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ADVISORY BOARD ON ENGLISH EDUCATION

**Prioritizing Student Diversity in
Québec's Education System**

A Brief Presented to the Minister of Education

ADVISORY BOARD ON ENGLISH EDUCATION

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Prioritizing Student Diversity in Québec's Education system

Introduction

Even casual attention to various media outlets over recent years has given us examples of discrimination¹ in our society, whether as overt racism or, more insidiously, as implicit bias. Whether the bias is structural or implicit is immaterial: the effect on the marginalized individual or group is the same - discrimination leading to exclusion from various forms of opportunity.

Discussion of discrimination in society often focuses on racial differences, but it is also evident in the treatment of “others” of many sorts, whether those of different ethnicity, including Indigenous peoples; different genders and gender identities; sexual orientation, sexual identification; abilities; religions. Thirteen percent of the population of Canada is estimated to belong to the LGBT community,² while studies from the United States suggest that up to 3% of US adolescents and teens identify as transgender or non-binary.³ They are more likely to experience anxiety, depression, bullying, and suicide and are at greater risk of substance abuse and homelessness.

Discrimination: *The unequal treatment of members of various groups based on race, ethnicity, gender, gender expression, socioeconomic class, sexual orientation, physical or mental ability, religion, citizenship status, a combination of those identified, and/or other categories.*

Racism: *The systematic subjugation of members of targeted racial groups, who hold less socio-political power and/or are racialized as non-White, as a means to uphold White supremacy.*

Implicit bias: *A belief or attitude that affects our understanding, decision, and actions, and that exists without our conscious awareness*

Structural racism: *Historical, social, political, institutional, and cultural factors that contribute to, legitimize, and maintain racial inequities. Structural racism is not something that a few people or institutions choose to practice, it is the confluence of racist concepts and theories that control our economic, political, and social systems.*

¹ The following five definitions are taken from: CSSP (2019). “Key Equity Terms and Concepts: A Glossary for Shared Understanding.” Washington, DC: Centre for the Study of Social Policy, <https://cssp.org/resource/key-equity-terms-and-concepts-a-glossary-for-shared-understanding/>.

² <https://www.newswire.ca/news-releases/according-to-lgbt-realities-the-first-pancanadian-survey-on-lgbt-communities-conducted-by-crop-for-the-benefit-of-the->

[fondation-jasmin-roy-13-of-the-canadian-population-belongs-to-the-lgbt-community-639432223.html](https://www.fondation-jasmin-roy-13-of-the-canadian-population-belongs-to-the-lgbt-community-639432223.html).

³ Human Rights Campaign. Transgender Children and Youth: Understanding the Basics. <https://www.hrc.org/resources/transgender-children-and-youth-understanding-the-basics> accessed February 10, 2021.

The effects on young people of being different from the majority of their peers are compounded by intersectionality,⁴ the cumulative effect of the overlap of two or more of these differences, unless they are well supported by the adults in their lives.⁵ These adults obviously include school personnel.

In all its manifestations, discrimination is based on differential power. It is often the result of prejudice that stems from a lack of knowledge or understanding. Since schools and centres and their classrooms mirror society, what happens in society is reflected in classrooms. But classrooms are also the best places to start combatting prejudice through education about otherness.

There is clear evidence of diversity in all its expressions in classrooms in the English-language school system. Until the implementation of Law 101, English-language schools traditionally welcomed ethnically diverse populations, and many of its urban and suburban schools still demonstrate this diversity. The system has long had a policy of accommodating differences in ability and behaviour in the mainstream classroom, and English-language schools and centres have a policy of integrating students with a range of learning difficulties and behavioural problems, as well as providing enrichment activities for academically gifted students. The following table compares the integration rates of students with special needs in English-language and French-language schools in recent years.⁶

Integration of students with special needs into regular classes in Québec		
	2019-2020	2020-2021 ^(P)
English school boards	89.9%	90.1%
French service centres	76.6%	76.5%

⁴ “Coined by Professor Kimberlé Crenshaw in 1989, this term describes the ways in which race, class, gender, and other aspects of our identity “intersect” overlap and interact with one another, informing the way in which individuals simultaneously experience oppression and privilege in their daily lives interpersonally and systemically. Intersectionality promotes the idea that aspects of our identity do not work in a silo.” CSSP, (2019), op. cit. p.7.

⁵ Kristina R. Olson, Lily Durwood, Madeleine DeMeules and Katie A. McLaughlin. “Mental Health of Transgender Children Who Are Supported in Their Identities,” *Pediatrics*, March 2016, 137 (3). <https://doi.org/10.1542/peds.2015-3223>.

⁶ Source: MEQ, TSEP, DGSRG, DIS, Entrepôt de données ministériel, système Charlemagne, 2021-01-28. (P): Provisional data.

