Creating Culturally Responsive Classrooms

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Abstract

The treatment of diversity that currently exists in education is disjointed and superficial. Multiculturalism must guide a vision of teaching and learning in a diverse society such as Canada. There has been an increase in awareness of the effects of culture on learning and teaching. Every day teachers and children bring their own values regarding education, work habits, ways of communicating, and ways of knowing into the classroom. Through culturally responsive teaching, relationship building, and reflective practice, teachers can begin to make content relatable to every child regardless of culture, upbringing and home circumstances thus improving student achievement.

Canada is a diverse nation with over 30 million inhabitants representing a collection of cultural, ethnic, religious and linguistic compositions from around the world (Canadian Heritage, 2004). The diverse international cultures add to the cultures of the original inhabitants of our nation, the Aboriginal peoples, even though their histories have been profoundly neglected. Canada's diversity has only grown over the years due to Canada's aggressive approach to grow its population for the sake of the economy. Canada is a choice of immigrants due to the perceived quality of life and its reputation as a peaceful and caring society that is welcoming to newcomers and values ethnicity (Canadian Heritage, 2004). Although Canadian history has shown attempts of creating a homogenous society with the creation of residential schools, Canadian education can build upon and utilize strengths in diversity to create a culturally responsive environment where all can learn. The educational environment must be embedded in our roots, a nation shaped by the Aboriginal cultures of Canada.

Multiculturalism is a term used by many nations across the world. Countries such as Germany, France and Britain have declared multiculturalism as a failure for their respective countries, because the countries' policies and approaches have served to separate and segregate, rather than integrate (Hyman, Meinhar, & Shields, 2011). The key to multiculturalism in Canada is the movement beyond "the integration of population groups, marginalized by national, racial, religious or ethnic origins, to addressing broader social inclusionary processes that influence inequities and impact on nation building as a whole" (Hyman et al., 2011, p. 2). Hyman et al. (2011) concluded that multiculturalism policies need to provide a foundation for developing, and implementing national social inclusion processes. The goal of these policies is to reduce social exclusion and ensure the full valued participation of all Canadians. This concluding argument made by Hyman et al. can be transferred to the classroom and school where educators can reduce exclusion and ensure full participation of all Canadians in a given school community and classroom.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to explore how learning leaders can support teachers to develop and deliver culturally responsive pedagogies.

Research Questions

1. What is culturally responsive pedagogy and what are its key elements?

2. Why are these key elements important?

3. What is reflective practice and how can it be utilized to support a culturally responsive classroom?

4. How can learning leaders support teachers in implementing culturally responsive classrooms?

Context

In 2014 the Education Sector Strategic Plan (ESSP) was the first ever province wide plan developed in cooperation with education sector partners, approved by the 28 provincial school boards and accepted by the government of Saskatchewan (Provincial Education Sector Plan, 2015). The ESSP is a multi-year (2014-20) plan developed by provincial school division directors of education and the Ministry of Education's Deputy Minister's office. Cycle 1 deployment for school divisions began in 2014. The Cycle 2 Plan for the 2015-16 school year was finalized in February of 2015.

One of the priorities identified by all partners of the ESSP included a First Nations Metis (FNM) goal entitled *Following Their Voices* (Government of Saskatchewan, 2016). The priority of this goal was to develop partnerships with FNM stakeholders and develop a FNM student achievement initiative with the following outcome: "By June 2020, collaboration between FNM and non-FNM partners will result in significant improvements in FNM achievement and graduation rates" (Provincial Education Sector Plan, 2015, p. x). Greater Saskatoon Catholic Schools has embarked on professional learning and development to support this Provincial Education Sector Plan (2015) priority with the guiding vision that identifies the importance of an "education that promotes accelerated learning for First Nations, Metis and Inuit students where learning is joyful, culture is affirmed and students are given real choice for their future" (Provincial Education Sector Plan, 2015, p. 1). This year has been a year of professional development for administration teams concentrating on creating equity and culturally responsive pedagogy. In turn, every school is responsible for creating a FNM goal focused on providing equity, improved achievement and culturally responsive pedagogy. Given this context, throughout this paper the qualitative meta-synthesis of literature will focus on the areas of culturally responsive pedagogy, building relationships, and how teachers can become reflective practitioners, thus increasing outcomes of FNM students and other marginalized groups.

