HISTORY, FEATURES, AND PRINCIPLES OF THE *INNER CITY OPTION, OISE/UT* 2006-2014

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ABSTRACT This article is a salute to the ICO design committee, and the eight years of instructor and teacher candidates who continue to do the work, and to Jeff Kugler, the executive director of the Center for Urban Schooling, and father of the ICO, who will retire from his position as he sees the final ICO graduating class walk across the Convocation Hall stage in 2014.

This article tells a history of the *Inner City Option*, an equity-focused initial teacher education program for one of the cohorts in the Bachelor of Education program at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (OISE) at the University of Toronto. In 2006, with the leadership from the Center for Urban Schooling at OISE, this cohort was created out of a desire to disrupt power inequities in structures and pedagogies practiced in schools and to realize teacher education reform at a system level. The underlying feature of design of the *Inner City Option*'s (ICO) curriculum is the commitment to infuse equity education into every course, every experience, every reflection in the teacher candidates' experiences. The design criteria also emphasize the necessity to be able to transfer the learning, features, and curriculum of the ICO to the other cohorts of OISE's Bachelor of Education program, in order to address systemic change.

This paper describes the particular approach of this teacher education curriculum to preparing teachers to teach in Toronto's increasingly diverse neighbourhoods and schools by helping them understand the many ways of teaching for equity, diversity, and social justice in inner city schools. The seven founding principles of the *Inner City Option* are described as follows. The curriculum is focused on helping teacher candidates understand the history, challenges and strengths within inner city communities. The program has a simultaneous focus on anti-oppression education, transformative school change, research/self-study, and restructuring the relationship among placement schools communities, and OISE. The curriculum places a distinct emphasis on social justice through an anti-oppression agenda, which addresses systemic power imbalances, both in the educational system and society as a whole. The instructors aim to prepare teacher candidates with strong critical content, culturally, linguistically, and racially affirming pedagogies and an understanding of respectful school cultures. The *Inner City Option* is committed to high expectations at all levels: for teacher candidates, for instructors, and for all students in schools. High expectations are demonstrated in actions and practices. The ICO works with teacher candidates to program for all of the students in their classes, ensuring that the needs and interests of all students are met. This paper describes the supportive, yet challenging environment set for teacher candidates to learn and reflect deeply on social issues, emphasizing that professional growth is a life-long endeavor. The teacher candi-

dates' examination of their assumptions, biases and personal positions of power is foundation to the learning of the seven principles, and examined throughout the program.

The author recalls the questions that arose during design and implementation around the issues of staffing, funding, admissions, school partnerships, community partnerships, policy changes and teacher education's deep questions about theory and practice. Further issues of implementation such as conflict and activism at the university and in local schools, building authentic school partnerships, and institutional commitment are briefly described.

RESUME Cet article est un hommage au comité de conception de l'ICO, aux apprentis professeurs et instructeurs des huit dernières années, qui continuent à travailler fort, et à Jeff Kugler, directeur général du Center for Urban Schooling et fondateur de l'ICO, qui prendra sa retraite après avoir assisté à la remise des diplômes des derniers étudiants de l'ICO en 2014.

Cet article retrace l'histoire de Inner City Option, un programme de formation initiale pour les enseignements axé sur l'équité et offert en 2006 à l'une des cohortes d'étudiants inscrits au baccalauréat en éducation à l'Institut d'études pédagogiques de l'Ontario (OISE-Ontario Institute for Studies in Education) à l'Université de Toronto. Cette cohorte a été formée sur l'initiative du Center for Urban Studies de OISE, qui désirait mettre fin aux inégalités de pouvoir qui sont au cœur des structures et des pédagogies mises en place dans les écoles, et procéder à des réformes systémiques dans la formation donnée aux enseignants. L'objectif fondamental ayant mené à la conception du programme *Inner City Option* (ICO) était d'insuffler un engagement envers l'équité en enseignement dans chaque cours, expérience et réflexion des futurs enseignants. Lors de sa conception, un accent a également été mis sur la nécessité de transférer les apprentissages, les caractéristiques et le curriculum de l'ICO aux autres cohortes d'étudiants au baccalauréat en éducation de l'OISE, afin qu'une transformation profonde puisse se produire à travers le système complet.