In previous briefs to the Minister, the Advisory Board on English Education (ABEE) has given advice on inclusion in the classroom⁷ and on Indigenous education,⁸ so this brief will not address these two issues directly. It will, instead, consider the impact of discrimination and the promotion of inclusion in the school environment, the curriculum, student achievement, and teacher education. Much of the research we have identified relates to racism, and there are certainly issues specific to racist behaviour, but we recognize that the mindset that causes racist behaviour often causes discrimination against “others” of all sorts and that the remediating strategies are often similar.

School Board Initiatives

Examples of discrimination against other kinds of differences are prevalent enough for educators to address this issue and to look for guidance in doing so. For example, the Lester B. Pearson School Board (LBPSB) has responded to the racism expressed by a few of its students by establishing a task force on equity and inclusivity whose mandate is to:

1. Evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of existing policies and procedures pertaining to addressing and eliminating all forms of systemic racism and discrimination

and:

2. Produce actionable recommendations to serve as a foundation upon which individual institutions, based upon demographic and educational requirements, can build to promote equity and inclusivity for all students and staff.⁹

The composition of the LBPSB Task Force on Equity and Inclusivity is broadly representative of the school board’s community. Its work is evidence based and it has solicited input from members of the community. Examination of the Task Force’s draft report suggests that it will be a valuable resource for other school boards and service centres as they investigate ways of ensuring inclusion for their whole student body.

In December 2020, the commissioners of the English Montreal School Board voted unanimously to include Black history:

...throughout the school year “to recognize both disparities and opportunities in working towards greater equity in our schools, in the community and throughout the education system.”

and

⁷ ABEE, *Special Education: Issues of Inclusion and Integration in the Classroom*, November 2006. http://www.education.gouv.qc.ca/fileadmin/site_web/documents/ministere/organismes/CELA_Avis_AdaptationScolaire_ANG.pdf.

⁸ ABEE, *Indigenous Education: Walking on Both Sides of the River*, March, 2017. http://www.education.gouv.qc.ca/fileadmin/site_web/documents/autres/organismes/17-00091_CELA_Autochtones_ENG_web.pdf.

⁹ <https://boardsite.lbpsb.qc.ca/council-of-commissioners/task-force-on-equity-and-inclusivity>.

...to “reflect on, commemorate and celebrate the contributions of African Canadians and Quebecers from all walks of life throughout our history” and teach students about pride in heritage and identity.¹⁰

This commitment was accompanied by resources for consultants and teachers.

These two school boards, with the greatest concentration of students from visible minorities among Québec’s English language school boards, are to be congratulated for showing leadership in combatting various forms of discrimination, including racism. Their experiences will surely help the Minister develop policies and strategies for the rest of the province.

Recognizing the vulnerability of LGBTQ2+ students with regard to bullying and even their higher risk of suicide, the Riverside School Board has focused on discrimination against LGBTQ2+ students¹¹ by emphasizing individual counseling, referrals, the education of parents, and training for all school teams. The Board’s work is based on the provisions of the Québec Charter of Rights and Freedoms,¹² with the modifications from the Act to strengthen the fight against transphobia and improve the situation of transgender minors in particular (Bill 103), on the MEQ Sexuality Education K-11 program,¹³ and on resources such as those offered by the *Table nationale de lutte contre l’homophobie et la transphobie des réseaux de l’éducation*.¹⁴ All school boards and school service centres have incorporated the Sexuality Education program into their schools, but ABEE wonders how well known or well implemented are the recommendations and resources of the *Table nationale* or, indeed, other existing anti-discrimination policies?

We recognize that the Charter entrenches anti-discrimination in law but laws do not necessarily change personal views and discriminatory practices come from deep-seated attitudes and beliefs that are hard to change. It is hoped that this brief will not only extend the discussion on combatting discrimination, unconscious or otherwise, in Québec schools and centres, but will also outline to the Minister what the English-speaking education community believes his leadership can do to help make the classroom a safe and welcoming place for all.

¹⁰ <https://educationnewscanada.com/article/education/level/k12/3/879557/emsb-sees-2021-as-pivotal-year-for-marking-black-history-month.html>.

¹¹ <https://www.rsb.qc.ca/sexuality-health-education/>.

¹² “10. Every person has a right to full and equal recognition and exercise of his human rights and freedoms, without distinction, exclusion or preference based on race, colour, sex, gender identity or expression, pregnancy, sexual orientation, civil status, age except as provided by law, religion, political convictions, language, ethnic or national origin, social condition, a handicap or the use of any means to palliate a handicap. Discrimination exists where such a distinction, exclusion or preference has the effect of nullifying or impairing such right.” <http://legisquebec.gouv.qc.ca/en/showdoc/cs/c-12>.

¹³ <http://www.education.gouv.qc.ca/en/teachers/dossiers/sexuality-education>.

¹⁴ Original document in English available online at: www.tablehomophobietransphobie.org.