Methods

This paper will be a qualitative meta synthesis for the purpose of reviewing literature in order to examine the importance of relationships, culture and reflective practice in improving outcomes for FNMI and culturally diverse students.

Literature Review

Background

Canadian history has shown attempts in creating a homogenous society with the creation of residential schools. This paper will examine how, counter to the experience in residential schools, Canadian education can further build upon and utilize strengths in diversity to create a multicultural environment where all can learn. The concept of culturally responsive pedagogy cannot only be applied to our FNM students but also to our increasing immigrant population of children in our classrooms. The ESSP goal can encompass all cultural groups, focusing on improvement and equity for all students.

To fully understand why multiculturalism presents challenges for education, one must examine the history of education in Canada. Canada was created as a bilingual and bicultural nation (Carr, 2008)**.** During the first century of Canada's existence, Canada's "two founding" nations were protected in many ways, and cultural and ethnic minorities, including Canada's Aboriginal peoples were viewed as detrimental to the national cause (Carr, 2008, p. 5). "The Aboriginal people are not a homogenous group and include a range of nomenclature: on reserve, off -reserve, Metis, Inuit, dozens of bands and tribes, and various territorial- rights and represent a number of linguistic and cultural perspectives" (Carr, 2008, p. 6). Evidence of this move to assimilation is seen in how Canada instituted residential schools for Aboriginal students. Since the beginning of European contact the Aboriginal people have been exploited and disregarded. This time in history is quite ironic, for the Aboriginal people were not immigrants, rather first of our nation. These are not proud moments of Canadian history but ones we must live with, learn from, correct, and about which we need to continue to educate our children. These elements of Canadian history were the attempts to eliminate the Aboriginal culture from Canada. When a massive migration of immigrants into the country occurred, only then was the importance of assimilation realized (Haig-Brown, 1988).

Prime Minister Pierre Elliott Trudeau developed the policy of multiculturalism within a bilingual framework in 1971 (Haig-Brown, 1988). He realized the need to link multiculturalism with official policy. This policy was designed to ensure Canadians would embrace all cultures as Canada was allowing more immigration. As policies go, it looked great on paper; however, it created a problem, because it promoted the maintenance of immigrants' cultural identities while assimilating into Canadian society (Haig-Brown, 1988). This approach is problematic in education. In 1982, the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms emphasized the problem by stating its provisions are to be "interpreted in a manner consistent with the preservation and enhancement of the multicultural heritage of Canadians", but it does not outline how to realize this (Passaris, 2005, p. 194). In 1988, the Canadian Multiculturalism Act (1985) outlined the important commitment of Canadians to the idea of multiculturalism, but it did not specify how to achieve this goal. There are many cultural groups who are not confident with the way their specific group is protected under these policies, one of them being Aboriginal (Passaris, 2005). The multicultural principles are not enough to protect them as founding fathers of a nation and an integral piece to Canadian history. "It is important for Canada that our social and educational policies make better attempts to address the problems of multiculturalism as this will allow Canada to become a stronger nation and a stronger democracy" (Wood & James, 2005, p. 28).

Multicultural education is a progressive approach that can transform education by holistically assessing and addressing current shortcomings, failings, and discriminatory practices in education. It is grounded in morals of social justice, educational parity, and a dedication to facilitating the educational experience where all students can reach their full potential. Multicultural education recognizes that schools are essential in laying the foundation to elicit change in societal thinking and to assist in the elimination of oppression and injustice.

> Multicultural education is a field of study and an emerging discipline whose major aim is to create equal educational opportunities for students from diverse racial, ethnic, social-class, and cultural groups. One of its important goals is to help all students to acquire the knowledge, attitudes, and skills needed to function effectively in a pluralistic democratic society and to interact, negotiate, and communicate with peoples from diverse groups in order to create a civic and moral community that works for the common good. (Banks & Banks, 1995, p.xi)

For students to reach their full potential multicultural education is essential. Canada's population has grown with immigrants coming to the country; the diversity in this country is on the rise. As stated in Statistics Canada (2011), data shows Canada is a nation with an ethno cultural mosaic as indicated by its immigrant population, the ethno cultural backgrounds of its people, the visible minority population, linguistic characteristics and religious diversity. Our classrooms have students with wider ranges of diverse experiences more than ever before. It is important that teachers acknowledge the disparities and utilize experiences of each child to enhance teaching in every subject area not only in the realm of Social

