EQUITY, INCLUSIVE AND CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE PEDAGOGIES: TRAINING AND EXPERIENCES OF PROFESSIONAL EDUCATORS IN ONTARIO

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ABSTRACT The development of new teachers as equitable practitioners is an important component in ensuring the creation of culturally responsive and relevant classroom and school spaces. It is through this form of equity education that we can ensure academic success and well-being of all students, specifically racialized and historically marginalized students. In this article, a model of equity education embedded within the New Teacher Induction Program (NTIP) will be described as one vehicle that can be used to develop the professional learning and growth of new teachers and mentors within Ontario. In the province of Ontario, two educational strategies, NTIP and Ontario's Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy, offer elements that can be taken up by school boards to examine and develop teacher professional learning modules that have an intentional focus on equity theoretical frameworks.

The Toronto District School Board (TDSB), over a three year span has developed a multi-layered module of professional learning focusing on creating culturally responsive and relevant classroom spaces. This module provided new and experienced teachers with the opportunity to deepen their understanding of culturally responsive and relevant teaching, explore components of their own identity and develop inquiries to engage in their classroom environments that focus on the tenets of high expectations, cultural competence and critical consciousness. Through this intensive collaborative work, new learnings emerged that suggests that new teachers are already emerging leaders in equity education but requires administrative support to move their learning from a professional learning space to actual classroom and school implementation. The author discusses themes identified by Ontario administrators that if embedded through a culturally responsive and relevant lens would provide new teachers with the conditions needed to engage in the work of culturally responsive and relevant teaching in authentic ways. The article concludes by suggesting the need for a continuum of teacher leadership that can use the elements of the NTIP to ensure the emerging leadership of new teachers in this area of Equity Education.

RÉSUMÉ La formation des nouveaux enseignants en tant que praticiens inclusifs et équitables est un élément important pour assurer la création de classes et d'écoles culturellement adaptées et pertinentes. C'est grâce à cette approche d'éducation inclusive, axée sur l'équité, qu'il est possible d'assurer la réussite scolaire et le bien-être de tous les élèves, surtout ceux appartenant à des groupes racialisés et marginalisés. Dans cet article, nous décrivons un modèle d'éducation équitable et inclusive intégré au programme d'insertion professionnelle du nouveau personnel enseignant (PIPNPE), qui pourrait être utilisé comme méthode de perfectionnement professionnel pour les nouveaux enseignants et enseignants-mentors de l'Ontario. Dans cette province, deux stratégies éduca-

tives, le PIPNPE et la Stratégie ontarienne en matière d'équité et d'éducation inclusive, contiennent des éléments pouvant être utilisés par les conseils scolaires pour élaborer et évaluer des modules de formation professionnelle fondés sur une perspective théorique d'inclusion et d'équité pour les enseignants.

Au cours d'une période de trois ans, le Toronto District School Board (TDSB) a conçu un module multidimensionnel de formation professionnelle axée sur la création de classes comme espaces culturellement adaptés et pertinents. Ce module offrait aux nouveaux enseignants, tout comme aux enseignants d'expérience, une opportunité de renforcer leur compréhension d'un enseignement culturellement adapté et pertinent, de réfléchir à propos de leur propre identité et de s'impliquer dans leur environnement scolaire en respectant les principes d'une approche équitable, comme avoir des attentes élevées envers tous les élèves et développer une compétence culturelle et une conscience critique. Grâce à ce travail intensif de collaboration, il a été possible de documenter que les nouveaux enseignants sont déjà des leaders en matière d'éducation inclusive et équitable, mais qu'ils ont besoin d'un soutien administratif pour transférer leurs connaissances acquises aux contextes de classe et d'école. Les auteurs mettent en perspective des thèmes identifiés par les administrateurs ontariens qui, s'ils étaient abordés dans une perspective culturellement adaptée et pertinente, offriraient aux nouveaux enseignants des conditions leur permettant d'adopter cette perspective de manière plus authentique. En conclusion, l'article se conclut sur la pertinence d'un continuum sur le leadership en enseignement reposant sur les éléments du PIPNPE afin de développer le leadership des nouveaux enseignants en matière d'éducation à l'équité et l'inclusion.