Full inclusion in a school where students feel they belong, are cared for as individuals, and are respected for who they are, and where their parents are welcomed, not judged, is surely a worthy vision for public schools.¹⁵

The Environment in Schools and Centres

Education is what got us into this mess –the use of education at least in terms of residential schools –but education is the key to reconciliation.¹⁶

No one is born racist. Racism is learned.¹⁷

Data is knowledge and knowledge informs action. How do you effectively address something that you have no idea of the scope and impact?¹⁸

We have found very little original research into the lives of students from minority groups in Québec except for research on the integration of immigrant children into French-language schools. Yet the Ministère de l'Éducation recognizes the need for data to guide its decisions:

[*Translation*] Information resources play a strategic role in steering the education system as well as developing public policies, programs and services. They offer enormous potential which must be developed for the benefit of all. Information on educational outcomes, various socioeconomic statistics and all relevant evidence are essential for the Ministry to define consistent and proactive orientations with regard to the needs and expectations of the clientele and the population. In addition, these resources represent a central and integrating vector of organizational capacity, hence the need to develop information intelligence so that its full potential is exploited, allowing the Ministry to ensure safe, ethical and responsible management.¹⁹

¹⁵ R. Brown, S. Manning, J. O'Reilly and M. Yau, (2010), "Summary of Student Achievement and Its Relationship to Demographic Variables," in Toronto District School Board). (undated). Quoted in: Penny Milton, "Debating values: race, class and academic achievement," *Education Canada*, vol 48 (4). www.cea-ace.ca (p. 18).

¹⁶ Justice Murray Sinclair, quoted in https://www.oecd.org/education/2030-project/contact/Meaningful_reconciliation_indigenous%20knowledges_flourishing_in_B.C.%27s_K-12_education_system_for_the_betterment_of_all_students.pdf, p. 14.

¹⁷ <http://www.ascd.org/publications/educational-leadership/nov16/vol74/num03/Let%27s-Talk-about-Racism-in-Schools.aspx>

¹⁸ Alicia Boatswain-Kyte, "COVID-19 Q&A: Impact of the Pandemic on the Black Community and the Need for Race-Based Data," *McGill Reporter*, February 18 2021. <https://reporter.mcgill.ca/covid-19-qa-impact-of-the-pandemic-on-the-black-community-and-the-need-for-race-based-data/>.

¹⁹ MEES, 2020, Rapport annuel. https://cdn-contenu.quebec.ca/cdn-contenu/adm/min/education/publications-adm/rapport-annuel-de-gestion/MEES_RAG_2019-2020.pdf?1601641109

There exists evidence that Québec students from racial minority groups are more likely to be identified as having special needs,²⁰ but most data come from the United States and the rest of Canada, especially Toronto. Are minority students more likely to be disproportionately disciplined in Québec schools as they are elsewhere? Are they expelled or suspended more often than White students? Do teachers' expectations vary according to the students' race? Are Black students overrepresented in less demanding academic streams? Without quantitative data, these questions cannot be answered although it is easy to imagine that the situation here is similar to other jurisdictions. There is a need to collect specifically race-based data in Québec, as Statistics Canada does for the whole country,²¹ not to fuel further discrimination, but to obtain a clearer picture of the realities of belonging to a visible minority in Québec, as well as the experiences of diverse children of all sorts.

Teacher Characteristics. There is evidence from extensive research elsewhere that a more diverse teaching corps benefits students of colour in retention, behaviour, attitude, and achievement scores²² and some authors conclude that:

... there are good reasons to believe that students of color would benefit from a more diverse teaching workforce. Thus, policy makers should consider policies to increase the diversity of the teacher workforce as one of many strategies to attempt to close racial and ethnic achievement gaps in public schools.²³

What is the proportion of ethnic-minority teachers in Québec, especially in racially diverse schools, but also in the more homogeneous regions? Do students recognize themselves in the teachers who interact with them daily? Do they have contact with adults who are different from them?

The Québec government's action group on racism (GACR) tabled its first report²⁴ in December 2020. It made 25 recommendations to combat racism in Québec, among them references to education as a means of promoting social change. The report focused on the Ethics and Religious Culture program as a vehicle for teaching students about racism:

The current review of this program offers an opportunity to highlight the realities experienced by visible minorities and to better educate students about the issues of racism and discrimination. (p. 27)

The report went further in Action No.10, which specifies: "Include racism and discrimination issues throughout the school curriculum." Then, in relation to teaching

²⁰ Robyn Maynard, "Canadian Education Is Steeped in Anti-Black Racism," *The Walrus*, Nov. 29, 2017, updated 10:14, Jun. 10, 2020. <https://thewalrus.ca/canadian-education-is-steeped-in-anti-black-racism/>.

²¹ See, for example, Education Indicators in Canada: Report of the Pan-Canadian Education Indicators Program; <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/81-582-x/81-582-x2021001-eng.htm>.

