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Neutrality Always Benefits the Oppressor: The Need to Rupture the Normalized Structure of Teacher Education Programs to Diversify the Workforce

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Education Programs Responded
to the COVID-19 Pandemic*

Edited by

Patricia Danyluk, Amy Burns,
S. Laurie Hill, and Kathryn Crawford

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EDITORS

Patricia Danyluk, Amy Burns, S. Laurie Hill, and Kathryn Crawford

COVER ART AND DESIGN

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BOOK DESCRIPTION

This collection examines how Bachelor of Education programs across Canada adapted during the COVID-19 pandemic, covering the period immediately after the pandemic was declared and the year following (March 2020 to March 2021). The collection is divided into four sections focused on programmatic changes, pedagogical developments, practicum adaptations, and equity with an overall consistent concern for preservice teacher learning and well-being.

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CHAPTER 20

Neutrality Always Benefits the Oppressor: The Need to Rupture the Normalized Structure of Teacher Education Programs to Diversify the Workforce

*Zuhra Abawi, Niagara University Ontario
Ardavan Eizadirad, Wilfrid Laurier University*

Abstract

As faculties of education have undergone drastic changes to keep teacher education programs afloat while accommodating teacher candidates during a pandemic, much of these alterations are designed, much like the education system itself, to meet the needs of white, privileged students. Although many of the changes from classroom content, pedagogy, and assessment to alternative practicums are commendable in the face of a pandemic, BIPOC and teacher candidates from lower socioeconomic status, who are already underrepresented in the Ontario teacher workforce, are further disadvantaged due to existing inequities and opportunity gaps (Battiste, 2013; Colour of Poverty, 2019; Henry & Tator, 2012) exasperated by pandemic conditions. In this chapter we ground our experiences through a duo-ethnography as two racialized faculty members within teacher education programs at Canadian postsecondary institutions. It is argued that the implications of the pandemic in convergence with the axiology of whiteness and white privilege that define teacher education and the teaching profession in Ontario operate as a double barrier to entry into and diversification of the teacher workforce. Suggestions are made for how to disrupt and rupture the normalized structure of teacher education programs and its policies and practices to advance equitable outcomes.

Keywords: duo-ethnography, BIPOC, critical pedagogy, whiteness, teacher candidates, pandemic

Résumé

Alors que les facultés d'éducation ont subi des changements radicaux pour maintenir les programmes de formation des enseignants à flot tout en accueillant les candidats enseignants pendant une pandémie, plusieurs de ces modifications ont été conçues pour répondre aux besoins des étudiants blancs privilégiés. Bien que bon nombre des changements apportés au contenu, à la pédagogie et à l'évaluation en classe vers des stages alternatifs soient admirable face à une pandémie mondiale, les candidats noirs, autochtones, de couleur et de statut socioéconomique inférieur, qui sont déjà sous-représentés au personnel enseignant ontarien, sont encore plus défavorisés en raison des inégalités existantes et des lacunes en matière d'opportunités (Battiste, 2013 ; Color of Poverty, 2019 ; Eizadirad, 2020 ; Henry & Tator, 2012) exaspérés par les conditions pandémiques. Dans ce chapitre, on se tient bon à nos expériences dans une duo-ethnographie, deux membres racialisés du corps professoral au sein de programmes de formation à l'enseignement dans des établissements postsecondaires canadiens. On soutient que la convergence des conditions pandémiques avec le privilège blanc comme forme de monnaie qui définissent la formation des enseignants et la profession enseignante en Ontario, fonctionnent comme une double barrière contre la création d'un accès à la diversification du personnel

enseignant. Nous présentons des propositions qui répondent à comment perturber et rompre la structure normalisée des programmes de formation des enseignants et de ses politiques et pratiques afin d'avancer des résultats équitables, des propositions sont présentées.

