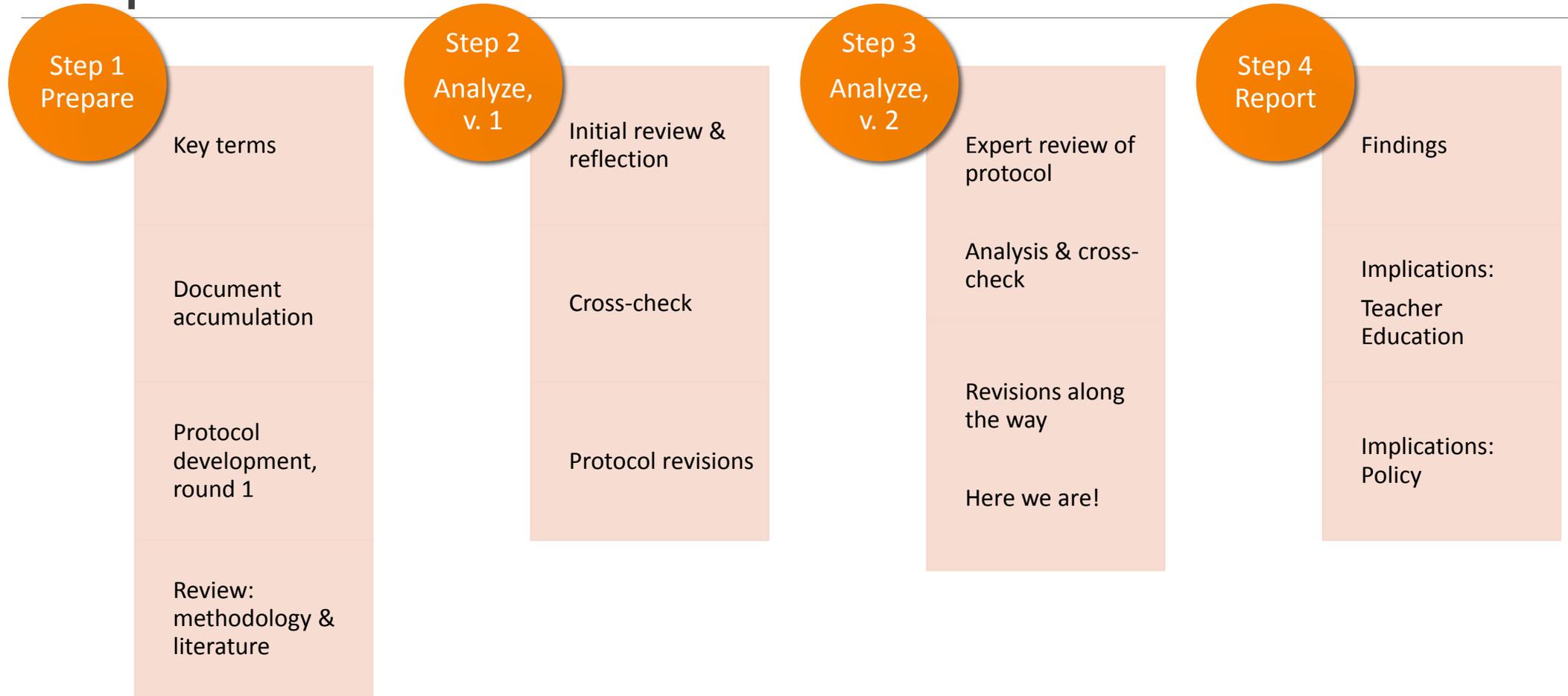
Canada

- No federal department or integrated national system of education
- Two typical routes for certification:
 - Two-year post-graduate degree
 - 4/5 year concurrent undergraduate degree
- Certification on graduation in most provinces
- Standardized test results for students have no ties to teacher employment or certification

Our Questions

- To what degree does teacher certification policy—which stands in the position to leverage change in teacher education programs—support the preparation of teacher candidates on school mental health needs of students?
- How do certification policies and preparation curriculums vary across Canadian provinces and U.S. states?
- How do national policy and professional contexts (primary/secondary education, teacher education) explain state/province-level requirements?
- What role in promoting student mental health do these policies imply for teacher candidates, and how if at all do this role differ between countries (or provinces/states)?