BUILDING CAPACITY: EMBEDDING EQUITY AS A VEHICLE FOR THE NEW TEACHER INDUCTION PROGRAM (NTIP)

Ontario's New Teacher Induction Program (NTIP) created in 2006 as part of the Student Performance Act, requires that all publicly funded school boards offer new teachers support in their on-going professional learning and development. This program, also offered to all teachers new to the province, provides a diverse approach to teachers' professional growth. New teachers, as part of the NTIP, attend school and board level orientations, engage in mentorship opportunities, and participate in a wide variety of professional learning to support their growth as educators within the province (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2010).

In 2009, the Ontario's Ministry of Education released the Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy. "The strategy aimed to promote inclusive education, as well as to understand, identify, and eliminate the biases, barriers, and power dynamics that limit our students' prospects for learning, growing, and fully contributing to society" (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2009, p.11). The Equity and Inclusive Strategy presented district school boards with an opportunity to improve on various initiatives that allowed for teachers to become an instrumental component in the success of all students in the province. One model was to embed equity education as a vehicle to support the professional learning and growth of new teachers and their mentors through the NTIP initiative.

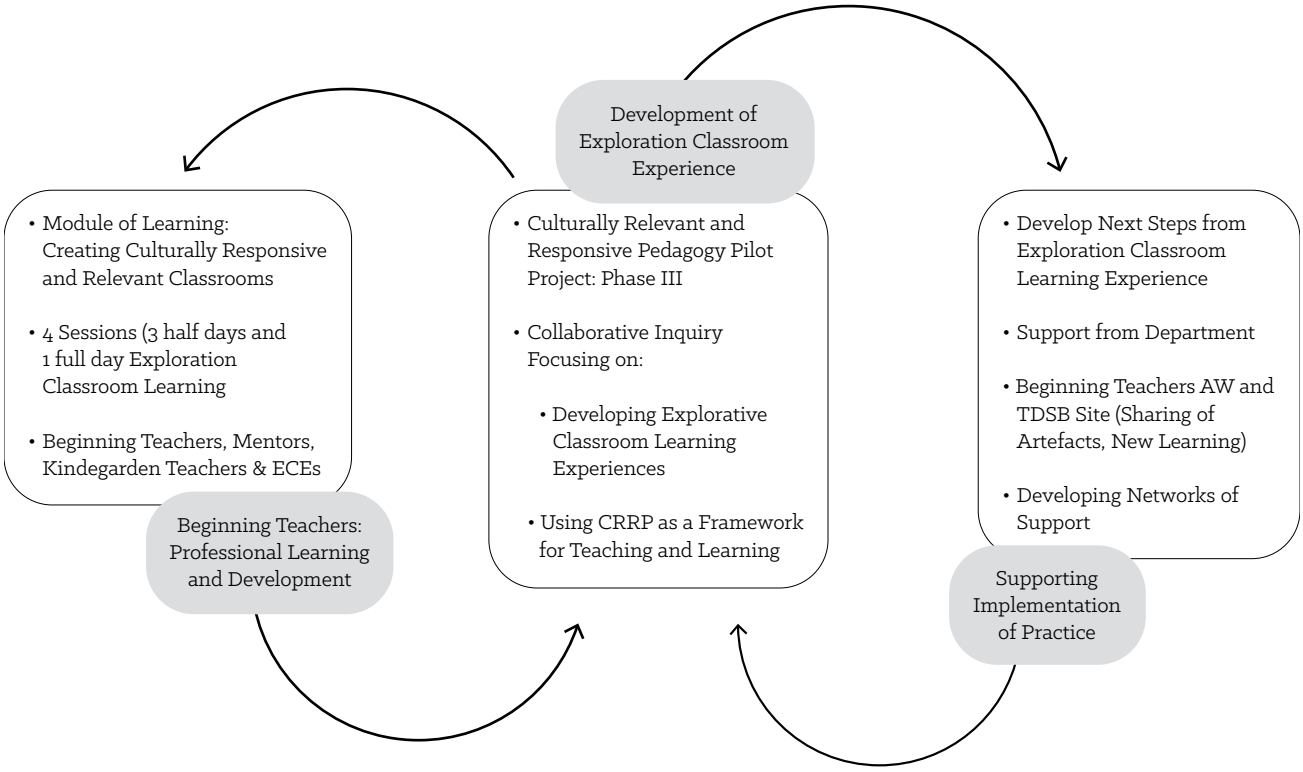
The Toronto District School Board (TDSB) created and designed this model in 2011. This was the first model of its kind in the province. This braiding of equity education within the professional learning design for new teachers and mentors allowed for the development of new forms of professional learning that could address student achievement, and more specifically, the achievement of racialized and historically-marginalized students. Intentionality to the type of design for this professional learning was important as it was our goal to develop equitable practitioners from the very early stages of their involvement in the teaching practice. This led to the creation of modules of learning that had specific elements for teacher development and growth. Each module would embed and ensure three foundational components: theoretical frameworks of equity education; research based instructional practices and strategies related to student learning; and opportunities for teachers' reflection on their beliefs and understanding of the teaching and learning process.