Mots clés : duo-ethnographie; candidats noirs, autochtones, de couleur; pédagogie critique; blanchité; candidats à l'enseignement; pandémie

We must always take sides. Neutrality helps the oppressor, never the victim. Silence encourages the tormentor, never the tormented.

– Eli Wiesel, Holocaust survivor

Introduction

Following the brutal murder of George Floyd by police officer Derek Chauvin on May 25, 2020, in Minneapolis, Minnesota, antiracism protests were staged around the globe to draw attention to widespread racism, particularly anti-Black racism, not only at the hands of police forces, but also within institutions including education. Institutions across different sectors had to critically self-examine their policies and practices with a heightened level of critical consciousness to reflect on their role, historically and currently, in perpetuating racism and privileging whiteness as a system (Ahmed, 2007; Annamma & Handy, 2021; Henry & Tator, 2012; Karumanchery, 2005). There is momentum and pressure on institutions to speak up and commit themselves to doing the work of equity beyond simple acknowledgements of past wrong doings or solidarity statements. This is evident in the rise of consultations and equity, diversity, inclusion, and indigenization efforts and initiatives being enacted across multiple sectors, particularly within K–12 and higher education institutions. This is a pivotal moment in the history of institutions and how they will be remembered: whether they respond with intentional actions to reduce the harm they have inflicted and enacted via historically normalized policies and practices that disadvantage BIPOC and those of lower socioeconomic status (Abawi & Eizadirad, 2020; Colour of Poverty, 2019; Eizadirad, 2017; Henry & Tator, 2012; Mohamed & Beagan, 2019) or continue to be a bystander through silence or superficial statements.

Karumanchery (2005) reminds us that “space and place, the social, political and historical fabric of existence has constituted a relationship between the oppressor and the oppressed. This is a relationship constructed through discourse, and through the institutional structures that work to subjugate the margins” (p. 6). We expand on this by emphasizing that when it comes to the work of institutions, it does not occur in a binary framework of the oppressor/oppressed but rather within a malleable discourse that simultaneously and paradoxically oppresses while claiming liberation, freedom, and support for marginalized groups. Most institutions are hiring more faculty from underrepresented groups to diversify representation as a response to being more equitable and inclusive. Although this is a good start, if this is the only response to making teacher education programs more inclusive, it drastically falls short of being effective.

While calls to diversify the teaching profession have long been touted, educational systems, including school boards and institutions of higher education such as teacher education programs in Canada, continue to be predominantly white spaces that BIPOC educators must navigate carefully to succeed (Ladson-Billings, 1998; Henry & Tator, 2012; Mohamed & Beagan, 2019). At a systemic level, the hostilities and microaggressions of educational spaces toward BIPOC communities and identities via its policies, practices, and colourblind neutral approaches came to the forefront following the Ministry of Education’s 2020 Review of the Peel District School Board, which expressed widespread and embedded racism, most notably anti-

Black, anti-Indigenous, anti-South Asian, and Islamophobic racism at all levels of the board (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2020). Peel is not an anomaly in such incidents of institutional, systemic, and structural racism as similar findings have also been uncovered in ministry reviews of other Ontario school boards, including the York Region District School Board and Toronto District School Board (CBC News, 2021). For example, the Toronto District School Board Human Rights Office examined reports of hate activity among its 245,000 students and 40,000 staff from 2018 to 2020 and found that

Race-related complaints made up 69 per cent of all reported hate incidents in the 2019-2020 school year, with anti-Black racism making up the biggest share. Incidents related to a person's sexual orientation accounted for 17 per cent, while creed or religion made up 14 per cent. (para. 6)