²² Dan Goldhaber, Roddy Theobald, and Christopher Tien, "Why We Need a Diverse Teacher Workforce." *Phi Delta Kappan*, January 21, 2019. <https://kappanonline.org/why-we-need-diverse-teacher-workforce-segregation-goldhaber-theobald-tien/>

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Gouvernement du Québec, *Racism in Quebec: Tolerance Zero. Report of the Groupe d'action contre racisme*, December 2020.

about Indigenous issues, it recommended reviewing the content of the Social Sciences (History) course for its presentation of Indigenous history and in Action No.17, it recommended:

Change the academic curriculum at the primary and secondary levels to update concepts related to the history, cultures, heritage and current realities of Indigenous peoples in Québec and Canada and their impact on society. (p. 38)

ABEE welcomes these calls to action and the resulting designation of a Minister responsible for the fight against racism and goes further: the issues surrounding racism—and all other forms of discrimination—should not be restricted to the content of one or more courses but should permeate the whole climate of the school or centre. An excellent resource for policymakers is British Columbia’s Administrative Procedure 170, called “Non-Discrimination.”²⁵ With modifications for local conditions, this could be a template for other provinces in Canada.

School is not a neutral space²⁶ and the members of the school community are not neutral. Every school and centre has its own ethos and is composed of individuals with different cultures and biases. Even when a system for change is in place, through curriculum content, teacher education, and modeling of acceptance and inclusion, there is still a need for change at the level of the individual. This may be a painful realization for a person of privilege, that is, any individual who is part of the mainstream, dominant group, few of whom would admit to being racist, homophobic, transphobic or any other manifestation of their privilege. Anti-bullying policies are a positive initiative to reduce peer-to-peer and adult-to-child bullying, yet students who are marginalized in some way still report discrimination, both overt and through micro-aggressions.

Parents. Parents are important members of the school community. The involvement of parents is recognized as a factor in promoting academic achievement and English-language schools have traditionally welcomed parents, whether on committees as advocates for their children or as volunteers to further the school’s mission. Research from outside Québec indicates that parents from minority groups are often hesitant to become involved in their children’s education, whether because of insecurity, language difficulties, or intimidation as a result of their own poor experiences in the education system.²⁷

²⁵https://www.vsb.bc.ca/District/Departments/Office_of_the_Superintendent/Administrative-Procedures-Manual/Administrative%20Procedures%20Manual%20Library/Section%20100/AP_170_Non_Discrimination.pdf.

²⁶ J. Isaacs (2015), “Toward a Multi-Centric Approach to Education in Toronto.” https://tspace.library.utoronto.ca/bitstream/1807/68729/1/Isaacs_Jennifer_A_201506_MT_MTRP.pdf, p. 68.

²⁷ See, for example, S. Auerbach (2012), *School Leadership for Authentic Family and Community Partnerships: Research Perspectives for Transforming Practice* (New York: Routledge), and: A. Marchesi (1998). Meeting the Needs of Students at Risk. *Education Canada*, vol. 38, no.2 (Summer Edition).

Schools must make every effort to involve such parents whose children would benefit greatly from their presence and role modeling, and to listen to their concerns and preoccupations.

ABEE heard that some parents are hesitant to accept their children's sexual preferences or reluctant to have sexuality education included in the curriculum. In both these instances, teachers may be the better role models and these concerns suggest a role for the school in reaching out to inform parents. As a minimum, children should be exposed to a common knowledge base that does not depend on the beliefs of the adults around them, whether their parents or teachers.

Parent organizations have a role to play in encouraging parental involvement in school committees and other activities, but the Minister can provide resources and materials to further the process. These could include materials in different languages, support material such as videos to explain the curriculum, or tools for parents to discuss anti-discrimination at home. While English language school boards already produce some of these resources, a more systematic approach at a provincial level would send a strong message about their importance, as well as reducing the load on school boards.

Curriculum

History is written by the victors. (anon)

What aids or impedes the acceptance and inclusion of differences among students? The common thread in all schools and centres in Québec is the curriculum. The messages the curriculum conveys, both overtly and subtly, should be carefully examined.

Marie Battiste describes the mainstream curriculum as “cognitive imperialism,” which defines success as assimilation into dominant values, norms, and languages.²⁸ Curricula in North America, including Québec, have traditionally been Eurocentric, with little attention to a polycentric vision of the world. The explicit curriculum should be representative of who the students are. Collaborative, not competitive, narratives should guide it and any curriculum revision should include a consideration of the questions: What does a multicentric curriculum look like? Who must be included? Who are the best people to consult for advice on these questions? How much do students in different communities, including Indigenous students, know about the history and contributions of their ancestors?

In the Québec school history curriculum, history is taught from one perspective—that of the dominant narrative, which conveys the message that white heterosexual European males are the only people who have made valuable contributions to the society and history of Québec. The history of French Québec is far from the whole picture of the history of the province. For example, Indigenous people were never “savages,” but a number of diverse ancient cultures with valuable knowledge and ways of knowing and learning. Ability transcends race, and minority groups have contributed to the arts, sciences, the economy, and society. Other histories are not a threat to the history of French Québec, and addressing

²⁸ Marie Battiste, “Discourses of Difference: Cognitive Imperialism, Culturalism and Diversity,” <https://education.usask.ca/documents/profiles/battiste/diversity.pdf>, p. 18.

this lacuna would be a helpful move towards addressing diversity in the classroom as well as in society.

