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PRE-SERVICE TEACHER TRAINING IN ETHNO-CULTURAL, RELIGIOUS AND LINGUISTIC DIVERSITY OFFERED BY QUÉBEC UNIVERSITIES: A QUANTITATIVE AND QUALITATIVE PORTRAIT

Key words: Ethno-cultural, religious and linguistic diversity; Teacher training; Québec

Abstract

This portrait of pre-service teacher training in diversity at the 12 Québec universities is the first part of a comparative research program on the development of this field and the issues it raises. Combining quantitative and qualitative methodologies, it is based on a content analysis 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 in the province 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 flows 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 (Mc Andrew, 2010a; Bouchard & Taylor, 2008). A school integration and intercultural education Policy has been implemented by the Department of Education in 1998 followed by various measures by local school Boards to insure the mastery of French as a common language, the promotion of equal opportunities for students of various origins as well as positive interethnic relations and appreciation of diversity among the full student body (Mc Andrew, 2010b; MEQ, 1998). To achieve such goals, the attitudes and skills of teachers who are still largely ethnically homogenous, although the presence of teachers with an immigrant background is increasing, are central. Thus in the last ten years, various training programs, courses or ad hoc initiatives to support the adaptation to ethno-cultural, religious and linguistic diversity within classrooms and educational settings, have been implemented by various faculties of education who are responsible for pre teachers training in the province or by national or local educational authorities who oversee in-service training. However, there had been no complete, or even partial, assessment of the state and challenges of the field until our team undertook our research project.

The need for such an assessment had been identified though as a priority in numerous government documents such as the 2008 governmental Action plan, *Diversity: An Added Value* (MICC, 2008) and the 2010 report of the Quebec Human Right Commission on racial profiling (CDPDJ, 2010). The issue was also one of the 2013 priorities on the agenda of the joint committee between the departments of

Education and of Higher Education and Universities, where civil servants and deans of all the Faculties of education in Québec exchange about their respective programs and aim at harmonizing them.

This is why a team of researchers and graduate students from various institutions embarked on an extensive research project¹ to examine how ethno-cultural diversity is dealt within the pre-service and in-service training of various school professionals in Quebec, in other provinces of Canada as well as in selected European countries, with a special focus on French-speaking contexts. The project also includes a theoretical component aiming at identifying the knowledge attitudes and skills that should be pursued in the field (Potvin et al, 2014, in press) as well as a practical component supporting the establishment of provincial, national and international networks of trainers in this field (Larochelle-Audet, 2013) The report (Larochelle-Audet et al, 2013; Mc Andrew et al, 2013) that we present in this article, limited to pre-service training of teachers in Quebec, is part of this process.

Methodology

The realization of the portrait was carried through various stages, involving both quantitative and qualitative methodological approaches. First, the research team used key words related to the theme of diversity to draw up a list of 254 course titles likely to look at ethnocultural, religious and linguistic diversity from teacher training programs on the web sites or from official documents of the 12 Quebec universities (9 French-medium and 3 English-medium) involved in such programs. After analyzing the course description for these 254 courses, we selected 70 of them which, on the one hand, effectively dealt with ethno-cultural, religious or linguistic diversity and, on the other hand, did so with a clear link with the taking into account of such diversity within the educational milieu. After validation with the instructors of these courses, the list of relevant 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 of their objectives based on the discipline they were related to and the importance they explicitly granted to knowledge, attitudes and skills. To complement 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 linked to intercultural training from an educational perspective and in terms of institutional anchorage at their institutions. Also discussed was the actual content of the courses they taught (such as the proportion devoted to various types of diversity, the specific groups studied, the theoretical approaches and concepts selected, the type of knowledge and facts transmitted, the competencies targeted, as well as the pedagogical and evaluation methods used).

¹ Potvin, M., Armand, F., Estivalèzes, M., Kanouté, F., Rahm, J., Mc Andrew, M. & Low, B. (2012-2014): *L'enseignement sur la diversité ethnoculturelle en formation initiale et continue des professionnels de l'éducation dans les universités: développement du champ théorique et pratique, au Québec et dans une perspective comparative*. Grant from the Canadian Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC).

Key findings

Significant progress

First, the portrait reveals that intercultural pre-service teacher training in Québec universities has grown significantly over the last ten years as exemplified by the fact we identified 41 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 (MEQ, 1997) that resulted in new programs and courses in history and citizenship education and in ethics and religious culture, while cross-disciplinary courses on diversity instituted in the 1990s were most of the time maintained by universities.

Another positive finding is the existence of a 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 middle-size cities targeted by the government policy aiming at a more balanced regional distribution of immigrants (MICC, 2008) 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 innovation 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 in intercultural pre-service training in Québec. First, over the last ten years courses, initiatives and activities in this field developed largely without an overall plan and without significant collaborative effort both within and between various universities. First and foremost, the respondents almost unanimously deplored the lack of coordination in many respects between professors and instructors offering courses on this subject. Several, 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 province-wide.

This somewhat makeshift development is also related to the often ambiguous institutional anchorage of teaching related to diversity within pre-service teacher training programs, 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 twelve general competencies found in the reference framework established by the Department of education (MEQ, 2001), although one institution, situated in the multi-ethnic core of the city, the Université du Québec à Montréal (UQAM), has adopted a specific 13th competency

on the taking into account of diversity. Other trainers must rely on their own personal judgment and professional expertise in order to interpret the impact of these competencies on the legitimacy of various objectives and content related to intercultural education they select within their courses. This is linked to the absence of 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 pre-service teacher training in the field of ethno-cultural, linguistic and religious 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 the legitimacy of intercultural education, professor and instructors of academic courses have difficulty establishing the relevance of the competencies they target in this field. 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 of intercultural pre-service teacher training is also problematic. Indeed although a certain degree of variation is expected to reflect local specificities, major regional and linguistic differences in this regard are likely to maintain or even increase the gaps that already exist, on the one hand between the multicultural metropolitan regions and the largely homogenous outlying regions and, on the other hand, between French-speaking teachers who often adopt an intercultural or even assimilationist paradigm and their English-speaking colleagues more influenced by the Canadian multicultural approach (Mc Andrew, 2010a, b). Indeed, 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 issues of recognition. In Montréal, the focus is on populations of immigrant origin with a clear distinction between French-medium universities where questions related to integration are paramount while in their English-medium counterparts more attention is paid to anti-racism. The “other” majority group is also practically absent except in the three institutions catering to the English-speaking community where its relationship with the francophone community is more often 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 pre-service teacher training. They 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. Some also report that choice of some universities to encourage a wide definition of diversity, which also include social class, gender, sexual orientation and handicap, sometimes results in a very limited treatment of ethno-cultural, linguistic and religious diversity.

The first concern is confirmed by the quantitative analysis which revealed significant differences in the exit profiles of students 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 destined to teach in vocational and technical programs have no courses that address the educator's response to diversity in the school environment.

Recommendations

Based on the results of the study, the authors made several 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 better 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 Department of Education 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 more detailed information on the knowledge and skills possessed by graduate students in 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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