Furthermore, a recent study by Abawi and Eizadirad (2020) found that BIPOC teachers have markedly different experiences, facing more systemic challenges in accessing and securing permanent teaching employment than their white colleagues. Racial inequities in teacher education and access to the teaching profession have only been exacerbated by the pandemic, as James (2020) notes, the massive shifts to online learning and in some cases online practicum experiences, are designed to benefit affluent and white students to the detriment of BIPOC students. This systemic barrier is driven by institutional policies and practices that are normalized and claimed as neutral and colourblind, yet they privilege certain ways of being and doing, in the process safeguarding who can gain entry into teacher education programs and consequently who has positive experiences rooted in belonging and who has negative experiences rooted in lack of representation and exclusion. This is the invisibility of whiteness as a culminating system of privileges (Abawi et al., 2021; Ahmed, 2007; McIntosh, 1988) rather than a descriptor of skin colour, where it leads to access to opportunities for some at the expense of exclusion to others, including the assessment process for who is an ideal teacher candidate and how they would demonstrate their value and worthiness as part of gaining entry and completing the 2-year teacher certification program within Canadian teacher preparation programs.

Critical Pedagogy as Theoretical Framework

By employing a critical pedagogical framework (Battise, 2013; Freire, 1970; McLaren, 2015), we attempt to move beyond Eurocentric ontologies and epistemologies that privilege whiteness and neglect the multiplicity of lived experiences of BIPOC identities including teacher candidates and faculty. We agree with Brown and Strega (2005), who distinguish differences between doing research on the marginalized versus doing research with the marginalized:

Research from the margins is not research on the marginalized but research by, for, and with them/us. It is research that takes seriously and seeks to trouble the connections between how knowledge is created, what knowledge is produced, and who is entitled to engage in these processes. It seeks to reclaim and incorporate the personal and political context of knowledge construction. (p. 7)

At the core of this paper is troubling of the metanarrative that teacher education programs operate in neutrality and as apolitical spaces. Their current normalized policies and practices, to varying degrees, is exclusionary and leads to perpetuating inequality of access to opportunities

for minoritized teacher candidates and faculty, which on a larger scale has led to lack of diversity in the workforce across different geographical locations.

The personal is political, just as much as institutional policies and practices wrapped up in market logic are political and driven by profit (Giroux, 2003; hooks, 1991). There are ongoing disparities in accessing teacher education programs both via entry requirements and lack of funding, supports, and mentorship within programs for minoritized teacher candidates and faculty following entry into the programs. This contributes to many BIPOC students and faculty alike feeling isolated, burned out, and unsupported (Henry & Tator, 2012; Mohamed & Beagan, 2019). We contribute to filling in the research gap by discussing how mandated institutional equity and inclusive policies, including the changes and adaptations introduced and enacted as part of teaching and learning during a pandemic, have fundamentally failed to respond to the needs of BIPOC identities and communities, often being performative and superficial. As implications, we discuss the myriad ways that the pandemic exposes and accentuates cracks in the system. Critical questions such as “Who can be a teacher?” and “Who is education for?” highlight the salience of race in teacher education programs as well as the permeation of whiteness as a normalizing force which needs to be ruptured systemically with alternative approaches.

Methodology

This chapter takes on a duo-ethnography methodological approach (hooks, 1991; Latz & Murray, 2012; Lund et al., 2017; MacDonald & Markides, 2016; Sawyer & Norris, 2013). A duo-ethnography is a qualitative, emancipatory methodology that makes space for two scholars to engage in critical dialogue concerning a specific topic or phenomena. Through this dialogical exchange (Freire, 1970), the two scholars engage in a conversation, juxtaposing their ways of knowing, identities and lived experiences to offer a myriad of understandings about a specific topic. Latz and Murray (2012) articulate duo-ethnographic work as a process whereby “each researcher/dialoguer uses his or her life’s curriculum, which is, inevitably steeped in some culture(s), as a starting point for dialogical contributions” (p. 2). This transformational exchange allows for an open-ended discussion between the voices of two social locations, in which the relationship between the two dialoguers come to “regard each other as both their teacher and student, assisting the other in reconceptualizing their own meanings” (Sawyer & Norris, 2013, p. 22). For the purpose of this paper, our experiences as two racialized faculty members in Ontario teacher education programs are centred, discussing how we navigated the pandemic to support our students emotionally, professionally, and spiritually especially our BIPOC students.