MODULE OF LEARNING: CREATING CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE AND RELEVANT CLASSROOM SPACES

Culturally Responsive and Relevant Pedagogy (CRRP) is one of the theoretical frameworks used to anchor this work with new teachers and mentors. This framework embeds two theoretical bodies of research, Culturally Responsive Teaching (Gay, 2002, Villegas and Lucas, 2002) and Culturally Relevant Teaching (Ladson-Billings, 1994). In addition, CRRP "***connects pedagogical practice to high expectations regardless of issues of social identity; it infuses issues of a broadly defined culture and cultural components with the classroom teaching and environment; and engages students in developing questioning of the status quo and critical consciousness***" (Kugler and West-Burns, 2010, p.216).

In 2011, this framework formed the basis of a three year multi-layered collaborative inquiry that entailed designing modules of professional learning for new teachers and mentors that allowed them to deepen their understanding of the tenets of CRRP (high expectations, cultural competence and critical consciousness); reflect on their own beliefs and biases as classroom teachers; examine the role of power and privilege within their classroom spaces; and make links to their own practice by undertaking their own inquiry and by engaging in an exploration classroom experience.

The uniqueness of this collaborative inquiry was its interconnected design, where new teachers and experienced teachers engaged in simultaneous professional learning that took the form of professional learning communities (PLC). Each PLC, although similar in design, with 3 half days of professional learning and 1 full day of exploration classroom experience, had a different focus for each group of teachers.



New Teachers, in their Module of Learning entitled: *Creating Culturally Responsive and Relevant Classroom Spaces*, furthered their learning of Culturally Responsive and Relevant Pedagogy, which began with an introductory session at the Board NTIP Orientation. At this orientation session, new teachers were introduced to the theoretical framework of CRRP and TDSB's Equity policy, procedures and resources. In the module of learning, new teachers participated in 3 professional learning sessions: *1)* that required them to engage in reading journal articles to unpack their understanding of the theories of culturally relevant teaching (Ladson-Billings, 1994) and Culturally Responsive Teaching (Villegas and Lucas, 2002); *2)* participate in activities that challenge their beliefs about their role in the classroom; and *3)* utilize a culturally responsive and relevant planning template to construct and design a specific learning experience for their students based on their own inquiry question. This inquiry allowed new teachers to begin to practice and understand the various ways they can embed the tenets of Culturally Responsive and Relevant Pedagogy as part of their students' everyday learning experiences.