Cet article décrit l'approche particulière de ce programme de formation dont l'objectif est de préparer les enseignants à travailler dans les quartiers et les écoles de plus en plus diversifiés de Toronto et de les aider à assimiler les diverses façons d''enseigner pour favoriser l'équité, la diversité et la justice sociale dans les écoles du centre-ville. Les sept principes fondateurs d'*Inner City Option* sont décrits de la façon suivante : *1)* le curriculum vise à aider les futurs enseignants à comprendre l'histoire, les défis et les forces présentes au sein des communautés des différents quartiers. *2)* Le programme est également axé sur une formation anti-oppression, des changements « transformatifs » au sein des écoles, un autoréflexivité et une restructuration des relations entre les milieux de stage et OISE. Le programme insiste particulièrement sur la justice sociale à travers un calendrier axé sur la lutte contre l'oppression et aborde directement les inégalités de pouvoir systémiques à la fois au sein du système éducatif et de la société. Les formateurs préparent les futurs enseignants à partir d'une solide formation critique, de pédagogies culturellement, linguistiquement et racialement adaptées et axes sur une compréhension de ce que signifie une culture scolaire respectueuse des apprenants. Le *Inner City Option* s'engage à atteindre ces objectifs ambitieux à tous les niveaux: pour les futurs enseignants, les instructeurs et tous les élèves dans toutes les écoles. Ces ambitions élevées se traduisent en actions et en pratiques. L'OIC travaille avec les futurs enseignants à planifier leur enseignement en fonction de l'ensemble des élèves dans leurs classes, en s'assurant que les besoins et les intérêts de chacun soient pris en compte. Cet article décrit le contexte de formation soutenant, mais exigeant, dans lequel les futurs enseignants sont invités à apprendre et à réfléchir sur des enjeux sociaux, et qui fait ressortir que le développement professionnel se poursuit tout au long de la vie. L'analyse, par les futurs enseignants, de leurs propres biais, préjugés et position de pouvoir est au fondement de l'apprentissage de ces sept principes, qui sont examinés tout au long du programme.

L'auteur rappelle les questionnements qui ont émergé lors de la conception et de la mise en œuvre (concernant le personnel, le financement, les admissions, les partenariats scolaires et communautaires, les changements dans les politiques), ainsi que les réflexions des enseignants en formation concernant les liens entre la formation théorique et pratique. Enfin, d'autres enjeux relatifs à la mise en œuvre de ce programme sont brièvement décrits, tels que les conflits et l'activisme au sein de l'université et dans les écoles, l'établissement de véritables partenariats scolaires et l'engagement institutionnel.

INTRODUCTION

The Center for Urban Schooling opened at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education at the University of Toronto in 2005, providing a much needed space to discuss the responsibility of Initial Teacher Education's (ITE) to the inner city children of Toronto. Acknowledging the correlation between poverty, immigration, and school success, conversations centered on the need to make new commitments to the fifty percent of recent immigrant children and the one third of children of colour who experience the impact of poverty in their lives (Campaign 2000, 2006). Following the example of Jeannie Oakes, who compels us to "make the rhetoric real" (Oakes, 1996, p. 4), two critical questions repeatedly emerged:

- What would be the particular features of a teacher education curriculum which was dedicated to preparing teachers to teach in Toronto's increasingly diverse neighbourhoods and schools?

- How might we work with teacher candidates to help them understand the many ways of teaching for equity, diversity, and social justice in inner city schools?

Informal gatherings over coffee soon became formal meetings in order to discuss the mission and vision of a new cohort in the elementary initial teacher education program deliberately designed to address the inequities of schooling, The Inner City Option.

In 2006, the large student body of teacher candidates (TCs) in the Initial Teacher Education/Bachelor of Education consecutive program at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (OISE) were organized in smaller learning communities[1], known as cohorts. These cohorts were designed to embrace collaborative learning and build intentional learning communities amongst TCs, the university, partner schools and their communities. This cohort, the Inner City Option (ICO), was created from a desire to disrupt the power inequities in structures and pedagogies practiced in schools and to realize teacher education reform at a system level. Always present during the dreaming and scheming for the ICO was the subtext that in order to produce systemic change, all structures of the ICO program would need to be transferable to all other elementary options and cohorts of students. Transferability was a central requirement in the design of timetables, staffing, and budgets. We wanted to be able to implement what this ICO team learned and designed in this option, in all other options in the future.