In vocational training and adult education centres, all programs should also be reviewed to ensure inclusion, diversity, and an understanding and respect for all minorities. This is especially important for program modules such as hairdressing, professional cuisine, professional sales or hotel services, whose content emphasizes customer service.

While the development of a more accurate and inclusive curriculum is a first step in addressing inequities in the classroom, the prescribed curriculum is not the only issue. Writing about a subtle hidden curriculum in Canadian schools, Ratna Ghosh²⁹ maintains that:

...simply changing curricula and policy is insufficient because the problem is embedded in the social consciousness. More destructive and insidious than the formal curriculum is the “hidden” curriculum.... the socialization process in schooling – a curriculum that is taught without being formally ascribed. It emanates from social, political and cultural environments of the society and must be understood in relation to the overall societal power structures (of ethnicity, class, and gender for example) that influence the education system. Therefore, the effects of the hidden curriculum are not casual or unsystematic but rather a reflection of the socio-cultural and economic-political structure of society.

Ghosh maintains that, given Canada’s long-standing commitment to multiracialism policies,

.... very few Canadian teachers are blatantly racist. Furthermore, racist and sexist materials have largely been removed from formal curricula, although the problem of Eurocentric educational systems across Canada does produce racist effects, largely through textbooks’ non-recognition and misrecognition of the contribution of groups of people. (p. 28)

Brown, Manning, O’Reilly and Yau write that:

Conversations about race, class and academic achievement are inherently difficult for Canadians. Educators share a commitment to equal educational opportunity, but we are less certain about making a commitment to equal educational outcomes.³⁰

One manifestation of the hidden curriculum is its effect on the success of students of colour, whether judged by retention or graduation.

Student Achievement

²⁹ Ratna Ghosh (2010), “Racism: A Hidden Curriculum,” *Education Canada*, vol. 48 (4) (www.cea-ace.ca), p. 28.

³⁰ R. Brown et al., 2010.

In Canadian cities with large black populations, black students are overrepresented in expulsions and suspensions from school,³¹ reflecting the findings in an extensive database from the United States. When the students are in school, “racism can also be expressed by educators having low expectations for students,”³² and these low expectations quickly become self-fulfilling prophecies.

Although TDSB [Toronto District School Board] has not yet published multivariate analyses of student background characteristics and achievement, earlier Toronto Board of Education surveys concluded that over one third of Black students (36 percent) and nearly half of Aboriginal students (46 percent) were at risk for poor educational outcomes.³³ Importantly, these findings held true after controlling for factors such as parents’ educational level and socio-economic status.³⁴

It does not appear that the Ministère de l’Éducation nor individual school boards and service centres have conducted quantitative studies similar to those of the TDSB. However, in 2011, the Commission des droits de la personne et des droits de la jeunesse reported on an extensive two-year consultation “to find potential solutions to counter racial profiling and systemic discrimination by focusing the discussion on the situations experienced by youth from racialized communities between the ages of 14 and 25.”³⁵ In the section on education, the Commission heard that the behaviour of students from racial minorities is disproportionately scrutinized, and any bad behaviour is disproportionately and more severely punished. This often reduces the student’s motivation, leading to poorer achievement or even to dropout before graduation.

The Commission also identified a less obvious cause of lower success rates among minority groups: that implicit bias among school personnel tends to stereotype students (and their parents) and leads to a lower set of expectations regarding the students’ abilities and performance. This may cause them to steer the students into less challenging academic pathways. This report invites Québec to meet these challenges, which will not disappear simply because they have been identified.

As a society, we must work together to overcome the problems associated with racial profiling and systemic discrimination.³⁶

³¹ Ratna Ghosh (2019), “Teacher Education in a Globalized World,” in Julie Mueller and Jodi Nickel, eds, *Globalization and Diversity: What Does It Mean for Teacher Education in Canada?* Canadian Association for Teacher Education, p. 420.

³² https://www.oecd.org/education/2030-project/contact/Meaningful_reconciliation_indigenous%20knowledges_flourishing_in_B.C.%27s_K-12_education_system_for_the_betterment_of_all_students.pdf (p. 8)

³³ R. Brown et al. (2010), p. 17.

³⁴ Ibid., p. 16. See also: <<https://www.bcg.com/en-ca/publications/2020/reality-of-anti-black-racism-in-canada>>.

³⁵ Commission des droits de la personne et des droits de la jeunesse (2011). *Racial Profiling and Systemic Discrimination of Racialized Youth: Report of the Consultation on Racial Profiling and its Consequences*, p. 3

³⁶ Ibid., pp 3-4.