Studies (Alberta Learning, 2005). School administrators must support teachers in the teaching of and integration of multiculturalism across all curricular areas in classrooms and acknowledge the diversity of culture, language and religion within their schools (Alberta Learning, 2005). People who are part of the mainstream in Canada run the risk of not understanding the intricacies of other cultures because they do not recognize that they have their own culture, and the primary step in understanding other cultures is to first recognize one's own, and the perceptions and beliefs that are shaped by it (Beairsto & Carrigan, 2004). It is important for teachers to show pride in their own culture and to promote students' pride in their distinct cultures. With pride comes thirst for knowledge and the ability to make connections from cultural backgrounds to learning (Beairsto & Carrigan, 2004). Instilling this in the culture of a school will create openness to diversity among all.

There are many misconceptions as to how multiculturalism can be achieved in the classroom. The first misconception as stated by Gay (2010) is that multicultural education is not a central part of the regular curriculum. "Educators have relegated it primarily to social studies, language arts, and the fine arts and have generally targeted instruction for students of color" (Gay, 2010, p. 316). With this approach, cultures are visited as you would at a local Folk fest, and as discussed in Joshee's working paper, culture is more than food, dance and costume (Joshee, Peck, Thompson, Careka, & Sears, 2010). Culture embodies what people believe, how they cope with these beliefs and how they survive while cohabitating with other distinct cultural groups (Joshee et al., 2010). Cultures need to be permeated through everyday instruction within all areas of the curriculum (Joshee et al., 2010). This approach is needed to promote Aboriginal awareness, respect and education. Not only does history of the Aboriginal population need to be addressed, their culture and how culture affects their daily lives needs to be addressed through all areas of the curriculum to promote understanding and learning of First Nations, Metis and Inuit (FNMI) students and other marginalized groups of students. Multicultural education is invaluable and promotes the building of a unified school community culture. It is not uniform in practice, rather unique and diverse and unified in difference. If teachers see this value in multicultural education the resulting achievement gaps will inherently be addressed. Multicultural education is an approach that is holistically integrated. "In its comprehensive form, it must be an integral part of everything that happens in the education enterprise" (Gay, 2010, p. 316).

Multicultural education can facilitate a more tolerant, inclusive, and equitable society by recognizing that the whole is rich with many contributing parts. "Teachers need to use multicultural education to promote such highly valued outcomes as human development, education equality, academic excellence and democratic citizenship" (Gay, 2010, p. 316). Gerin-Lajoie (2008) stated that that Ministries of Education or school boards do not demonstrate the type of leadership and support needed for the development of a more inclusive school structure for students from diverse racial, ethnic and linguistic backgrounds. "More importantly, student diversity and student inclusion are not discussed in the context of social inequities" (Gerin-Lajoie, 2008, p. 186). The ESSP has developed a strategic plan to include all school divisions of the province. Each division is confronting the challenges through professional development initiatives. Every attempt is being made in Saskatchewan education to address the problems facing students in terms of social inequity and cultural difference; these problems transfer to the classroom and affect student learning.

When teachers ignore cultural diversities in classrooms and deny differences exist, students are unable to respond in a meaningful way; this problematic dynamic does not set up a student for success. "Multiculturalism is based on a celebration of diversity, not the pursuit of uniformity" (Beairsto & Carrigan, 2004, p. 1). At times there tends to be a prejudgment of families from different ethnic and cultural backgrounds. These prejudgments lead to inadequate representations or stereotypical representations of cultures in schools. Cultural misunderstandings need to be prevented in order to guarantee equity for all (Beairsto & Carrigan, 2004). Multiculturalism requires the realization that we all share commonalities. We are separated by culture; however, we are connected by similarities that can work to connect us if it is used in the proper way (Beairsto & Carrigan, 2004). These similarities do not make us uniform, they unite us. We all use language to communicate, we belong to groups and organizations, and we all look for meaning in our world.

Culturally Responsive Teaching

Hattie (2009) showed that effective teaching is one of the largest single school influences on student achievement. There are many factors that contribute to effective teaching: effective teachers have high expectations of all their students, students are treated as individuals, effective teachers acknowledge diversity, and they are approachable and take time to listen to aspirations and concerns of parents. Effective teachers understand content knowledge and understand the learning process (Hattie, 2009). Programming which is highly effective connects prior learning and life experience.