Concurrently, a module of professional learning was taking place for experienced teachers. In this module, experienced teachers, who were often mentors to the new teachers, were intensifying their understanding of the framework of Culturally Responsive and Relevant Pedagogy. As their aim was to provide the link from theory to practice for the new teachers. In addition, experienced teachers focused on designing exploration classroom experiences that showcased the classroom condi-

tions required to engage in culturally responsive and relevant teaching practices. They also wanted new teachers to have an opportunity to observe what a culturally responsive and relevant lesson and experience would look like, sound like, and feel like in a classroom environment.

The concept of "exploration classroom" is important to investigate. Previously, this form of professional learning was called a 'demonstration classroom experience'. The shift in this paradigm from demonstration to exploration came as a result of feedback from new teachers who had an unintentional belief that when visiting a demonstration classroom they were going to engage in observing a prescribed lesson taken place by an expert teacher. Therefore, their own expertise was not required in the process. In our design of exploration classrooms, new teachers were already viewed as promising transformative leaders in engaging in Equity Education and their knowledge and understanding was equally important in this shared learning experience. The idea of "exploration" allowed us to create conditions for reciprocal learning for the teachers sharing their practice, for the students engaging in the learning, for the facilitator unpacking the experience and for the new teachers.

ENGAGING IN INQUIRY

Our new teachers were able to engage in exploration classroom experiences, which explored some of the following inquiry questions:

- How can I teach students at the kindergarten level to fully understand the importance of social justice issues by first focusing on big ideas (e.g. fairness) that they can relate to authentically?

- What is the deeper links between social identity and academic achievement?

- How does Culturally Responsive and Relevant Pedagogy help to motivate students who might have been disengaged from their learning?

- What culturally responsive strategies work effectively to close the achievement gap?

In debriefing this experience, new teachers were able to reflect on how the theories presented and discussed in the modules played out in the host teachers' classrooms. They began to think about their own various inquiries and reflect on how these inquiries might be changed, revised or modified based on the learning gained from these experienced teachers. All teachers involved had entered into this professional learning experience with specific learning goals and were able to reflect on their own inquiry question, and make links to instructional techniques, resources and the curriculum. The new teachers had the opportunity to plan next steps in collaboration and support of the exploration classroom teacher and the facilitator in determining how to implement this practice authentically into their own school environments.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE

The opportunity to debrief was also essential as it allowed all stakeholders to discuss the successes, challenges and limitations required to put into practice culturally responsive and relevant pedagogy as an equity framework for teaching and learning. New teachers shared that one element affecting their ability to engage in the work of CRRP on a consistent basis was classroom and school conditions. They were confident in their belief about the pedagogy, but often came across resistance from their colleagues. These teachers felt that administration support was essential. New teachers stated, "with administration support, they believe they could be leaders in educational equity who can share and show others that culturally responsive and relevant pedagogy is possible" (West-Burns, Murray & Watt, 2013, p. 6).

An implication to practice was the perceived lack of administrative support. Many new and experienced teachers shared in their reflections this gap in support. They felt that they had support when the work related to bringing in culturally responsive and relevant resources as a means to closing the achievement gap of racialized and historically marginalized students. However, administrative support waivered in regards to highlighting and discussing issues of power, privilege, oppression or multifaceted identities. We realized that in order to make this form of learning move beyond the module or individual classroom spaces for new teachers and into school wide practices where it can be introduced at the school level NTIP orientations or built within the school based PLCs, it was important for all teachers involved, new and experienced, to receive administrative support within their various school environments.

In Ontario, school administrations are also engaged in discussing strategies pertaining to closing the achievement gap. One such report entitled, "Ontario Leadership Strategy Closing the Gap: Advice from Expert Ontario Principals" (2012), identified 5 themes that if implemented by administrators through a culturally responsive and relevant lens would support the work of developing school conditions that would allow for the creation of culturally responsive and relevant classroom spaces. In addition, support the professional learning, development and growth of new teachers through the school based elements of the New Teacher Induction Program.