The Inner City Option design committee was comprised of research-stream faculty, teaching-stream lecturers, board-seconded instructors, community workers, local board of education teachers and administrators, and chaired by the executive director of the Center for Urban Schooling/ OISE-UT. The agenda was guided by the following questions: *a)* What should inner city teachers know and be able to do? *b)* What are helpful dispositions and attitudes of a inner city teacher? and *c)* How might a social justice agenda be implemented to prepare teachers to teach in an inner city community? In preparation to respond to these questions, the committee engaged in the following: reviewed teacher knowledge base theory (Turner-Bisset, 2001), consulted successful teachers and leaders in inner city schools and communities, including parents, agencies, government programs and community recreation, and examined theories of multicultural education and effective methods of challenging bias.

In the continued development of the ICO, the teaching team continues grappling with the following questions: How might the community-based field experiences differ from school-based field experiences? Can dispositions and attitudes of deficit orientations be influenced or must we be selective in our admission process? How can ideals and logistics work together in the practicality of program design, especially in terms of the relationships between course content (and its configurations), staffing, practicum components and student evaluation? If all teacher education options at OISE had equity-infused curriculum, how would the ICO be different from the others?

PRINCIPLES GUIDING THE INNER CITY OPTION CURRICULUM

The Inner City Option Design Committee developed a collection of principles to guide the program/ The ICO curriculum. These principles are based on the belief that all children, from all socio-cultural-economic backgrounds and circumstances, can be successful in school. Through an anti-oppression agenda, this intial teacher education program addresses systemic power imbalances both in the education system and in society as a whole. The mission of the Inner City Option is to prepare new teachers for the joys, possibilities, and challenges of working with inner city young people, to help make school success their reality. In the effort to make the rhetoric real, seven principles were created to guide the practical development of a new initial teacher education program. For further explanation of the principals see Stewart Rose (2007). These principles are:

- The Inner City Option has a focus on school communities in order to help teacher candidates understand the history, challenges and strengths within inner city communities.

- The ICO has a simultaneous focus on anti-oppression education, transformative school change, research/self-study, and restructuring the relationship among placement schools communities, and OISE. The ICO places a distinct emphasis on social justice through an anti-oppression agenda, which addresses

systemic power imbalances, both in the educational system and society as a whole.

• The ICO prepares teacher candidates with strong critical content, culturally, linguistically, and racially affirming pedagogies and an understanding of respectful school cultures.

• The ICO is committed to high expectations at all levels: for teacher candidates, for instructors, and for all students in schools. High expectations are demonstrated in actions and practices. Learning to teach is as much about learning about oneself as it is about teaching.

• The ICO works with teacher candidates to program for all of the students in their classes, ensuring that the needs and interests of all students are met.

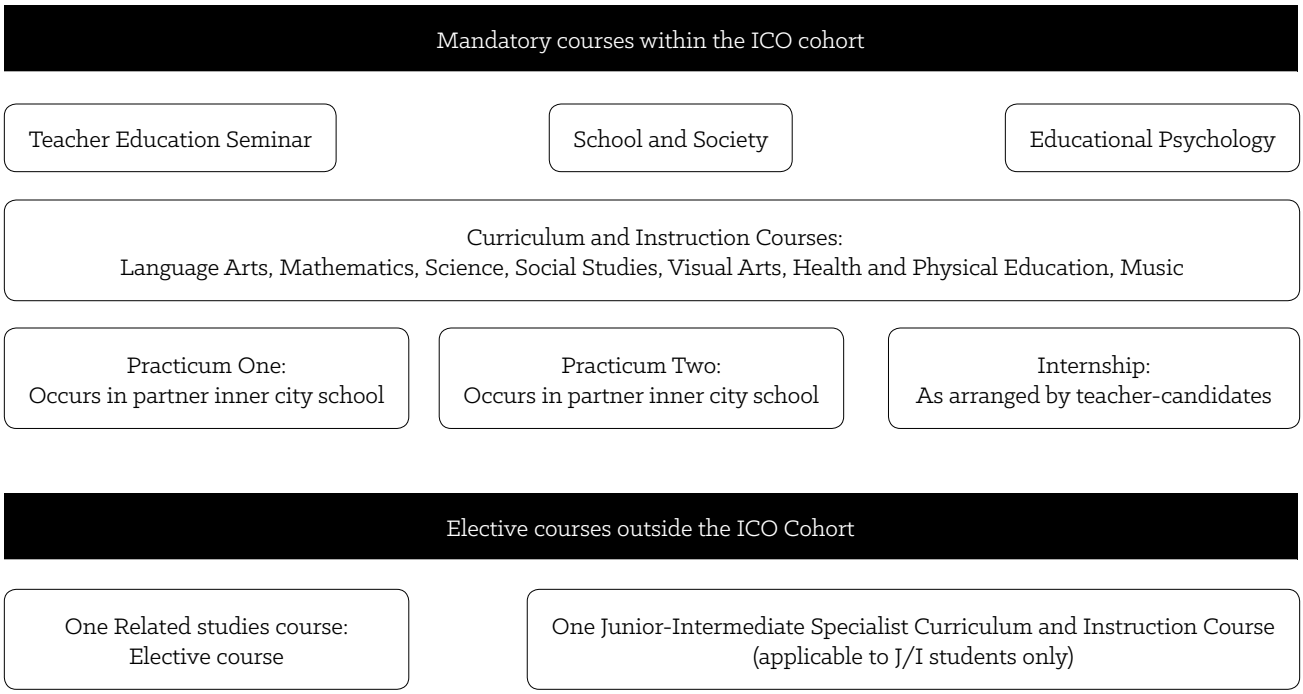
• The ICO provides a supportive yet challenging environment for teacher candidates to learn and reflect deeply on social issues.