Culturally responsive teaching is a pedagogical theory which affirms that culture underlies every part of education, including curriculum and assessment, learning and teaching styles, and methods of administration and supervision (Gay, 2010). Every student can learn, and every student can do something well. Teachers must be able to recognize individual strengths and utilize them in preparing for instruction (Gay, 2010). Culturally responsive teaching is a pedagogy that emphasizes the inclusion of a student's cultural background in all aspects of learning (Ladson-Billings, 1994). In Alberta Learning's (2005) *Our Words, Our Ways,* Aboriginal educator Diane Hill incorporates the circle, which shows the four elements involved in FNMI learning processes. These elements include the body (physical), spirit (spiritual), heart (emotional) and mind (intellectual). A teacher allowing the circle to guide them in preparation of teaching Aboriginal students allows room for the students to respond in appropriate and meaningful ways, which reflect their culture and facilitate learning. Utilizing Aboriginal knowledge such as the learning circle fosters a building of trust between student, teacher, family, and communities. Barman specified, "The key to the future of any society lies in the transmission of its culture and world view to succeeding generations" (Barman & McCaskill, 1986, p. 1). The *Te Kotahitanga* project of New Zealand is an exemplar for FNMI teaching (Bishop, Berryman & Wearmouth, 2014). This project supports teachers in raising achievement levels of their Maori students. First Nations students in regular classrooms across Saskatchewan would benefit from some aspects of this project. There needs to be an explicit direction in classroom pedagogy and professional development and most importantly growth in knowledge of the culture of First Nations peoples, similar to the approach used in the *Te Kotahitanga* project (Bishop, Berryman & Wearmouth, 2014).

Many educators stereotype FNMI students as low achieving or under achieving. Often the blame is seen as the product of poverty, unsupportive families, or lack of support systems. When viewing education from a deficit point of view we invalidate unique perspectives, skills and experiences of students (Bishop, Berryman & Wearmouth 2014). The idea underlying cultural responsiveness in teaching is to close the gaps. Singer (2015) proposed a method to close gaps, as requiring educators to continuously problem solve, study our impact and shift how we work in response to what students need. Professional development as in the New Zealand project is part of the solution to building capacity but it cannot be the only solution (Bishop, Berryman & Wearmouth, 2014). Cultural responsiveness must begin with reflective practice in the classroom (Singer, 2015). As Singer (2015) shared, every educator must ask themselves the following four tough questions in relation to their teaching:

> What are our goals for student learning? What can students now understand and do in relation to those goals? What learning opportunities do we need to provide to help students build from current abilities to realize the goals? What do I need to learn or change about my practice to provide those opportunities? (p. 4)

Teachers need to step into classrooms together and listen to the students as was done with Maori students in New Zealand (Bishop & Berryman, 2006). Reflecting on shared observational data can drive positive collaborative work. The *Tell Them From Me Survey*, which shares the student voice, is another tool from which valuable data may be compiled to guide teacher planning and change (Government of Saskatchewan, 2016). Singer (2015) highlighted the need for more teachers observing in a classroom, observing the same students, and collecting formative data to share insight. Changing expectations for educators and the education system are a result of our changing economy and attitudes toward FNMI education; schools require leadership that emphasizes creating a culture of change. Fullan and Levin

wrote that the revitalization of a school system requires a whole system reform and that it must take place simultaneously at the school, district and provincial level with support from dedicated unrelenting leadership (Alberta Learning, 2012). It must be focused on what goes on in the classroom and has to have the capacity to identify, critically assess and selectively incorporate new ideas and approaches. Capacity building within teachers is the root of culturally responsive education.

Relationships

Relationship building is the foundation to success in the culturally responsive classroom. FNMI students experience greater success when learning is connected to their personal values and life stories. Warm, caring and welcoming classroom environments, which integrate Aboriginal teachings, cultures and content set up FNMI students for academic success (Ball & Tyson, 2011). There is a need to develop eyes to see the many facets of our students' lives and identities (Ball & Tyson, 2011). To reach every FNMI child and every other child of minority, teachers need to understand how learning depends on the ability to make connections to what the learner already knows. In order to teach a subject in a meaningful way and engage every student in learning, teachers need to know about their students' lives. The generic information about cultural groups to which students belong is considered stereotypical and does not necessarily apply to an individual student (Ball & Tyson, 2011). Rather teachers need to be aware of their student's family makeup, immigration history, favourite activities, concerns and strengths. Being aware of students' perceptions of the value of school, experiences with subjects in everyday settings, and their prior knowledge and experiences with curricula all attribute to creating positive relationships within the classroom thus improving outcomes for students (Ball & Tyson, 2011).