THEME 1: BUILDING TEACHER CAPACITY FOR POSITIVE CHANGE

Administrators found that influencing teachers' beliefs and attitudes was an important element. CRRP includes an intentional focus on teachers' beliefs, assumptions and attitudes about their students, their abilities and their lived experiences. Administrators' being open to having conversations about beliefs and attitudes within the professional learning communities taking place within the school would allow for teachers to develop and strengthen their individual practice by reflecting on what they teach, why they teach and for what purpose. Many new teachers who were part of this module were open to sharing their individual classroom experiences and learning within their school based PLCs and only required support to do so in a larger fashion. Providing new teachers with this avenue to share their learning would allow them to be seen as leaders in Equity Education.

THEME 2: USING RESOURCES EFFECTIVELY

Identifying and aligning resources with the needs within each individual school also supports the work of CRRP. Creating culturally responsive and relevant classroom spaces is reliant on the belief that the family, caregivers and the community are also resources in the teaching and learning process. It also relies on the understanding that culturally relevant curriculum resources are vital. In addition, the administrator's role as a resource becomes an essential component in the implementation of this practice and would require the administrator to also adopt and learn this equity theoretical framework. Considering, new teachers as resources who can be tapped to model and share their understanding would also begin to shift the paradigm of the experience teacher being the only resource in building teacher capacity within a school.

THEME 3: KEEPING THE FOCUS ON STUDENT OUTCOMES

Ontario Leadership Strategy also speaks to the collection and use of data to sustain school improvement. Although the collection of data is important, what we discovered within the module was the need to embed student voice, student work and student inquiry into the framework of this initiative. If we wanted to truly address all three tenets and more specifically the tenet of critical consciousness, we needed to talk to, include and provide opportunities for students to tell their narratives about their educational experiences in school. This learning has led us to consider a different module of learning that focuses specifically on student voice and student narratives. This new module, also embedded with the professional learning offered to new teachers within the New Teacher Induction Program, allows for new teachers to showcase their students thinking in authentic ways beyond the classroom.

THEME 4: BUILDING A CULTURE OF COLLABORATION

Building a culture of collaboration where all members within the school environment are able to co-learn together is critical in creating positive school spaces. However, working with the whole school on school climate to ensure student achievement and well-being are areas required to create culturally responsive and relevant school spaces. New teachers shared that without the whole school involvement in this process, from the administrative assistant to the teacher in the classroom, sustaining the work beyond the classroom was quite difficult. They found that in order to have true collaboration with colleagues, students, families, caregivers, community and with school leadership, an intentional focus on school wide involvement in equity education was needed. They felt that as part of their Individual Strategy Form required to identify their goals through NTIP, they should also include goals that directly identify the ways they will engage and work with all stakeholders in their programming.

THEME 5: HARNESSING PARENT AND COMMUNITY SUPPORT

Harnessing parents and community support is an important strategy. Engaging in this approach through the lens of being culturally responsive and relevant, new teachers' suggestions involved parents and community stakeholders as partners, as acquiring their support is important but having them as partners in ways that goes beyond the parent council would suggest to teachers that these stakeholders are valuable resources that can be used in their work. New teachers involved in this module consistently utilized families, caregivers and the community as vehicles to enhanced the curriculum, deepen the learning taking place and to provide students with multiple perspectives about the world around them.

MOVING FORWARD: EXTENDING OUR FOCUS TO A CONTINUUM OF TEACHER LEADERSHIP

This three-year emphasis on embedding Equity as a vital component in our work with new teachers through the NTIP, has provided us with many key learnings. Of these, is to go deeper by interweaving Equity Education and the theoretical framework of CRRP through a continuum for teacher leadership. Our new teachers have shown that they are emerging equity leaders on this continuum and only require some intentional professional learning to strengthen their understanding of the work. Embedding an equity framework into the NTIP has proven to be a seamless way of honoring this understanding.

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