

Initial Teacher Training in Ethnocultural, Religious and Linguistic Diversity Offered by Québec Universities: a Quantitative and Qualitative Portrait

Key words

Ethnocultural, religious and linguistic diversity • Teacher training • Québec

Research summary

This portrait of initial teacher training in diversity at the 12 Québec universities is the first part of a much larger research program to study this field comparatively, both inside and outside Québec. As a quantitative and qualitative study, it is based on an analysis of the content of 37 courses covering approaches to ethnocultural, religious and linguistic diversity in an educational milieu and on interviews with 35 university trainers who teach these courses. The study shows this training has expanded significantly over the last ten years, but still faces numerous challenges, chiefly related to the lack of established institutional anchorage for this field.

Context

Over the past 30 years, major changes have occurred in Québec schools as a result of an increased and more diverse flow of migration, a greater integration of ethnic minorities into French-language institutions and a broader awareness of equal-rights issues –not only for immigrant communities, but also for the diverse communities who have long resided in Québec. Initial and ongoing teacher training in how to respond to ethnocultural, religious and linguistic diversity plays an essential role in educating all Québec students for citizenship

in a society that is both inclusive and pluralist. However, despite numerous local initiatives since the *Policy Statement on Educational Integration and Intercultural Education* was adopted in 1998, there have been no complete, or even partial, progress reports.

The need for a report on the situation has already been identified as a priority in numerous government documents. These include the 2008 action plan, *Diversity: An Added Value*, of the Ministère de l'Immigration et des Communautés culturelles and the 2010 report of the Commission des droits de la personne et des droits de la jeunesse (CDPDJ) on racial profiling. The need for such a report has also come up during various events organized by CEETUM and its associated teams, where decision-makers and representatives of government and education were brought together (e.g. the *Study Days on Inclusive Education* held in April 2012). The issue was also discussed at the MELS-MESRST-universities meeting with the deans of all the faculties of education in Québec universities or their representatives.

This is why the Axe Éducation et rapports ethniques (research focus on education and ethnic relations) of CEETUM embarked upon

an extensive research project (CRSH 2012-2014, supervised by Maryse Potvin) to examine how ethnocultural diversity is dealt within the initial and ongoing training of education professionals. It is intended to assemble a portrait of the current situation in Québec, by both theoretical and empirical means, and from a comparative perspective, while supporting the establishment of a network of trainers in this field. Like the first and second *Sommet des professeurs et chargés de cours engagés dans la formation interculturelle du personnel scolaire*, held in March 2012 and May 2013 respectively, the present document is part of this process.

Methodology

First, the research team used key words related to the theme of diversity to draw up a list of 254 courses likely to look at ethnocultural, religious and linguistic diversity from the identified teacher training programs. Of these 254 courses, 70 effectively dealt with general issues related to diversity and, even more importantly, with ways of taking diversity into account in an educational milieu. After validation with the instructors of these courses, the list of initial teacher training courses was reduced to 41. Using these 41 courses, a descriptive analysis of their content was developed, organized by university and by program. These key informants also sent us detailed course outlines for 37 courses, which enabled us to develop a typology of courses and their objectives. To supplement this analysis, interviews were conducted with 35 trainers, 21 professors and 14 instructors, from 10 of the 12 universities offering these programs. The interviews dealt with what the trainers saw as the main challenges from an educational perspective and in terms of institutional anchorage of this training at their institutions. Also discussed was the content of the courses they teach (proportions devoted to diversity, population studies, theoretical concepts, knowledge, facts, competencies targeted, pedagogical activities, evaluation methods and theoretical approaches).

Key findings

Significant progress

First, the portrait reveals that this field has grown significantly over the last ten years. In fact, in initial teacher training alone, we identified some 40 current courses that deal effectively with ways of taking diversity into account in an educational milieu. To a great extent, this expansion is due to the education reform in Québec in the 2000s that resulted in new programs and courses in history and citizenship education and in ethics and religious culture and which retained existing cross-disciplinary courses on diversity instituted mainly in the 1990s.

Another positive factor is the critical mass of tenured professors who devote the bulk of their teaching and research to issues related to ethnocultural, religious and linguistic diversity in an educational milieu. While such expertise is still largely concentrated in Montréal, universities in other regions of Québec are also showing interest in this field of activity, although to different degrees. Université Laval and the Université de Sherbrooke, both located in regions affected by the government policy on regionalization of immigration, are the most active in this regard.

With respect to content, approaches and activities favoured in the courses, the portrait shows that they allow future teachers to be exposed to a variety of theoretical concepts (e.g. integration, prejudice and discrimination). They also include information on ethnic relations and immigration to Québec as well as knowledge related to the adaptation of the educational system to diversity, e.g. general frameworks, pedagogical practices and school-family-community relationships. Teaching on diversity also seems to be characterized by a strong pedagogical energy and by the great importance accorded to the development of ethical positions and professional competencies needed for working in increasingly diverse educational milieux.