Creating a classroom atmosphere that reflects respect for Aboriginal perspectives will benefit every student in the classroom. In such a climate, trust and respect develop, self-confidence matures, and teachers then appreciate each other's differences (Villegas, 2007). Creating a safe and secure educational environment is important for learning.

Cultural values are the beliefs, practices, symbols, specific norms, and personal values individuals in a society share (Villegas, 2007). It is very difficult when the home culture of a child is different from the learning environment. When the relationship between the home and school culture is compromised, academic achievement suffers. Villegas (2007) explained that white children typically have an advantage in the classroom over minority children because the curricula and classroom culture is typically designed to be an extension of their home and community culture. Therefore, minority students face disadvantages because they are presented with classroom values different from what they have experienced in their homes. Hollins and Oliver (1999) described this as a cultural mismatch. This mismatch occurs when the culture of the learning environment is different from the home culture of the child, and learning is negatively affected.

Aboriginal students have a history and worldview, that is unique. FNMI people understand education and learning as lifelong and permeated throughout the physical, emotional, intellectual and spiritual dimensions (Alberta Learning, 2012). FNMI parents and communities want their children prepared through education for Western World technologies but in the same instance do not want to compromise their cultural traditions, heritage, values, perspectives and ways of knowing (Alberta Learning, 2012). This is nothing out of the ordinary; throughout the world cultural groups want to maintain their identities and to be understood. Bishop and Berryman (2006) shared a student's perspective on why it is difficult for Maori students to learn in New Zealand. "Like, I mean, they're not Maori, they don't understand Maori kids. Like, Maori teachers know how to control Maori kids" (Bishop & Berryman, 2006, p. 9). In contrast:

the teacher I liked best wasn't Maori, but he could have been. He knew all about our stuff. He knew how to say my name…He always came and saw our whanau at home, …He invited the whanau into our room anytime. (Bishop & Berryman, 2006, p. 9-10)

The voices of the Maori children can guide us in how we can teach our FNMI children in Canada. Learning about and understanding the culture of FNMI students will lead to their learning success. As is stated in *Our World, Our Ways* "the teacher's role in facilitating the learning process and unlocking student potential is best served when the teacher learns about the ways that students reflect Aboriginal worldviews and cultures of their families and communities" (Alberta Learning, 2005, p. 29).

Kutsunai and Au (2013) showed how culturally responsive education was alive in science lessons taught to young Hawaiian children based on the theme of plants and the water cycle. Through exploration, the children experienced hands on learning in the school's small garden. Child centered discussions led each child to express themselves in their own style and they learned from each other. Some children described the flowers as "ula, ula" the Hawaiian word for red (Kutsunai & Au, 2013, p. 16). Another child made a connection to Pele, which is a belief passed down through families that picking a lehua blossom will cause it to rain (Kutsunai & Au, 2013). Other children referred to the flowers as pokey and soft. This example of cultural responsiveness illustrates how children were making sense of the world around them, building on their prior knowledge and the knowledge they bring from home. Culturally responsive education gives children opportunities to learn and to find success in school, by responding to their cultural backgrounds.

Reflective Practice

Reflective practice is defined as "the thoughtful consideration and questioning of what teachers do, what works and what doesn't, and what premises and rationales underlie our teaching and that of others" (Hubball, Collins, & Pratt, 2005, p. 60). Reflection on teaching has a positive effect on teaching thus improving learning outcomes for students (Hubball, Collins, & Pratt, 2005). Through the use of reflection as professional development a teacher experiences growth and development in pedagogical practices responding to personal learning styles of students. Teachers can use a variety of methods to promote reflection both in their professional lives and in their classrooms.

