INTRODUCTION

The possibilities for immigrant teachers to become recertified and find employment is an important concern for the diversification of the teaching profession in Canada and elsewhere in the face of social forces such as globalization and increased immigration. This chapter draws on a larger study that examined the recertification process of internationally educated teachers (IETs) in the contradictory space of Canadian multiculturalism as it played out in one of two teacher education programs in British Columbia (BC) which offer a designated track for IETs (Marom, 2016). Although many IETs arrive in Canada as graduates of higher education and teacher education programs, many of them need to repeat at least parts of their education to be eligible to teach in Canada. Obtaining the course work and practice teaching needed for recertification falls under the mandate of teacher education programs; however, critics point out that teacher education programs have not been flexible enough to meet the challenge of IETs’ integration (Cho, 2011; Phillion, 2003).

Building on Bourdieu’s (1985, 1990) concept of cultural capital and its sub-category of professional capital (Schinkel & Noordegraaf, 2011), we investigate the dominant professional capital circulating in teacher education involving IETs. We use the concept of professional capital to demonstrate the capital conversion process that is required from IETs (Marom & Ruitenberg, in preparation).

Research on IETs in Canada is a relatively recent endeavour (Bascia, Thiessen, & Goodson, 1996; Beynon, Ilieva, & Dichupa, 2004; Cho, 2011; Deters, 2011; Faez, 2010; Frank, 2013; He, 1998; Janusch, 2014; Myles, Cheng, & Wang, 2006; Schmidt, 2010). Studies to date focus on different stages of the recertification process (e.g., credential assessment, course work, practicum, and job search). Most studies focus on the experiences and voices of IETs and unveil barriers in the process of recertification and employment using various terminology such as systemic, social, and general barriers (Phillion, 2003); recertification entry, marginalization, and professional acculturation (Deters, 2011); “regulatory agencies, teacher education programmes and employers” (Beynon et al., 2004, p. 433); language,
recertification processes, personal and economic problems (Walsh & Brigham, 2007); intake and recertification programs, and job finding (Cho, 2011). Two major themes identified in the literature are cultural and linguistic barriers with studies describing the difficulties in teaching in a second language and the cultural nuances embedded in diverse teaching contexts. Fewer studies, however, take a closer look at the institutional frames impacting IETs’ experiences (Schmidt, 2010; Schmidt & Block, 2010). Indeed, Schmidt (2010) claims that there is a “dearth of scholarship that brings immigrant teacher issues beyond the realm of the personal and into the political” (p. 241).

This chapter focuses on the institutional space of the recertification trajectory for IETs, and some of the processes and interactions enacted in it, by analyzing the conception of the “good teacher” in the recertification trajectory of IETs in the University of British Columbia (UBC) Updating Program. It is grounded in the understanding that the program is not an isolated social site, but rather is located within a web of policies and institutions that are intertwined in the recertification process. The study it draws on findings of previous research on IETs, while aiming to extend beyond IETs’ experiences to the institutional and political factors that affect these experiences.

BOURDIEU, PROFESSIONAL CAPITAL, AND THE “GOOD TEACHER”

Bourdieu’s (1985, 1990) work on habitus, field, and capital is a useful frame to illuminate some of the challenges that IETs face institutionally in the recertification process. The notion of habitus reflects human participation in a social world and the incorporation of that social world in the embodied dispositions of the person. Fields, or social worlds, are defined by the degree of their autonomy and their location within a larger field of power (Bourdieu, 1985; Gemme, 2009) according to the relative economic, cultural, and social capital operating in them. In any given field, “the kinds of capital, like the aces in a game of cards, are powers which define the chances of profit” (Bourdieu, 1985, p. 196). Hence, capital has two important functions: to advance members of one group over another, and to serve as the quality distinction of a certain group. Bourdieu uses the term symbolic capital to denote “the form in which the different forms of capital [economic, cultural, social] are perceived and recognized as legitimate” (1985, p. 197) in a given field. Thus symbolic capital has a double function as a form of capital embedded in the other forms of capital while different fields have specific forms of capital that act as the local currency of the field.

According to Bourdieu, disjunctions between habitus and field occur “when individuals with a well-developed habitus find themselves in different fields or different parts of the same social field” (Reay, 2004, p. 438). The IET participants in this study arrived in Canada as immigrants with their prospective habitus and capital; however, in order to keep working in their profession (the field of teaching),