

## Chapter 83

# The Need for Promoting and Developing Cultural Competency in Future Teachers

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### **ABSTRACT**

*This chapter discusses the importance of promoting and developing cultural competency in future teachers. As many countries face changing demographics and student populations in schools it is essential that future teachers understand and respect different cultures, especially the role of equity and inclusion in supporting student success. The chapter provides a review of cultural competency, why teachers today need to have cultural competency, and ways in which this competency can be developed for beginning teachers. Methods of promoting and developing cultural competency for pre-service teachers are highlighted based on the experiences from a four-semester pre-service teacher program in Ontario, Canada. The ways in which cultural competency is addressed in different courses such as Digital Literacies, Human development, Mental health in Schools, and the “Foundations” series of courses (fundamentals of teaching, learning, planning and assessment) are presented. Recommendations for teacher preparation and professional development are provided.*

## **INTRODUCTION**

Many teachers around the globe have diverse classrooms today. Students come from different cultures, religions, races, social classes, and speak different languages. They bring with them their own set of values, customs, and beliefs. Atkinson, Morten, and Sue (1993) referred to this trend, which began in the 1980s as the “diversification of America”. More recently, Jeffreys (2016) referred to this as cultural evaluation; the cultural growth and change within a society. It is predicted that by 2030 half of all U.S. elementary school children will be children of colour. By 1990 one out of four school aged children came from a home where English was not a primary language and one out of six was born outside of the United States (Diller & Moule, 2005). Countries around the world are seeing similar statistics. In Canada, this trend of diversification was referred to as the ‘mosaic effect’ or the ‘mosaic culture’ (Kalman, 2010). It is reported that there are over 200 languages in the province of Ontario alone and the rates of students’ households with English as their primary language is declining (Ministry of Education, 2009). Between 2001 and 2006, Ontario’s visible minority population increased more than four times faster than the population as a whole. By 2017, about one-fifth of the Canadian population will be members of diverse faith communities including Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, and Judaism, in addition to a growing number of individuals without a religious affiliation (Statistics Canada, 2010).

School boards must be able to respond to such diversification and address the needs of a rapidly changing and increasingly complex society and student population base. Ever more important is the need for teachers that can respond to the diverse needs and learning styles of their students. In their framework for learning to teach, Darling-Hammond and Baratz-Snowden (2007) suggest that along with knowledge of subject matter, beginning teachers must also have an understanding of learners and their social context in order to help them succeed. Teachers must also be able to assess their own beliefs, values, and potential biases that they may bring to the classroom (Darling-Hammond, 2007). It is likely that future teachers will be interviewed and assessed on their ability to engage in critical reflection related to diversity and equity, as well as experiences working with diverse populations. To respond to the changing social dynamics in schools, future teachers should have cultural awareness and competency.

This chapter explores the theory of cultural competency and its role for future teachers and within teacher education programs. Although this chapter focuses on the Canadian education system, universal recommendations and research- to- practice ideas are shared. The chapter begins with a review of the theoretical principles of cultural competency, then narrows in focus on the application to the field of education. To highlight how cultural competency can be promoted within a faculty of education, a case study is provided of the experiences within a Faculty of Education in Ontario, Canada. Examples of the myriad of ways this concept and skill was discussed, promoted, and practiced are described. This includes examples of curriculum content, assignments, and activities within a Bachelor of Education program. To end this chapter, recommendations for the promotion of cultural competency, a valued teacher skill, are discussed.

## **BACKGROUND**

Canada’s diverse culture is reflected in a “salad-bowl” analogy that captures the multicultural diversity of Canadian society (Parkay, Stanford, Vaillancourt, Stephens, Harris, Hughes, Gadanidis, & Petrarca, in press). Twenty percent of the total Canadian population represent newcomers to Canada, the highest

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