

**Ontario Pre-service Teacher Education:
The Case for Equity, Inclusion and Diversity Training**

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Position

The London & Middlesex Local Immigration Partnership (LMLIP) and the *Peterborough Partnership Council on Immigrant Integration (PPCII)* strongly call upon the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities to mandate the completion of at least one course in equity, inclusion and diversity studies to be a requirement for all pre-service teachers prior to graduation. Additionally, we call upon the Ministry to ensure that the principles, attitudes and skills required to provide successful equitable and inclusive education be embedded throughout the curricula of all teacher education courses and programs in Ontario.

Rationale

“An equitable and inclusive education system is fundamental to achieving high levels of student achievement. It is recognized internationally as critical to delivering a high-quality education of learners.” (UNESCO, 2008, quoted in Ontario Ministry of Education, 2009a, p. 5). Teachers are an integral component of any education system, as is their role in fostering equitable and inclusive learning opportunities and classrooms to support students in reaching their highest potential. To achieve truly inclusive education, it is fundamental that teachers be well prepared to enable all students to reach high levels of academic achievement. The development of knowledge, skills, attitudes and beliefs of pre-service teachers is essential to this preparation and falls within the purview of Ontario’s Faculties of Education. In order to fully prepare teachers for the breadth of diversity in Ontario classrooms, it is vital that the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities set a framework for teacher training that results in teachers who are capable of providing all students with high-quality and equitable education.

In examining the current situation for pre-service teacher education related to diversity and inclusion, one primary concern is the cultural, racial and linguistic divide that continues to exist between teachers and students. The majority of teachers continue to be white, middle-class, mono-lingual females (Childs, Broad, Gallagher-MacKay, Sher, Escayg & McGrath, 2010; Cho & DeCastro-Ambrosetti, 2005) and Ontario classrooms continue to diversify (Egbo, 2011; Solomon, Portelli, Daniel & Campbell, 2005). Ryan, Pollack & Antonelli (2009) indicate that as a group, educators and administrators in Ontario are highly under-representative of the students that they teach, and in recent years that gap has been widening. Additionally, Gay and Kirkland (2003) found that teachers have limited experience with people who are not like them.

It is worth noting that Ontario continues to receive the highest proportion of immigrants of all Canadian provinces (Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 2012), resulting in considerable numbers of immigrants in Ontario’s schools. Of the approximately 250,000 immigrants who arrived in Canada each year between 2006-2010, 40% were children and youths who subsequently entered Canadian classrooms. A substantial majority of these students – estimates range as high as 90% – spoke neither official language (Canadian School Boards Association, 2006). As the most popular Ontario city for immigration, Toronto is now rivalling New York and London, England with its reputation as one of the world’s most diverse cities (Spicer, 2008). This diversity is reflected in Toronto’s multicultural/multilingual school profiles. Cummins (2007) estimates that 50% of all school-aged children in Toronto speak home languages other than English or French. Ottawa and Hamilton are also leading immigration destinations in Ontario; however, multicultural/multilingual school profiles are not only standard for the largest cities in the province (tier one cities). Such profiles are also becoming the norm in smaller (second and third tier)

Ontario cities such as Kitchener-Waterloo, London, and Windsor (Canadian School Boards Association, 2006; Taylor, 2010).

Ontario's *Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy* (2009) is based on the vision of a publicly funded education system that gives all students the opportunity to reach their highest potential. This strategy explicitly recognizes that some groups of students, including recent immigrants, may be at risk of lower achievement. Childs, Broad, Gallagher-MacKay, et al. (2010) state that "Ontario needs all of its teachers, whatever their background, to be culturally responsive and equity minded...taking responsibility as educators for equal success for all students" (p. 5). At the same time, Ontario teachers must provide linguistically responsive pedagogy. Research suggests that students from diverse linguistic and cultural background invest themselves more in schooling that recognizes all aspects of their (diverse) identities, and that greater investment in schooling leads to higher academic achievement (Taylor & Cummins, 2011). To this end, teacher education programs must have a comprehensive approach to equity, inclusion, and diversity training, thereby enabling teachers to work from an inclusive foundation within diverse classrooms.

The current model provides in-service teachers with opportunities for further learning about diversity and inclusion through Additional Qualifications (AQ) courses, including *Inclusive Classroom* offered by the Ontario College of Teachers. However, all teachers will face diversity from their first day in the classroom, not just those who choose to take AQ courses. While in-service courses do provide supplementary knowledge and skills for teachers, this timing is not effective. The optimal period for developing a foundation for diversity-focused and inclusive classroom practice is during pre-service teacher training.