• The ICO treats professional education as life-long learning.

KEY PROGRAMMATIC FEATURES OF THE INNER CITY OPTION

Learning in community is a key feature of the consecutive Bachelor of Education program at OISE. In the inaugural year of the ICO, the 2006-2007 academic year, 5,988 people applied to 1,233 available positions allotted to OISE. Of the 1,233 teacher candidates at *OISE/UT*, 574 were in the elementary education. In an effort to personalize the learning experience for such large numbers of students, the elementary program is divided into Options comprised of 55 - 65 TCs. In these cohorts, candidates begin and complete their program together, take most classes together, are grouped together in field placements, participate in retreats, team-building activities, community partnership work, share a teaching team, and reflect on their learning and teaching together. The OISE cohort approach is based on the belief that teacher preparation should be designed to prepare beginning teachers for professional learning communities in schools where teachers jointly define goals and take responsibility for all students' progress, engage in ongoing inquiry and experimentation, and assume leadership in school development (Anderson, Rolheiser, & Gordon, 1998).

FIGURE 1. VISUAL REPRESENTATION OF THE BACHELOR OF EDUCATION PROGRAM



The significant difference of the ICO option is the overall infusion of a coherent equity, diversity and social justice conceptual framework into all the ICO courses. This approach is unlike the add-on course in multiculturalism or equity studies. The ICO instructors worked together to coordinate an infusion of the issues of equity, diversity and social justice throughout each course. The aim was to create a program rather than a collection of discrete courses. Typically, two coordinators teach the majority of the course hours, with a few others with specific subject expertise recruited as needed.

A key criterion to staffing this cohort was the ability of the instructors to be able to infuse and highlight equity issues into their course content while embedding their personal practical experiences in "inner city schools".

The instructors in this cohort met frequently in advance of and during the school year to plan, reflect and discuss this equity-based curriculum from a wholistic point of view for the teacher candidates. The teaching team shared foundational articles and topics so that ideas presented in one course would be augmented in other courses. In addition, similar terms and language were agreed upon for clarity and cohesion. For example, if "purposes of education" were presented in the School and Society course, the instructional team was sure to discuss how teachers' differing views of the purposes of education influence their teaching in the Curriculum and Instruction courses. The team strived to timetable these topics for synchronicity of presentation. For instance, when discussing systemic discrimination in School and Society, music courses considered how Euro-centric and Euro-adapted repertoire choice and/or music program fees for students are inequitable practices.

Along with the course work, all *OISE/UT* teacher candidates complete two practica and one internship placement during their B.Ed. year; however, the ICO TCs[2] are placed in Toronto District School Board schools from the top 100 on the Learning Opportunities Index, which *"ranks TDSB schools based on measures of external challenges affecting student success.*[3]*"* The ICO coordinators actively seek and invite partnership with teachers interested in transformative school change and inner city teacher education, and in particular, aim to build collaborative teams of teacher candidate/instructor/associate-teacher. Associate-teacher recruitment was pivotal in the TCs experiences of enacting a social justice curriculum and was key to how the TC's measured the success of the ICO program. The TCs expected to see social justice teaching being modeled for them in their school placements. The cohort needed to discuss the tensions between their ideals and their realities and they asked "*do we teach to fit in today or for tomorrow?*" This is a complicated dilemma in a complex reality. Regardless of where the associate-teacher was perceived to be on the "social justice continuum," by the TC, as a group of instructors, we were committed to the idea that teacher activism begins on the first day of September of their ITE program.