Our positionalities and lived experiences not only frame our exchange and our overall work, but also inform the rationale for selecting this particular methodology. We chose a duo-ethnographic study with intentionality as a counterstory to resist Eurocentric methodological norms (Ladson-Billings, 1998). The overarching purpose of our critical dialogic exchange is to explore how identities and discourses of education in settler colonial societies such as Canada inform notions such as who is education for, who can be an educator, and the power relations that make some valued at the expense of exclusion to others.

Zuhra: Carving Out Spaces

As a settler on Turtle Island to parents of different backgrounds, I identify as a cisgender white-passing female of mixed race. My father is an ethnic Pashtun from Afghanistan and my

mother is Scottish. Before my father came to Canada, he lived in India, where he received his undergraduate education. I had always grown up feeling proud of my heritage, and looked forward to evenings when my parents, especially my father would tell animated stories of his childhood in Afghanistan and his days as a student in India. When I was in Grade 11, the September 11, 2001, attacks occurred, and suddenly I was not so proud of my identity. In fact, I just wanted to hide it. Most of the students in my high school were white, as were the teachers. People started calling my dad a terrorist within public spaces saying that we would pay for what happened.

None of the teachers addressed any of this discrimination, nor offered any support. Not a single teacher sat down with the class and discussed the dangers and implications of the hurtful stereotypical words expressed by other students towards me and my family. I felt completely isolated and did whatever I could to downplay my heritage. I was not interested in my father's stories anymore and I even asked my parents if I could change my name. It was not until I went to university that I began to learn about colonialism and antiracism and Western military imperialism. This knowledge gave me the power and the critical analysis to challenge and resist white supremacy and find strength in my background and ancestral history.

Growing up, I never had any teachers that represented my father's heritage. I never had a Muslim teacher or any South Asian teachers. The same is true throughout my postsecondary studies. Teacher education is embedded in whiteness from white socialization to white normativity, as well as programming, assessments, and curricular decisions (Childs et al., 2010; Pinto et al., 2012; Soloman et al., 2005). Moreover, white privilege also informs student demographics where overwhelming majority of full-time teacher candidates in the BPS program at Niagara University are white and predominantly female. Niagara University does offer a pathway program unique to other faculties of education across Ontario, known as the paraprofessional program, meant for Early Childhood Educators and Educational Assistants already working in school boards wishing to obtain their teacher certification. The program allows for candidates to continue working full-time to support their families while pursuing their teacher degrees. The paraprofessional cohort has significantly more racialized teacher candidates than the full-time program.

A large portion of students speak English as a second language, are foreign born, and have families to support. I have taught the paraprofessional cohort for 4 years now, and although I make it a habit of learning about my students and getting to know about their lives and interests outside of the program, I am much more intentional with ensuring I get to know my paraprofessional students. I am mindful of the fact that racialized women, who make up a significant demographic of the cohort, are disproportionately more likely to be subject to precarious labour and low wages, with the average racialized woman in Ontario earning just 55.8 cents for every dollar earned by a white male (Block & Gallabuzi, 2011). In general, racialized Ontarians continue to fall further behind their white counterparts in terms of income, access to resources, and opportunities (United Way Report, 2019). Through a shared dialogue, we learn from each other's experiences, struggles, hopes, and dreams and form a reciprocal relationship of trust that disrupts the traditional binary student–professor relationships in the ivory tower. The COVID-19 pandemic has made these efforts more difficult, so I log into the Zoom link beforehand and always make sure that I allocate time to check in with my students. I also make my office hours more flexible and beyond the scheduled office hours provided in the syllabus. With intentionality, I ensure I make space for BIPOC students who continue to be marginalized by white privilege and heteronormativity encapsulating teacher education (Abawi, 2021). For

example, I do not require students to turn on their cameras, being mindful that many are parents and have young children they care for at home, or other family members working at home. I do not require students to present their work live, as it may not be possible for them to stop all of their other obligations to present, rather, I allow them to submit a video recording on their own time that meets their needs.