There is some evidence that black anglophones in Québec drop out of school more frequently than any other group, causing their economic outcomes to be more limited. Even with the same level of education, black graduates experience higher unemployment at all levels and a greater disparity in income compared with their white counterparts. Salary differences are easy to quantify. More difficult to measure, because they are more insidious, are the mental effects of discrimination and bias. We have already mentioned the higher suicide rate among non-heterosexual youth but they, as well as youth from ethnic minorities, are more susceptible to depression and in greater need of long-term mental health support. Even this has an economic impact because of its cost to society if, in fact, the support is available to them.

A Florida study showed small but significant positive effects in learning outcomes, higher expectations, and fewer disciplinary actions when teachers and students were of the same ethnicity.³⁷ The Commission des droits de la personne et des droits de la jeunesse reported that:

A number of participants in the consultation asserted that one of the strategies that would contribute to making schools a discrimination-free environment would be to ensure that the ethnocultural profile of the teachers and specialists (e.g.: remedial teachers, speech therapists, etc.) better reflect the diversity that characterizes the school clientele in regions and schools with high ethnic concentrations. Not only would a school staff who better reflects the ethnocultural diversity of the students be better equipped to take into consideration the needs specific to such students, but students from immigrant families would have models of success and inspiring authority figures with whom they could identify more easily.³⁸

This is a worthy aim but surely sensitivity from all teachers, regardless of their ethnicity or experience of other differences, would be a more practical strategy and would apply to all forms of diversity and in all schools.

Indigenous education. ABEE has already addressed issues relating to the presence of Indigenous children in southern schools and centres and the education of Indigenous children in their own environments³⁹ and we urge a rereading of that brief. Since that brief was written, there have been several noteworthy examples of initiatives to support Indigenous students and their education. A 2018 paper by the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) describes an initiative called Equity Scan from British Columbia. The Ministry of Education in that province is planning a curriculum

³⁷ Anna J. Egalite, Brian Kisida, Marcus A. Winters, Representation in the Classroom: The Effect of Own-Race Teachers on Student Achievement. [Economics of Education Review, vol 45](#) (April 2015), 44-52.

³⁸ Commission des droits de la personne et des droits de la jeunesse (2011), p.79.

³⁹ ABEE, 2017.

renewal to honour Indigenous knowledge and learning in the spirit of reconciliation.⁴⁰ Closer to home, a recent initiative is the Intercollegiate Decolonization Network (IDN):

...an informal grassroots collective composed of Indigenous and non-Indigenous Cégep staff, professionals, teachers, and students from English-language Cégeps in the Tio'tia:ke (Montreal) area, as well as Indigenous partners from local communities.⁴¹

Among the activities of the collective is the development of a set of resources for indigenizing the curriculum and teaching at the Cégep level that would be equally appropriate for the secondary-school level.⁴² John Abbott College's Black Students' Union also led five Montréal Cégeps in developing activities during Black History Month that would easily transfer into the secondary classroom. An important characteristic of these two local initiatives is that they were developed by young people from minority populations, not given to them by non-racialized instructors.

Many elementary schools are attempting to include Indigenous students and their particular needs in a seamless way. ABEE has already noted the example of Pierre Elliot Trudeau School of the Western Quebec School Board.⁴³ The same board has developed a web page

to recognize and honour the accomplishments and contributions of members of the Black community in our society.... featuring a number of resources with the purpose of acknowledging, celebrating, and in some cases providing new knowledge.⁴⁴

Students at St Willibrord School in Chateauguay wrote, performed and recorded a song in English, French and Mohawk to celebrate the school's different cultures, of which about 30% are Mohawk.⁴⁵ These children are learning to respect and value each other's differences at an early age.

The Commission des droits de la personne et des droits de la jeunesse has identified an anomaly in the eligibility of Inuit children who are in residential care in the south to be educated in English.⁴⁶

⁴⁰ https://www.oecd.org/education/2030-project/contact/Meaningful_reconciliation_indigenous%20knowledges_flourishing_in_B.C.'s_K-12_education_system_for_the_betterment_of_all_students.pdf, p. 14.

⁴¹ <https://www.dawsoncollege.qc.ca/faculty-hub/all-news/two-virtual-workshops-with-the-intercollegiate-decolonization-network-nov-6-and-25/>.

⁴² <https://idn.netboard.me/intercollegiatedecol/?tab=116093>.

⁴³ ABEE, 2017.

⁴⁴ <https://westernquebec.ca/blackhistorymonth/>.

⁴⁵ <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/montreal/dreamchild-chateauguay-mohawk-english-french-1.4416799>.