In order to develop inclusive classrooms that demonstrate and value cultural diversity, all teacher candidates require certain attitudes, skills and strategies. This is not a new idea for Ontario. The 1994 Royal Commission on education reform, *For the Love of Learning*, called for more learning about the diverse student population along with a longer teacher preparation program. The case for inclusion and diversity training in Ontario pre-service teacher training curricula rests clearly on the fact that its practice is directly correlated to student success. "[R]esearch shows that when students feel welcomed and accepted in their school, they are more likely to succeed academically" (Ontario Ministry of Education, (2009b). Nieto (2000) outlines the need for teachers to learn "how to promote the learning of all students, and to develop educational environments that are fair and affirming" (p. 183). Overarching themes for the Ministry of Education include supports for high levels of student achievement and reducing achievement gaps. The Ministry's *Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy* (2009) embraces multiculturalism and diversity, promotes human rights, and counteracts discrimination, bullying, and intolerance. By expanding pre-service teacher training to include mandatory diversity, equity, and inclusion training, all students will have greater opportunities to achieve success, and the education system will be better equipped to meet the needs of a growing diversity of students.

Recommendations

We recommend that the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities mandate that equitable and inclusive education principles, attitudes and skills be embedded in Ontario's pre-service teacher education programs. As such, we strongly recommend the following:

1. Completion of one mandatory equity, inclusion and diversity and inclusion course by all pre-service teachers

A compulsory course specializing in surveying various issues of diversity would provide an essential foundation for understanding complex questions of cultural and linguistic diversity. Some examples of existing optional courses within Ontario Faculties of Education that could fulfill this mandatory course component include: *Culture, Language and Education* (Queen's University), *Identity Construction and Education of Minority* (University of Toronto) and *Diversity Issues in Schooling* (Brock University).

2. Integration of equity, inclusion and diversity content in all course work

Infusing equity, inclusion and diversity content in all courses ensures they become part of the normal experience for all prospective teachers (Nieto, 2000). While some may argue that this approach has become part of pre-service teacher education programs, it has not been mandated nor consistently implemented. Additionally, based on their study of pre-service teachers' attitudes toward multicultural education, Cho & DeCastro-Ambrosetti (2005) recommend that "...issues related to diversity should be infused throughout the courses offered..." in teacher education programs, in addition to the mandatory course (p. 28).

3. Concentration on diversity as an asset rather than a deficit

The ability to see diversity as an asset rather than a deficit is an attitude that can be fostered during pre-service training (Kurz & Paul, 2005). An asset-based approach positively influences classroom dynamics and student achievement. It is also relevant to teacher interactions with parents. Parent involvement and engagement with the education system is fundamental to student success and has been incorporated into the philosophy of the Ministry of Education (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2009a). The concepts and skills of inclusion that are learned during pre-service education extend beyond the classroom to interactions with parents. The recognition of parental assets and strengths, in conjunction with enhanced inclusive communication, supports successful engagement of parents as partners in children's education, which will contribute to optimal student success.

4. Opportunities for critical reflection on equity, inclusion and diversity issues

Unpacking existing beliefs, attitudes and assumptions is a starting point for pre-service teachers to challenge hegemonic knowledge and to develop critical consciousness in their teaching. The inclusion of content that broadly examines biases, including the biases, values, and attitudes of teacher candidates, as well as strategies for working effectively with diverse populations can result from such a focus (Nieto, 2000). Critical analysis of their own beliefs and behaviours enables pre-service teachers to develop a deeper awareness and understanding of inequities, diversity and inclusion.

Background

Local Immigration Partnerships (LIPs) are collaborative community partnerships established across Ontario and designed to strengthen local and regional communities in serving and supporting immigrants to integrate into their communities. This initiative is funded by Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC) and supported by the Ontario Ministry of Citizenship and Immigration (MCI) and the Association of Municipalities of Ontario (AMO).

London & Middlesex Local Immigration Partnership

Since its inception in September 2009, *LMLIP* has made a concerted effort to bring together a cross section of the community, including business, community services, volunteers, and immigrant representatives through local discussions, in order to hear the perspectives of multiple voices. These consultations resulted in our *Community Immigrant Strategic Plan*. The *Plan* identifies issues and strategies to address them in the areas of education, employment, health and wellbeing, inclusion and civic engagement, justice and protection services, and settlement.

Immigrant parents who attended community consultations clearly expressed their concerns about the challenges faced by their children in the classroom. These parents indicated that teachers need greater preparation to better understand and appreciate cultural and linguistic diversity in order to achieve a more inclusive classroom and school. Among other concerns, parents identified that they did not understand the expectations about the role of parents in the education system, while at the same time they themselves did not feel understood, especially when trying to discuss issues concerning their children with educators, administrators, and other professionals in the education system. This input from local parents reinforces our position.

Peterborough Partnership Council on Immigrant Integration

The *Peterborough Partnership Council on Immigrant Integration* (PPCII) was established in 2008 to create a cohesive regional response to the needs of newcomers in the City and County of Peterborough. In 2009, the PPCII began the research and community consultation process necessary to develop its five-year immigrant integration strategy.

Launched in 2010, the PPCII Integration Strategy outlines the objectives which need to be met to improve immigrant integration in the County and City of Peterborough. The Education pillar of the PPCII Integration Strategy aims to improve, among other things both the ability of teachers to teach in a diverse classroom, and the diversity of teachers themselves. To this end the PPCII has recently presented on these issues to teacher candidates in the Trent-Queens concurrent education program. Our strong belief that diversity should be a foundational principle of teacher curricula in Ontario motivates our involvement in this project.

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