As the only racialized faculty member in my department, I have witnessed first-hand some of the equity detours (Gorski, 2019) taken by other faculty members in order to avoid discussing race. An example of a detour I have come up against, numerous times, is what Brown-McNair and colleagues (2020) call “substituting race talk with poverty talk” (p. 3). This demonstrates how conversations about poverty and socioeconomic status, though important, effectively detour from discussions about race and fail to acknowledge intersectionality of race and poverty. Time and again, I have listened to white colleagues during faculty meetings insist that we ought to focus more on poverty rather than race, as that is where our attention is *really* needed. While racism is often attributed to individual acts of racism, what makes racism so potent is the power relations of whiteness which uphold it. In higher education, racism translates into hiring, promotion, and tenure decisions, faculty reviews, and curricular and syllabi content (Brown-McNair et al., 2020; Essed, 1991). One of the greatest barriers to racial equity I have noticed is the problematic use of colour-blindness and neutrality as a normalized framework to discuss equity issues. While faculties, including Niagara, have held discussions on racial equity and antiracism, the majority of faculty, who are white, do not have the tools needed to support BIPOC students. In order to address racism in higher education, whiteness must be both named and acknowledged as a racial identity, meaning that white people must be tasked with feeling uncomfortable (MacIntosh, 2019).

Ardavan: Rupturing the Norm

I did not have many Middle Eastern Muslim teachers or professors growing up. Having said that, I did have teachers who cared a lot about my success and others who could care less. I attended four high schools in 3 years in Ontario, and my experiences across different schools opened my eyes to what a big difference inclusion can make. Diversity is the tip of the iceberg. Inclusion is an embodied experience felt through our senses; whether you feel valued and experience belonging for who you are and your contributions. Am I seen or ignored? When I enter the room, how is my body and mannerism received and interpreted? Does the power dynamics in the teaching and learning space invite me to voice my concerns and viewpoints as part of the discussions or simply does ignore and indirectly signals to me that my very presence allows the institution to feel good about themselves by allowing them to proclaim diversity through a checklist approach?

In one high school I felt accepted for who I was, from how I talked to how I did my hair and dressed, whereas in another school I felt like an outcast, always judged and criticized. Therefore, inclusion is more than simply being given access to an opportunity or having a seat at the table as part of the discussions for change. It is about how one is supported and interacted with after entry into the space. Inclusion begins at the intersection of access and diversity. I agree with Annamma and Handy (2021) when they emphasize, “Centering oppressed groups is very different from giving them a seat at the table.... Injustice then, is an outcome of not centering the marginalized, effectively isolating and erasing them even when they are invited to deliberate” (p. 45). Hence, creating better access is only one component of making teacher education programs more diverse and inclusive. The challenge to being inclusive and equitable is whether

minoritized identities are made to feel valued and included by centring their lived experiences throughout their time in teacher education programs over a 2-year period rather than being left out on the margins.

With intentionality, I notice when there are racialized and minoritized students in my classes, particularly when there is only a few among a predominantly white cohort. They have to be seen and valued for who they are and the added value they bring to the program through their lived experiences. I make sure I check on them emotionally and spiritually at key points throughout my classes, even when such classes are offered remotely. This is part of ensuring they do not leave the program due to microaggressions or feeling excluded. I take time to learn how to pronounce my students' names correctly. This is important. The trauma of having your ethnic name made fun of and constantly mispronounced is a daily reality for many minoritized students. I suffered from the trauma of name mispronunciation with respect to my first and last name for the majority of my life. It was much more hurtful in the early years of arriving to Canada as immigrants from Iran.

