



The International Indigenous Policy Journal

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Abstract

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Education in Ontario

In Ontario, the provincial Ministry of Education (MOE) regulates education beginning in early childhood and continuing through to elementary and secondary school institutions. The Ministry mandates that, up until age 16, children living in the province must attend school. In 2003, the MOE developed new initiatives in the province to improve student engagement and achievement for Aboriginal learners. As part of the Aboriginal Education Strategy, the Ministry committed to “developing and implementing curriculum resources for teachers to reach Aboriginal students and to teach all students about First Nation, Métis and Inuit cultures, traditions and histories” (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2009, para. 6). Even with this initiative and Aboriginal input into the Aboriginal Education Strategy, change is slow in coming. It is not yet evident to what extent teacher education programs in the province have taken up the mission to educate teacher candidates about Aboriginal issues and history. It is also not yet evident what, if any, concrete and province-wide initiatives will be taken to (re)educate teachers about these issues.²

It has been stated by many scholars that the Aboriginal population is the fastest growing and the youngest amongst the Canadian population (Preston, 2008). Mendelson (2006) reported that there were 188,315 self-identified Aboriginal people in Ontario in 2001. The most recent Census data from 2011 showed there were 301,425 self-identified Aboriginal people in

The "Grandfathers"

ensure that Aboriginal people living in urban centres have the ability to obtain education, employment, shelter, and other social supports (McCaskill & Fitzmaurice, 2007).

Traditional learning passed on much more than traditional knowledge for the community to function; it also allowed for culture, language, and worldview to be passed on to the next generation (Battiste & Barman, 1995; Preston, 2008; Stonechild, 2006). Many Aboriginal people who live in urban cities have

The Deepening Knowledge Project

Initiated by Dr. Kathy Broad, Executive Director of Initial Teacher Education

By the Numbers

To date, the program has run over two academic years. In both years, we asked audience members to fill out a voluntary evaluation after the presentation in order to gain anonymous feedback and insight into reactions to the material and our presentation methods. After analyzing the statistical results and the written feedback sections, we determined that the results from both years were quite similar, and thus we have collapsed the feedback for the purposes of this paper. Over the two academic years, 844 evaluations were collected after 25 presentations. In total, 36 presentations were given, but due to a variety of factors (most often lack of time at the end of presentations) 11 groups were not asked to fill out evaluations.

Course instructors were asked to provide at least 1.5 hours for the workshop, but presentations ranged in time from 45 minutes to 3 hours (with a 15 minute break). We agreed to fill any time slot we were given,

are exposed before entering their teaching careers.

The evaluation also asked how confident teacher candidates felt teaching about Aboriginal issues after attending the workshop. Although over 12% of teacher candidates responded that they *did not feel confident*, 47.3% of respondents felt *somewhat confident*, while 29.2% were *confident* in teaching the material to their future students. Unfortunately, only 6.9% of all teacher candidates felt *very confident* that they could teach this material after the workshop. This lack of confidence in teaching Aboriginal material after the workshop indicates that, in addition to information workshops delivered as part of this project, additional time does need to be dedicated to instruction around lesson planning and practicum assignments in order to boost the confidence of the teacher candidates and give them concrete experience in incorporating information about Aboriginal cultures into their lessons. It may also be helpful for OISE/UT to help facilitate relationships between teacher candidates and various organizations in Toronto,

We also received many comments about the timing of the presentation, especially with regard to the perceived importance of the topics. For instance, teacher candidates stated:

The workshops should not be presented at the end of the year. It should be integrated into the year in all our curriculum. ALL of our curriculum.

Mandatory & longer/ Maybe do this presentation before second practicum so we can use this!

We need more! [This] should be at the beginning of the program.

Have this workshop earlier in the year, I could have used this in my practicum – it would make more confident teaching this.

In reviewing teacher education programs across Canada, it is apparent there is a wide range of incorporation of Aboriginal content into teacher instruction. Therefore, further analysis of how much time is provided to teacher candidates in all teacher education programs would be useful in order to ensure that all candidates are provided with at least some instruction about Aboriginal people and issues to assist with improving Aboriginal student graduation rates.

Finally, many teacher candidates requested the inclusion of concrete lesson plans and more direct links with various aspects of the curriculum:

[Include] more time for resources => how we can make positive change.

[H]ow to tie it into Math/Sci?

[M]ore specific to schooling, education and teaching.

[H]ow Aboriginal culture could be integrated into the curriculum... or what actions can be taken to integrate Aboriginal students into the curriculum?

The presenters received similar questions from teacher candidates at almost all workshops. Among these questions were:

Why wasn't this workshop provided earlier in the year? Or why wasn't the information provided in smaller segments across the curriculum?

How do I get more information about Aboriginal children and families?

How can I help Aboriginal children and their families with the curriculum?

What resources should I use in my classroom?

Is there a place to take a course or workshop to add to the information that you've provided?

We had some Aboriginal information throughout the year, but we don't all have the Canadian history knowledge. Will OISE work on rectifying that?