Major shortcomings

Despite these positive findings, the portrait reveals several shortcomings of this training in Québec. First, over the last ten years, this type of training has developed largely without an overall plan and without significant collaborative effort. In fact, the respondents almost unanimously deplored the lack of coordination in many respects between professors and instructors offering courses on this subject. Several respondents, particularly those in outlying areas, also mentioned the need for more sharing among all trainers involved in teaching ethnocultural, religious and linguistic diversity, both at their own university and provincewide.

This somewhat makeshift development is also related to the often ambiguous institutional anchorage of teaching diversity, due to the absence of clear Ministerial requirements and guidelines covering its legitimacy and the objectives it ought to target. Most of the trainers told us that they base themselves on the 12 competencies in the reference framework established by MELS in 2001 and, in the case of the Université du Québec à Montréal, on a 13th competency on the taking into account of diversity. However, the trainers are obliged to rely on their own personal judgment and professional expertise in order to interpret the impact of these competencies on intercultural education and their consequences. This is because there are no common reference points which all professors and instructors could use to define the specific competencies that future teachers must master to assume the twofold responsibility of carrying out effective and equitable interventions in multiethnic environments and preparing all Québec students to live in a pluralistic society.

In all the universities, the ambiguous status of teaching responses to diversity is also reflected in the sometimes difficult and often inexistent harmonization between the academic and the practical training courses, particularly during the evaluation of internships. Since there is no clear recognition of teaching how to respond to diversity, those who do teach it have difficulty justifying the competencies they target in

their courses. Consequently, the importance of students demonstrating these competencies in internships is poorly understood and finds little acceptance.

Among the universities, the absence of a shared vision and the lack of collaboration are even more apparent. Teaching diversity has less institutional anchorage outside of Montréal and is often handled by one or two individuals from the same institution. In contrast, the critical mass of tenured professors who have expertise in this field are concentrated in the universities of Montréal. The regional differences are also apparent in the issues and groups addressed. Thus, in outlying areas, more attention is paid to Aboriginal peoples and the issues associated with them while, in Montréal, more attention is paid to populations of immigrant origin and issues related to integration. The “other” majority seems practically absent, except in the English universities where it is its relations with the francophone community that are more discussed.

Other problematic issues raised by the professors and instructors more specifically concern the impact and pedagogical challenges of teaching ethnocultural, religious and linguistic diversity in initial teacher training. They particularly deplore the fact that, in certain universities or certain programs, graduates obtain their teaching diplomas without having taken any courses on diversity or with having been only briefly exposed to it in another more general course. The choice of certain universities to encourage a wide definition of diversity sometimes results in the almost total disappearance of the issue of ethnocultural diversity. Just over half of the courses analyzed are completely dedicated to ethnocultural, religious and linguistic diversity. In the rest of the courses, from 10% to 70% of the content is devoted to this topic.

Further analysis reveals some trends in the exit profiles of students in teacher training, and how their profiles differ according to the program in which they were registered. Generally speaking, students in programs designed to graduate second-language teachers receive

the most complete training, with several of these programs having more than one compulsory course. Future preschool, elementary and secondary school teachers also benefit from training in this area, as more than half of them must take a compulsory course, no matter what their major. On the other hand, the vast majority of students in vocational and technical teaching programs have no courses that address the educator's response to diversity in the school environment. At first glance, the analysis of other programs does not reveal any clear trend, as courses offered vary from one institution to the next.

Recommendations in terms of public or political interventions

Based on this first report, it is possible to make some recommendations on desirable courses of action in this area:

- 1) Clarify the role of teacher training in response to ethnocultural, religious and linguistic diversity and define its targeted competencies.
- 2) Make this training compulsory by adding a 13th competency or by more explicitly integrating it into the 12 competencies of the MELS reference framework.
- 3) Support exchanges and joint action among trainers active in this field, including internship supervisors. This should occur on a regular basis within each institution and, on an occasional, but systematic basis, among the various Québec universities.
- 4) Develop research to identify and better define the essential knowledge, skills and behaviours for ensuring efficient and equitable response to ethnocultural, religious and linguistic diversity by all school staff, and, at the same time, support the experimentation of innovative training practices in this area.
- 5) Gather, following a methodical protocol, more detailed information on the knowledge and skills possessed by the members of the graduating classes of the

education faculties, by university or by program, and on their views of the relevance of the training they received and its long-term impact on their attitudes and professional competencies.

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Granting agencies

- Direction des services aux communautés culturelles, Ministère de l'Éducation, du Loisir et du Sport
- Axe Éducation et rapports ethniques, Centre d'études ethniques des universités montréalaises (CEETUM)
- Canada Research Chair in Education and Ethnic Relations, Université de Montréal
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