I tell my students to call me by my first name, because education is about relationships and building rapport to understand the needs of our students, instead of fixation on titles and accomplishments. Hierarchy can be beneficial in setting boundaries, but misuse of unequal power dynamics can also serve as a barrier. This does not mean that the professional boundaries of teacher–student should be blurred but that as educators we do not always have to be mechanical in how power is enacted and dispersed within our teaching and learning spaces. This is part of the process of working towards creating brave spaces (Eizadirad & Campbell, 2021) where we can have discussions from opposing viewpoints rooted in varied life experiences to understand the complexities and nuances of inequities and injustice in its various forms.

This process is supplemented with me modelling being vulnerable by embracing my emotions and spirituality as part of teaching and learning to facilitate development of socioemotional IQ in teacher candidates. This is significant given the added stress and uncertainties created by pandemic circumstances such as limited space at home that needs to be shared among family members. Hence, I allocate 10 to 15 minutes at the beginning of each class to discuss nonacademic content and to share positive and negative events from our personal lives to the extent people feel comfortable sharing to cultivate a community of learners. No, you do not need to have your camera on at all times for the duration of my classes as it can be an equity issue. Learning occurs in different ways and having back-to-back 3-hour classes on Zoom does not align with best practices. I typically host 90-minute classes and make myself available after class for one-on-one check-ins if requested by a student. If you need an extension, simply let me know. You do not need to fill out three pages of paperwork or get a doctor's note to get a consideration for an extension. The normalized practice of extensive paperwork required to get accommodation approval is a systemic barrier that needs to change.

I speak up about political, community, and world issues. Black Lives Matter. #Justice4George Floyd. Anti-Indigenous and anti-Asian racism is #real and happening in many communities across Canada. I choose not to ignore it. Putting out a statement about various forms of injustice both within our classes and as faculty is not political. It is important to create spaces within our classes to discuss these events so it goes beyond solidarity statements. It is part of hoping and healing as a community of learners. It is an activist stance (Eizadirad & Campbell, 2021) that is needed to advance equity and social justice. Some colleagues worry that centring these events and lived experiences might impact their trajectory to getting tenure status as the normalized expectations is that politics and education should not mix. Who is this claimed by as

a normalizing expectation and for whom? Perhaps instead of trying to fit into the normalized inequitable system and its colourblind neutral approach to its policies and practices in postsecondary institutions including teacher education programs, we need to change the system to adjust its values and ideologies to prioritize human needs over profit. Minoritized identities experience feeling of uncomfortableness and microaggressions on a regular basis. Whose feelings and experiences are we choosing to centre and for what purposes?

Access to opportunities can be the difference between a paycheque or starvation. It can be the difference between being glorified for making good decisions or being vilified for poor choices. Who keeps the system accountable? Isn't the system made up of individuals? Is it a zero-sum game or are we as good as our weakest link? Unlearning is needed. Microsoft Word no longer tells me it's a misspelling #unlearn. Unlearning has entered the realm of decolonizing conversations. But is one course or perhaps two, 3 hours a week for one term, enough to equip people to advance equity, diversity, and inclusion for a lifetime? Is this a checklist approach again? "You always talk about equity," some of my students tell me through conversations and comments on course evaluations. Yes I do! I centre equity with intentionality at every opportunity, because within the normalized structure of the university and within teacher education programs, even through equity is present, it is often on the margins. As Giroux (2003) put it,

Color-blindness is a convenient ideology of enabling Whites to ignore the degree to which race is tangled up with asymmetrical relations of power, functioning as a potent force for patterns of exclusion and discrimination including, but not limited to, housing, mortgage loans, health-care, schools, and the criminal justice system. (p. 67)

Whiteness as a form of currency continues to be the default marker of teacher education programs. What will we do in our different roles and positionalities to rupture whiteness as the default marker and a normalizing force? This involves larger reflections on who is privileged within teacher education programs and in what ways? This is a life-long journey and commitment which requires grappling with and marination with opposing ideas and working in solidarity and in allyship with multiple identities across different communities. It needs emotional and spiritual labour. I choose to continue disrupting with intentionality, centring minoritized and racialized cultural capital and lived experiences within my classes, while being conscious of unwritten rules and codes affiliated with risk-taking and going against the norm.