Another line of questioning that emerged during both years of the presentations had to do with the cultural makeup of Toronto. It is true that Toronto is an especially multicultural city; however, as the original inhabitants of this land, Aboriginal peoples hold a unique place in the country's history and contemporary culture. Some teacher candidates expressed concerns about the importance of learning Aboriginal topics in a city where they felt Aboriginal people were not a significant portion of the population. Some also expressed disbelief that they would encounter First Nations, Métis, and Inuit

Second, different and more in-depth presentations should be offered for those few teacher candidates who do come from a background in Aboriginal studies or who are further along in their journey in learning about these topics. On the other hand, based on feedback during presentations and within the evaluations, it is clear that the majority of teacher candidates who enter into the ITE program do not have a solid working knowledge of Aboriginal peoples, histories, and cultures. Teacher candidates spoke about not learning this in elementary or high school, or in their undergraduate programs. Evaluations indicated that candidates wanted more information about a variety of subjects such as contemporary issues, historical perspectives, and especially residential school.

Course instructors may assume that their teacher candidates have more knowledge about Aboriginal peoples and perspectives than they do. On two notable occasions, instructors expressed shock at the lack of knowledge communicated by teacher candidates during the course of a presentation. One commented that knowledge of social justice in general does not necessarily translate into knowledge of Aboriginal-specific topics. Instructors should not assume that a satisfactory knowledge of social justice issues on the part of their teacher candidates translates into an equal level of knowledge of Aboriginal-specific topics. Instructors should be prepared to devote a larger proportion of their instructional time to Aboriginal-specific topics.

Third, the diversity of the requests from course instructors regarding length and content of the presentations, as well as the different needs of each cohort, meant that at least 30 minutes to 1 hour of preparation was dedicated to thinking and planning for each presentation. Presentations could be even more effective if more time was spent meeting with each instructor to learn more about the students and what material they have been taught up to the point of the presentations.

Some of the information provided by presenters was met with resistance from teacher candidates. Some teacher candidates made comments about the political nature of the presentations and that the delivery was biased. Others could not yet see culture beyond the representations of "artefacts" and "spiritual routines." Taken together, these comments suggest a fourth recommendation: More time needs to be spent on identity, privilege, bias and perspective, and critical multiculturalism theory prior to the presentations.

The original purpose of the presentations was to give a background of Aboriginal peoples, histories, and cultures, with some focus on the integration of material into classroom curriculum. Despite efforts to bring the two together, one presentation is not enough to give sufficient time to cover both to a satisfactory degree. This presentation should not be seen by teacher candidates or course instructors as the "one stop shop" for all things Aboriginal-specific for the year. Instead, course instructors should focus on curriculum integration and understanding how to work with Aboriginal children and families throughout the ITE program. If multiple sessions with the presenters are not possible, course instructors must see the integration and lesson-planning piece as their responsibility within the ITE curriculum.

Exposure to Aboriginal peoples, histories, and cultures should continue to be increased within the ITE program. The inclusion of established Aboriginal organizations at the University of Toronto such as the

In addition, the presenters recommended that OISE/UT create a partnership with Aboriginal and Northern Affairs Canada (previously known as Indian and Northern Affairs Canada) and, most importantly, build strong and trusting relationships with First Nations and Inuit communities in order to create more practicum opportunities in First Nations and Inuit schools. These relationships can also assist OISE/UT in determining the needs of Aboriginal families with children in the education system that may be beyond the curriculum. In this way, OISE/UT can assist communities by advocating for their interests.

Finally, it has become apparent that the lack of knowledge teacher candidates have about Aboriginal history and current issues is unacceptable, given their responsibility in educating future generations of Canadian, First Nations, Métis, and Inuit children. To begin to rectify this widespread problem, OISE/UT must do its part to educate, to undo the years of trauma perpetuated by the school system on many Aboriginal people, as well as the widespread ignorance among Canadians of these events and other assimilationist practices. To this end, it should be mandatory that candidates entering the B.Ed. program have some undergraduate credits in Aboriginal issues or that candidates receive a full term, mandatory course on topics related to Aboriginal communities while being educated at OISE/UT. In British Columbia and Saskatchewan, B.Ed. students are mandated to take at least one full course in

larger populations of Aboriginal students. Given the large population of settler-diasporic peoples in the Greater Toronto Area, the social dynamics differ from other urban centres in Canada where tensions between Aboriginal communities and settler peoples can be quite pronounced. These dynamics carry into teacher training programs and public school classrooms and so our work may not be fully applicable in these contexts.

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Appendix

Evaluation

Date:

Your Option:

Thank you for attending and being involved in our workshop today. Below are a few questions so we can evaluate our workshop and areas that may require improvement.

May we use your ANONYMOUS comments in future academic publications? _____

BEFORE viewing this presentation...

1. Did you receive any instruction on Aboriginal content at OISE prior to this workshop?

Yes	No	Not sure /N/A
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2. How comfortable were you with speaking/teaching Aboriginal history and in your classroom?
Please circle the one most applicable to you.

Not all comfortable	Somewhat comfortable	Comfortable	Very Comfortable	Not sure
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3. How important did you think Aboriginal content was to your classroom? Please circle the one most applicable to you.

Not at all important	Somewhat important	Important	Extremely Important	Not sure
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AFTER viewing this presentation...

4. Do you feel you now have a better understanding of Aboriginal peoples?

Yes No

5. What part of the workshop was most interesting for you?
-

6. What part of the workshop was not interesting for you?
-

7.