⁴⁶ Commission des droits de la personne et des droits de la jeunesse. *Investigation into the situation of Inuit children under the residential care of the CIUSSS-de-l'Ouest-de-l'Île-de-Montréal and the Ungava Tulattavik Health Center-Summary*. May 2021.

https://www.cdpcj.qc.ca/storage/app/media/publications/enquete-inuit-jeunes-DPJ_resume_EN.pdf

Inuit children can receive English instruction in their communities without an English eligibility certificate issued by the Quebec Ministry of Education. However, as soon as these youth leave Nunavik, they must initiate administrative procedures in order to be allowed to study in English despite English being the language of instruction for a significant proportion of Inuit youth. Thus, the right to instruction in English does not follow the child but is, instead, attached to their residence. The Commission's investigation reveals that the challenges encountered in obtaining the required documentation to be admissible to English instruction have created a chronic situation of lack of formal education for many Inuit youth placed outside their communities.

We echo the Commission's recommendation and urge the Minister to remedy this by allowing the students' eligibility to transfer with them to the southern school.

The Teaching Profession

*Teachers must be made aware of the subtle ways in which they empower or disadvantage different students; the initial step in teaching must be to examine one's own values.*⁴⁷

The Global Centre for Pluralism questioned more than 500 Canadian school personnel in 2020 and recommended:

1. Make anti-black racism a fundamental part of teacher training
2. Ensure representation and inclusion in all courses in the education program
3. Involve school councils in professional development to combat anti-Black racism and ensure that they provide such training opportunities
4. Address anti-Black racism in schools through strategic planning and professional development with the participation of the community and families
5. Include and mobilize the students.⁴⁸

We must assume that the deep-seated beliefs and discriminatory views held by many in society also exist in the teaching profession, which means that there is a need to educate pre-service teachers and to provide professional development for teachers in practice to embrace inclusivity. Teachers must be encouraged to put aside judgment about students before entering the classroom. The GACR report recommends that the revised teacher education programs:

Include the theme of racism in the mandatory courses for teacher training. (Action No. 11, p. 28)

Make the history and current realities of Indigenous people in Québec a mandatory part of initial teacher training programs. (Action No.16, p. 37)

⁴⁷ Ghosh (2010), p. 28.

⁴⁸ Global Centre for Pluralism (2021). *Racisme: De la réflexion à l'action. Aborder le racisme anti-Noirs dans les écoles canadiennes*. (Ottawa, Ontario). <https://www.pluralism.ca/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/Aborder-racisme-anti-Noirs-ecoles-canadiennes-FINAL.pdf> p. 6.

ABEE believes that a module in a university course, or a one-time workshop on a pedagogical day or at a conference is not enough to support teachers in including all the diverse populations in their classrooms and addressing the needs of all students. ABEE is pleased to note that Part 1 of the recently revised list of competencies for teacher education programs⁴⁹ explicitly refers to diversity in terms of Indigenous issues, gender identity and expression, language and religion, and family structure. We regret, however, the lack of specific reference to race.

In addition, teacher education programs should allow time for student teachers to examine critically their own beliefs and possible biases regarding race, ethnicity, language, class, and gender diversity. The OECD spearheaded “an analytic framework and a toolkit that provides specific teaching and education strategies with proven effectiveness at addressing various themes,”⁵⁰ including a useful toolkit for teachers and teacher educators.⁵¹ After examining their beliefs, student teachers should then formulate strategies for practicing anti-discrimination in their classrooms.

Just as the attitudes of acceptance and anti-discrimination should permeate the school classroom, the same philosophy should permeate the whole teacher education program. It is hoped that teacher education programs will address the inclusion of all forms of difference throughout the student teacher’s program.

Community Resources

Two non-profit organizations in Montréal provide support for young people. Tel-jeunes⁵² is a 24-hour telephone service that allows young people to obtain advice about issues that include bullying, mental health, sexuality, and suicidal thoughts.

Project 10⁵³ provides a safe space for non-heteronormative young people, as well as Indigenous and racialized youth. Both organizations rely on funding, some of it from the federal government, and both would provide a model for serving youth in the regions, where no such services exist.

The regions are especially poorly served in terms of support for young people who do not fit the norm. While schools integrate students with special needs, often by necessity, given the small enrollments, there is a shortage of support personnel such as psychologists, therapists and teachers’ aides. Supportive resources are scarce in regions where travel is difficult for most of the year and an overnight stay is often necessary when support personnel leave the school board office. Even the option of video linking is difficult to

⁴⁹ MEES, 2020. *Reference Framework for Professional Competencies for Teachers*. https://cdn-contenu.quebec.ca/cdn-contenu/adm/min/education/publications-adm/devenir-enseignant/reference_framework_professional_competencies_teacher.pdf?1611584651.

⁵⁰ <https://www.oecd.org/education/ceri/ceri-teachereducationfordiversity.htm>.

⁵¹ OECD, 2010. *TED Toolkit on Teaching for Diversity*. Centre for Educational Research and Innovation (CERI) www.oecd.org/edu/ceri.