The Problematic Nature of the Current Normalized Teacher Education Programs

The intersection of the COVID-19 pandemic with racism and classism has visibilized inequality of access to opportunities rooted in historical and systemic inequities perpetuated by institutions across different sectors. Even though the focus of our chapter has been on the educational sector, specifically teacher education programs, keep in mind that what occurs in different sectors and their institutions has an impact on others—for example, the school-to-prison pipeline, academic streaming, and educational qualifications required to access well-paying jobs. A historical example that has a ripple effect even today is the role of residential schools as spectacles of terror and sites of physical, psychological, spiritual, and intergenerational trauma: social workers as practitioners were part of taking children away from their parents and teachers were part of the violence enacted as part of the curriculum aimed at destroying Indigenous oral culture, languages, perspectives, and ways of being (Battiste, 2013). As a result of this systemic

violence and its inflicting terror and trauma, we see an underrepresentation of Indigenous identities within most postsecondary programs across Canada including teacher education programs (Mohamed & Beagan, 2019). As Dei (2016) reminds us, “We must make entry accessible to all groups not some at the expense of or on the backs of others. The university must solve this accessibility issue and refrain from making it a budgetary or financial issue” (p. 43).

The rapid shift from in-person learning, predominantly affiliated with experiential learning and hands-on practicums within teacher education programs, to online remote learning and practicum experiences has served to widen already prevalent opportunity gaps (Eizadirad, 2020; Eizadirad & Sider, 2020). Online learning in higher education, by its default conditions, has effectively provides a one-size fits all approach that privileges affluent white able-bodied students, creating conditions for learning that minimize access to education via consideration for who has consistent access to personal devices such as a computer, reliable internet connection, as well as timely access to academic and social supports (James, 2020). Further, students working from home, students who have childcare responsibilities, international students who have had to return to their own countries, and students with precarious immigration statuses have been pushed to the margins by such approaches, thus demonstrating how little institutions of higher education understand the lived realities of BIPOC and low-income students (Naffi et al., 2020).

Yes, there are existing and evolving accommodations, offered by postsecondary institutions, but they are predominantly aligned with what already exists as normalized policies and practices. The current normalized accommodations seek to facilitate othered identities to fit in and conform versus being an alternative approach intended to mitigate unmet needs. We agree with Dei (2016) when he states, “Inclusion is not bringing people into what already exists; it is making a new space, a better space for everyone. Such space is about structures and instructional processes and places” (p. 36). This is why the current structures within teacher education programs are problematic, because in the name of equity and inclusion, it still reinforces a hegemonic colourblind neutral framework with hierarchical unequal power relations that pressurize minoritized identities to fit, play by the rules/policies/practices, or risk getting poor marks, being placed on academic probation, or not progress forward in their program.

Ontario is often prided as being one of the world’s most diverse regions; however, the COVID-19 pandemic has disproportionately impacted BIPOC people and poverty-stricken communities in Ontario (CUPE, 2020; United Way, 2019). The overarching social, political, and economic implications of the pandemic have effectively transcended into teacher education programs throughout the province, further hindering access for BIPOC candidates and negatively impacting their trajectory within the program and as part of securing permanent employment postgraduation (Abawi & Eizadirad, 2020). As such, the implications of the pandemic in convergence with the axiology of whiteness and white privilege (Ahmed, 2007; McIntosh, 1988) that define teacher education and the teaching profession in Ontario operate as a double barrier to access to as well as diversification of the teacher workforce.