With the business of a school day, true reflection is often difficult to achieve. The reflection tends to turn into a blame game, or excuses as to why students are not learning. Through observational inquiry (OI) (Singer, 2015), the teacher must change a mindset of blame to one of growth (Dweck, 2006). Singer (2015) stated we must learn from the lessons that do not reach every child. Through teacher collaboration, and listening to students during observational inquiry, teams of teachers identify problems of practice (POP) while together observing a lesson (Singer, 2015). Teachers focus on a shared purpose by gathering evidence, which gives insight into the POP. It is student centered; watching and listening to the students is one of the most important skills for effective teaching (Singer, 2015). Nash (2011) specified that a teacher's continuous improvement journey must involve students as part of the collaborative exercise. This approach supports the theory of OI in the use of collaboration and listening to the voices of the students to make content of curriculum relatable. How appropriate that the ESSP's title of the FNMI goal is following their voices.

Reflective practice is a form of professional development that is different from traditional ones. Traditional practice relies on change happening through the dissemination of knowledge while in contrast reflective practice sees change happening through action theories (Osterman & Kottkamp, 2004). Traditional practice for professional development would typically have an instructor take a lead role, and relay knowledge and information through the use of handouts and visual aids. Reflective practice, on the other hand, is embedded into teaching practice; it involves planning, observation, and post observation discussion together with administration or peers. Singer's (2015) OI method of inquiry supports the work of Osterman and Kottkamp who emphasized integrating this practice through daily instruction and utilizing student feedback to facilitate change. An example of facilitating this change through reflective practice is teachers preparing personal growth portfolios. Teacher portfolios support the reflective practices happening in school classrooms and with division wide goals. "Specifically, the purpose of reflective practice is the improvement of professional practice through behavioral change" (Osterman & Kottkamp, 2004, p. 15). In a traditional setting the teacher spends most of the time as the instructor or expert transmitting knowledge, often to passive listeners. The students are then tested for acquisition

of this knowledge. In reflective practice the goal is not only acquiring knowledge but also applying that knowledge in effective and appropriate ways. This practice is a necessary tool in addressing cultural responsiveness so that children can make connections and apply learning to their daily lives (Osterman & Kottkamp, 2004).

Osterman & Kottkamp (2004) outlined clearly defined principles that differentiate reflective practice from traditional approaches. These strategies incorporate key principles drawn from constructivism, experiential learning, and situated cognition (Osterman, 2000). Osterman & Kottkamp identified learning as an active practice, engaging the learner with a question or problem. Teacher and student roles change with the learner becoming more active. The teacher now becomes the facilitator, raising questions and guiding inquiry, providing support and resources. Reflective practice is a collaborative search for answers to the questions.

The second strategy supports cultural responsiveness in the classroom. Building on prior knowledge and experience allows for a deeper understanding of concepts or knowledge (Osterman & Kottkamp, 2004). Making connections to cultural ideals and experience allows students to obtain this deeper understanding. Experience also allows the teacher to understand behaviours and the conditions students come to school with that can influence behaviours in school. Understanding the experiences of family, community, schools and culture help to support change (Senge, Cambron-Mccabe, Lucas, Smith, & Dutton, 2012).

The final strategy to support cultural responsiveness through reflective practice is constructing learning (Osterman & Kottkamp, 2004). Utilizing varied instructional strategies to suit the learner is an important step in actualizing reflective practice and requires teachers to change their mindset about teaching. Experimentation with teaching strategies allows for reflection where success can confirm and reinforce change, whereas failure can set up the opportunity to reassess, leading to change.

Implications for Practice

Inclusion begins with the teacher in the classroom creating a community that has high standards and expectations for all students. The teacher builds on a student's life experience, builds relationships, is never complacent about one's own teaching, always reflects on their teaching practice and students' responses. These practices support teachers in providing the best environment to improve outcomes for all students. The teacher can begin to make the biggest differences to ensure learning takes place with diverse groups through understanding and providing education for growth and inclusion. Through planned facilitation in schools, multiculturalism establishes a set of ideals and celebrates cultural diversity.

Inclusive teachers must contribute to culturally responsive pedagogical practices through teacher reflection so that we can make our school communities be the best they can be for closing gaps in learning. Diversity in population must lead to diversity in instruction and assessment while maintaining the structures of the curriculum. We must prepare all our children for the 21st century to be able to contribute and cope with the economy of the future. There are still problems with equity and access to opportunities in the classroom even though we claim as Canadians to be multicultural and inclusive.