⁵² <https://www.teljeunes.com/Tel-jeunes-en>

⁵³ <https://p10.qc.ca>.

offer when broadband is limited and connectivity erratic. While money is needed for travel costs, it is not enough to find teachers and technicians for remote areas or to keep them there if they are found. Over the years, ABEE has recommended that the need for the French-language examination for entry into professional orders be reconsidered, and we do so again. When a professional has trained in an English-language university, it should be permissible to sit the examination in English and other provinces can provide models of such examinations. This would certainly increase the potential number of much-needed professionals and encourage graduates of social work or child psychology and other therapists to stay in the province.

Recommendations

ABEE recommends that the Minister:

- make a definitive statement that discrimination by administrators, teachers, staff or students on the basis of race, sexual orientation, ability, religion or any other form of exceptionality will not be tolerated in Quebec’s schools and centres
- publicize this statement widely throughout the education system
- follow this statement with actions including, but not limited to, inclusion in the strategic plan of the Ministère
- collect race-based data on student success, retention and disciplinary actions to ensure the practice of equity
- mandate the establishment of equity committees in every school board (and service centre) to supervise similar committees at the school and centre level. These committees would be an evolution of equity training for school and centre personnel that would, in turn, evolve from meaningful conversations among the personnel, led by qualified trainers. Their establishment would be included in the school board’s or service centre’s commitment-to-success plan and their activities would be reported annually to the school community
- ensure that the support services provided to the diverse school and centre populations are equitable by differential funding, subject to local discretion, with particular emphasis on the needs of diverse populations in small rural schools
- employ an expert panel to review the whole K-11 curriculum to ensure that it is inclusive of diverse groups
- rewrite the K-11 History curriculum to broaden its perspective beyond Québec-based content and Eurocentricity
- allow latitude so that schools can incorporate modules in the History curriculum relative to their students’ backgrounds and local history
- review the curricula in schools and centres to ensure that they respect inclusion and diversity
- ensure that pedagogical materials authorized for use in classrooms reflect all aspects of the diversity of Québec’s classrooms and society
- ensure that teachers and administrators are prepared in both pre-service and in-service training to be sensitive to, respect, and value diversity in their work

- monitor the content of the revised teacher education program to ensure that it reflects the realities of the inclusive classroom and prepares teachers to work with these realities
- provide targeted funding for professional development activities that sensitize school personnel to issues of diversity
- provide funding to support exchanges between students in all regions of Québec
- provide funding to existing community-based resource projects and develop similar projects where they do not exist, to support youth of various expressions of diversity.

Summary

I have expressed an opinion on public issues whenever they appeared to me so bad and unfortunate that silence would have made me feel guilty of complicity. (Albert Einstein, 1954)

Recognizing the existence of bias is the first step towards eliminating discrimination. More knowledge about the experience of minorities and unlearning false narratives will lead to better understanding of difference and help reduce bias.

In a recent webcast, Rosemary Sandlier proposed that it is not enough to be an ally in the fight against racism or injustice: we must also take action. Saying or doing something may also inspire others to do so.⁵⁴ There is a fine line between allyship and condescension and inclusion of all minorities must be demonstrated by action, not by a passive expression of goodwill.

The overriding focus for ABEE in all its work is the health and well being of our students as the foundation for their success in schools. The goal is an inclusive society in which all children thrive and are accepted for who they are. Discrimination, implicit or explicit against those who are different is a reality in the lives of many of our young people who question their sense of belonging to the wider Québec society and, consequently, feel apart from it. Their futures should not depend on the colour of their skin, their indigeneity, their cultural or ethnic affiliation, their sexuality, or the fact they have special educational needs.

It is not enough to designate February as Black History Month, June as National Indigenous History month, June 21 as National Indigenous Peoples Day, and June 27 as Canadian Multiculturalism Day. These smack of tokenism, described by G.S. Aikenhead as a “typical neo-colonial problem.”⁵⁵ Instead, there is a need for differences in the classroom to be consistently accepted, addressed, and respected, whether between teacher and student or among students. These attitudes are signs of a mature, thoughtful, and equitable society. They are based on the development of good relationships and borne out by actions. They

⁵⁴ Rosemary Sadlier, *Where We Are Now with Rosemary Sadlier*. QPAT-APEQ Podcast Dec 18 2020. <https://qpat-apeq.libsyn.com/where-we-are-now-with-rosemary-sadlier> Accessed Feb 9 2021.

⁵⁵ G.S. Aikenhead and D. Elliott (2010). “An Emerging Decolonizing Science Education in Canada.” *Canadian Journal of Science, Mathematics and Technology Education*, 10, 321-338. <https://education.usask.ca/documents/profiles/aikenhead/An-Emerging-Decolonizing-Sci-Ed.pdf> (p. 19).

will be developed only by education at all levels, based on firm and clearly defined policies, well-funded materials and teacher support, taking as much time as needed, but not delaying the process any longer.

We believe that the Minister can provide meaningful leadership by taking actions that promote the inclusion of all students and ensure him of ABEE's support in carrying out these actions.

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