Change starts with examining the criteria used to grant access and entry into teacher education programs, but more importantly how teacher candidates, particularly those from historically underrepresented groups, are being marginalized and the extent to which they are supported from entry to completion in their Bachelor of Education program. Are they being pressured to fit in or are they being supported and centred for what they bring into the education sector in terms of their lived experiences, knowledges, cultural capital, and ways of being? Are they being mentored? Are they provided avenues to express their social, emotional, academic, and spiritual concerns while in the program? If the power dynamics exuded by administrators,

faculty, and other students is not inclusive, and if there is a lack of representation within courses and curriculum content, is it any surprise that many racialized and minoritized identities choose to not apply for teacher education programs or leave the program at some point? This has a ripple effect and implications for who can enter the workforce and to what extent the demographics in teaching can be diversified.

Discussion and Conclusion: Strategies to Support Minoritized Students Throughout the Pandemic and Beyond

The racial inequities informing income and access to resources and opportunities in Ontario also inform the province's teacher workforce. The teaching profession, as well as teacher education in Ontario, has and continues to be overwhelmingly overrepresented by whiteness, in particular white females, impacting discourses about which identities are most suitable as teachers and which identities do not belong and have been excluded in the profession (Abawi, 2018; Childs et al., 2010; Turner, 2015). This could be a teachable moment in teacher education programs during the pandemic, where we pause to strategize and mobilize for postpandemic teaching and learning conditions guided by values of equity and social justice driven by woke culture. This requires extensive reflection on how we can alter and rupture the normalized criteria typically used to give access and entry to teacher education programs. Who are we excluding and based on what criteria? How can we be intentional in recruitment so there is more representation from historically marginalized and underrepresented social groups? Should there be an optional component for self-identification as part of the application process for teacher education programs? How is the intent behind such initiatives articulated to the applicants? How much weight should self-identified demographical information be given in comparison to other criteria used to judge suitability of teacher candidates such as relevant experience and marks? What are we missing in Bachelor of Education programs holistically in terms of content, curriculum, and pedagogies?

Other suggestions that can contribute to strengthening the diversity and level of inclusion in teacher education programs and in the long term the diversification of the teacher workforce in Ontario across different geographical locations include the following:

- Listen and do not make assumptions.
- Do not force cameras on during classes and allow presentations to be recorded and submitted separately rather than making candidates turn cameras on and present in front of their classmates. Providing options is an equitable approach that allows for various forms of accommodation based on different needs and circumstances.
- Allow flexibility in assignment deadlines and work together with students to ensure they have an opportunity to express their socioemotional, spiritual and academic needs.
- Create brave spaces to validate and amplify BIPOC cultural capital and their lived experiences and perspectives and do not dismiss them as exceptions to the norm.
- Initiate cohesive partnerships between school boards, the Ontario College of Teachers, the Ministry of Education, and faculties in consultation with minoritized identities and communities.
- Invest in intentional recruitment: provide an option to self-identify as part of the admissions process.
- Have a student representative be part of the admissions process.

- Explore alternative approaches for entry into teacher education programs such as the use of portfolios to demonstrate growth over time. This can balance the weight allocated for marks, professional and lived experience, and other relevant skills needed for entry into teacher education programs.
- Make Ontario College of Teachers emergency certificate adjustments to guarantee permanent placement of teacher candidates on occasional teaching lists rather than providing them with temporary certificates expiring in August or December if their Math Proficiency Test is not successfully completed. This would minimize conditions for perpetuating precarious employment.

Overall, these critical trends discussed and their normalizing force rooted in privileging of whiteness as a form of currency highlight the salience of race in teacher education programs and highlights the need for alternative approaches to advance equitable outcomes. We need to question the rigidity of postsecondary policies and practices within teacher education programs always asking who does it privilege, why, and in what ways. This is a starting point to initiate and create long-term change. We must continue to disrupt and rupture from within, while working in solidarity and allyship with others from the community and other sectors to keep up the pressure and urgency to alter the normalized conditions for teaching and learning socially, culturally, and politically. As Elie Wiesel remind us, reflecting his horrific experiences during the Holocaust, “We must always take sides. Neutrality helps the oppressor, never the victim. Silence encourages the tormentor, never the tormented.”

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