Steps



Protocol

- Awareness of, identification of, or responsiveness to student mental health needs, **student mental health symptoms**
- **Specific mental health issues**, such as depression, anorexia, substance abuse, or trauma
- **Psychosocial issues known to contribute to mental health issues**, such as homelessness, disability, immigration, community and family violence,, peer harassment. (Important to consider context)
- **Knowledge of developmental needs** for the age group served, specifically social-emotional developmental needs **or characteristics**.
- **Universal interventions intended to promote student mental health**, such as suicide prevention, coping skills instruction and SEL.
- **Teacher practices or curricula that are understood in the field to have a positive, preventive effect** on student wellness, such as those regarding diversity, cultural identity or heritage, the promotion of positive student-teacher or peer relationships, creating a positive classroom climate, or pro-social skills.
- **Collaboration** with school-based or community-based providers to address student social-emotional needs.

Lessons from finding and analyzing policy across disciplines

- Diaspora of policy documents
- Challenges of specifying what “counts” as student mental health in teacher preparation
- Importance of cross-checking each other’s “coding” in a cross-disciplinary study
- Expert review: challenging and enhancing protocol and what it helped us find

Preliminary Findings

Lots of mental health content document

- e.g., Iowa, Ontario, Colorado
- Targeted to special populations (*e.g., special ed, HOH, etc.*)

Isolated in specific, non-generalist teaching positions

- Non-core courses (Health, FACS)
- Optional courses
- Teachers serving students with atypical “needs”

Preliminary Findings

Variation across states and provinces

- Virginia speaks to need for mental health content in teacher education (although hidden in licensure document)
- West Virginia no mention of mental health content
 - However discussion of other protocol indicators (i.e., climate, social/emotional)
- International differences
 - Strong focus in Ontario. Little to no discussion in British Columbia

Broad discussions of universal prevention-like content...but not specific to mental health

- Culture and identity affirmation
- Relationship-building
- Social skills (as opposed to behavioral control)

Preliminary Findings:

What did we learn from the expert review?

How definitions of school mental health vary across disciplines

- What does this mean for research and application?

Revised protocol expanded our investigation of documents

- Expanded focus on universal prevention-like content despite language not specific to mental health

Next analysis steps



Questions? Responses?

- ◆ What are your reactions to these preliminary findings?
- ◆ What does this mean for the fields of school mental health? Teacher education?

DISCUSSION

- What do we do with this information?
 - Teacher professional learning conference
 - Few studies exist which examine pre-service teacher preparation in the area of mental health.
 - Teacher education programs
 - Interdisciplinary scholarship
 - Conference of province, state and federal policymakers concerned with teacher education
- What would you want to tell others based on what you have learned today?

Implications for Research, Practice and Policy

- Our set of certification policies produces an inconsistently prepared workforce
- Promising practices suggest further inquiry: What do state- and province-level policies look like when carried out by teacher educators and, ultimately, teachers?
- The teacher candidates we are educating now will be the education leaders within their generation, so if we want to see change, we must change teacher education
- Mental health will affect the lives of many children, youth, families and teachers- so our education must not be restricted to those who are preparing to teach special populations or elective classes

Special Issue of Advances in School Mental Health Promotion

- Special issue on school mental health promotion and teachers
- Seeking 500 word descriptions of proposed papers by December 15
 - Published in October 2016
- Articles that consider
 - Pre-service teacher preparation
 - In-service teacher professional learning
 - Local and federal teacher preparation/education policy
 - Teacher and mental health practitioner collaboration

Questions?

Thanks for joining us!