As in all options, the ICO coordinators endeavor to place 2 - 6 teacher candidates in each of the partner schools. Each TC is paired with one associate or host teacher and elementary TCs visit their schools on 3 - 4 *STEP* days (Student Teacher Experience Program), which take place before the official practicum begins. The intent is that they informally familiarize themselves with the school community before evaluation begins. There is no practice-teaching or evaluation during this time. As in all options, the internship period takes place after academic courses and both practica are successfully completed. All arrangements, including the choice of internship, are made by the teacher candidate. The TCs take this opportunity to work in education settings ranging from Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), community and educational organizations and schools, locally, in Canada's Far North, and abroad.

The Inner City Option became a school site-based elementary option. Most classes were held at George Syme Community School in the TDSB and it is from this location that the TCs engaged in their community engagement and service learning projects. Partnership with the school's principal and teaching staff facilitated bringing theory and practice together. Collaborative projects supported the TDSB's teachers' professional learning, as well. For example, teachers and teacher candidates learned together with TDSB's instructional leaders and OISE faculty to embed culturally relevant and responsive pedagogies into math and language arts classes or to recognize deficit thinking and social class biases.

OUR LEARNING

Over the 8 years of the development of the ICO, informal feedback has been collected and formal research conducted. We learned the importance of creating a teaching team that is entirely committed to and has experience with equity issues in schools. We witnessed that a cohort of highly committed activists can lead to highly-charged and difficult discussions and learned how to have difficult conversations. ICO teacher candidates take every moment to point out the bias, assumptions, and blinders of the teaching team, reminding us to situate ourselves as learners too. ICO TCs were frustrated when their electives outside of the ICO program did not take up equity issues in the ways that the ICO did and were concerned that every TC at OSIE didn't have such a specialized teaching team and program and have practicum placements in Toronto's communities with such challenging circumstances. (see further learning in Stewart Rose, L., 2008).

From this program, deeply saturated with activism, we learned that, mostly, the commitment doesn't fade. As the graduates have developed their careers, they have become our next generation of equity leadership, and have learned how to navigate the political waters of schools. In the follow-up study of the first year of graduates, which captures their experiences of first year of teaching after the ICO, (Stewart Rose, L, Markus, J. & Kugler J. 2009), we were struck by the fact when asked to talk about the challenges of teaching, the absence of concerns like classroom management, how to develop a balanced literacy program, how to manage Individual Education Plans, which are often mentioned by new teachers. Instead, they discussed their challenges of being an activist teacher in their new teaching context.

The ICO will not be offered at OISE next year (Rushowy, 2014), but this staying power of activism in the ICO graduates continues to inspire me. I hope for strong new university leadership to take on the commitment to a teacher education program focused on equity at its core and committed to all children by preparing teacher candidates to teach well in one of the most diverse cities in the world.

ACKNOLEDGE

This article is a salute to the ICO design committee, and the eight years of instructor and teacher candidates who continue to do the work, and to Jeff Kugler, the executive director of the Center for Urban Schooling, and father of the ICO, who will retire from his position as he sees the final ICO graduating class walk across the Convocation Hall stage.

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NOTES

[1] Studies in education at the University of Toronto began experimenting with cohort education in the late 1980s. By the early 1990s the elementary teacher education experience was in a fully cohorted program. The secondary program introduced cohort learning in the early 1990's and became a fully cohorted program in 2003-2004 (Mark Evans, personal communication, February 14, 2008). For a more complete history of teacher education reform at the University of Toronto see Booth & Stiegelbauer (1996). At the time of writing, OISE is undergoing massive structural and programmatic change. Unfortunately, the Inner City Option will not be offered next year. Its future is unknown.

[2] The nine TCs who opted for the additional Catholic Education program were placed in Catholic schools in the same neighbourhoods as the TDSB partner schools.

[3] For more information: www.tdsb.on.ca/Portals/0/AboutUs/Research/LOI2014.pdf

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