It is important for teachers to use commonalities of students to unite a classroom and understand that cultures of each individual child affect learning. Providing equity and quality education for the 21st century must be deliberate and planned; teachers can take a lead role in this vision through culturally responsive teaching.

To help a school become culturally responsive, student failure must be re-envisioned as stemming from school inadequacies in meeting the specific needs of FNMI and culturally diverse students. Most teachers have great intentions for their students but they lack understanding of the nature and importance of cultural differences and their impact on achievement. It is up to educators, administrators and divisions to support new pedagogical approaches including reflective practice to support learning success with minorities, especially our FNMI students. Quality instruction geared towards individual learning needs of students is crucial in culturally responsive classrooms. In order to achieve quality instruction

there must be an understanding of the cultures in a classroom and the ability to connect with and build relationships with each student.

Teachers adjusting classroom practices promote mastery in learning. They can achieve this through their own professional growth in understanding the cultural values of the students in their classrooms. It is important to adopt holistic worldviews where the child is treated as a member of a family, a community, and culture. Every child is an individual and should be treated as such. In order to achieve success in teaching to diversity the teacher must be a risk taker thus influencing students to be risk takers. Teachers as learners influence students to be learners. Through reflective practice the teacher can listen to the students, reflect and adjust pedagogy to close gaps in learning for individual learning needs influenced by culture.

Collaborative reflection also promotes learning and professional development. Working collaboratively in teams allows teachers to identify what they cannot see during a lesson. It is important that the evidence gathered is not evaluative but rather descriptive of challenges students are facing. Through collaborative reflection a team can then identify opportunities for student learning. It is all centered on the student. Utilizing OI can pose many challenges within a school community especially with teachers. These challenges include buy-in and fear of evaluation. Administration teams need to build trust within their school communities while building the capacity of each teacher. It is a process that requires time, understanding, resources and support from administrative teams. The teacher acts as facilitator where learning, personal and holistic, is constructed. The teacher's role is that of a facilitator encouraging collaboration and providing a welcoming experience to influence the acquisition of knowledge.

Collaboration is essential to reflective practice and ensure cultural responsiveness in classrooms. Teams are united with common goals and brings multiple areas of expertise and insight to the problems of practice, which in turn facilitates learning and growth. It is important that practice is aligned with provincial, division and school goals thus not making the work of providing cultural responsiveness in schools something more to add to a teacher's plate. Utilizing practices in reflection not only allows students to develop but also allows the teacher opportunities for growth.

Conclusion

Diversity exists in every classroom. When teachers demonstrate respect and support for all learners within a classroom environment they can facilitate academic success. All differences should be celebrated, acknowledged, and embraced. By increasing awareness of all cultures in a classroom, the teacher creates an atmosphere of a respectful learning environment. This environment becomes one where all students can learn in their own ways. Teachers bring their own cultures into classrooms everyday. By example they can model pride in cultural differences, which will trigger respect and the thirst for learning about each other's unique differences. The "good old days" of teaching homogeneous groups of mainly white, middle class children is becoming less (Ball & Tyson, 2011, p.x). It is essential teachers become aware of cultural influences on learning and notice inequalities so they are able to utilize students' unique perspectives and experiences to connect them to the learning, thus enabling success for every learner whether they are FNMI or otherwise marginalized. The use of culturally responsive pedagogy in the classroom holds educators responsible for the diverse population of children for whom we are responsible, on a daily basis. Utilizing reflective practice makes teams in schools accountable for ensuring cultural responsiveness is alive in schools. Determining where you and your students are and "that nothing happens unless something happens" for the sake of growth and change is at the core of positive reflective practice (Nash, 2011, p. 31). We hold a responsibility to infuse the respect and knowledge of cultures into our classrooms on a daily basis according to The Constitution Act & Charter of Freedoms and Rights (1982). "Culturally responsive education entails giving all children opportunities to succeed in school by responding to their cultural backgrounds, and at the same time continuing to engage them in curricular content and assessment" (Kutsunai & Au, 2013, p. 17). Teachers are the front line role models and agents of change for promoting growth in our children, and the embodiment of what

education is in terms of social justice and equity. Teachers hold the responsibility of ensuring quality and equitable education for every Canadian student, no matter what culture they represent.

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