

# A LONG WAY TO GO

**Educator Perspectives on  
Multiculturalism and Racism  
in Alberta K-12 Classrooms**

Canadian Cultural Mosaic Foundation

*The Canadian Cultural Mosaic Foundation and all contributors who worked on this project would like to honour and acknowledge all who reside on the traditional Treaty 7 territory of the Blackfoot Confederacy. This includes the Siksika, Kainai, Piikani as well as the Stoney Nakoda and Tsuut'ina Nations. We further acknowledge that we are also home to many Métis communities and Region 3 of the Métis Nation. We conclude with honoring the city of Calgary's Indigenous roots, traditionally known as "Moh'Kinstsis".*

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# Introduction

During 2017-2018, the Canadian Cultural Mosaic Foundation (CanadianCMF) developed a research project in order to study the state of race relations in Alberta K-12 classrooms and measure teacher knowledge and preparedness with regards to educating students about multiculturalism. The purpose of collecting this data set is to raise awareness about anti-racism education and classroom diversity in Alberta. Furthermore, our organization will develop an online multicultural resource hub that aims to support teachers in curriculum planning and execution.

This report is grouped into three separate but interconnecting components. First, we will examine current trends and phenomena in Alberta on the topics of diversity and racism in the context of the Alberta curriculum and link this with the implications of our research study on school-aged children. Second, we will present our study, including the methodology, limitations, and results. Lastly, we will conclude with a summary of the information paired with relevant literature, the key findings that the report revealed, as well as recommendations going forward.

Our foundation and authors of this report acknowledge that diversity encompasses a broad range of topics, including but not limited to race, culture, ethnicity, age, sex, gender, differing abilities, socioeconomic status, mental health, the 2SLGBTQIA+ community, Indigeneity, and how these concepts intersect with one another. However, for the purposes of drawing attention to the dynamics of how multiculturalism plays out in Alberta classrooms, we have chosen to focus specifically on diversity in the context of race, ethnicity, and culture.

## **Project Goals**

Our four main goals when executing this project were to:

- 1) Determine teacher preparedness regarding teaching multiculturalism in schools;
- 2) Measure levels of racism towards children in K-12 schools;
- 3) Conduct a literature review discussing diversity in Alberta and the effects of prejudice and racism among children; and
- 4) Formulate an action plan through recommendations for social change in K-12 education in Alberta.

## **Diversity in Alberta**

Alberta contains a mosaic of cultures which all contribute to the rich social fabric of our province. These include one of the highest Indigenous populations in Canada (Government of Alberta, 2017), a solid Francophone presence, as well as a vastly diverse array of nations who have immigrated to Canada since European settlement.

According to the 2016 census, the top two languages spoken in Alberta are English and French, both official languages of the province (Statistics Canada, 2016). The majority of citizens who reside in Alberta are of English, Irish, Scottish and French descent, or otherwise descended from other countries in Western Europe, such as Germany (Statistics Canada, 2016). Alberta also contains the third highest Indigenous population in Canada, behind British Columbia and Ontario (Government of Alberta, 2016).

## **Indigenous Peoples**

In 2016, Canada was home to 1,673,780 self-identifying Indigenous people. This number includes the First Nations, the Métis, and the Inuit (Government of Alberta, 2016).

### **First Nations**

Alberta is the traditional territory of the 48 First Nations, including the Cree Nations, the Dene Suliné, the Dene Tha', the Tsuut'ina Nation, the Stoney Nakoda, and the Anishinaabe (Alberta Aboriginal Relations, 2013). The First Nations people of Alberta are culturally and ethnically diverse, with many unique distinctions between their histories, customs, traditions, beliefs, and community dynamics. Alberta is also home to a prominent Métis population, as well as a small number of Inuit.

## **Métis**

In 2016, the Métis population in Alberta was 114,375, with strong projected growth since the census was taken two years ago (Government of Alberta, 2016). The Métis people have a tenacious and unique culture that has been self-preserved and fought for since the nation's early beginnings during the fur trade in the mid-1600s (Alberta Aboriginal Relations, 2013). Métis people originally descended from a variety of Indigenous women who partnered with Scottish, English, and French settlers. The bonds resulted in distinct communities who later came together and formed the Métis Nation. In order to prove that one is Métis under the Métis Nation of Alberta criteria, they must be able to trace their family tree back to the 1800s, when the Métis people thrived throughout the Red River valley in Rupert's Land (now known as Manitoba) (Metis Nation of Alberta, 2018; Alberta Aboriginal Relations, 2013).

## **Inuit**

In 2016, there were 2,500 Inuit people living in Alberta (Government of Alberta, 2016). Though small, the Inuit presence in Alberta is important in acknowledging Indigenous history in our province as well as present-day circumstances. Many Inuit people who live in Alberta have moved south to pursue better educational and career opportunities. Traditionally, Inuit culture involves using both storytelling and songs to share knowledge and history with others (Alberta Aboriginal Relations, 2013).

Overall, the Indigenous population in Canada is growing at an exceptional rate, and the same trend is apparent in Alberta (Government of Alberta, 2016). Moreover, nearly half of Indigenous people in Alberta live in larger cities (Government of Alberta, 2016), with ongoing trends forecasting a much different demographic picture than we see today.

## **Francophone**

There is a prominent Francophone presence in Alberta, as is evidenced by the array of French Immersion schools, community services and events, and large French-speaking population - 88,220 Albertans spoke French in 2016 (Government of Alberta, 2017). In Alberta, there are four municipalities that are officially bilingual; Beaumont, Legal, Falher, and Plamondon (Government of Alberta, 2017). Alberta contains the third-largest Francophone population in Canada, and French is "among the fastest growing populations in Canada" (Government of Alberta, 2017). The Associations Canadienne Française de l'Alberta (ACFA) is the primary organization that supports Francophone Albertans and organizes community events that

celebrate Francophone heritage and traditions, including the Annual Maple Festival des Sucres (ACFA, 2018).

## **Immigrants**

In Alberta, one in five residents is an immigrant, and nearly one in 10 Albertans are not Canadian citizens (Government of Alberta, 2016). The majority of immigrants are concentrated in Alberta's two major metropolitan areas: Edmonton and Calgary. Calgary holds the highest amount of ethnic diversity within the province, with nearly one in 10 Calgarians being immigrants (Government of Alberta, 2016).

It is important to note that, unless otherwise Indigenous to the land, the majority of Albertans are, in fact, immigrants who have settled since colonization. Further, immigration patterns have changed significantly over time. In recent years, most immigrants came from Asia or Africa, and most come as economic immigrants. Refugees make up just over nine per cent of the population of immigrants in Alberta. Recent immigration patterns indicate a rapidly growing increase in immigration going forward, as well as a continued diversification of countries of origin (Government of Alberta, 2016).

# Diversity in Alberta Revisited

Alberta undoubtedly contains an incredibly diverse populace and vibrant history, built and sustained with contributions from nations all over the world. There are many traditions, customs, cultures and histories in Alberta, with each worthy of being celebrated and acknowledged. However, for the purposes of addressing **racism** and ethnocentrism in Alberta schools, this report will focus on elevating the realities of those who have individually and collectively experienced racial discrimination, oppression, and prejudice throughout history, and are still enduring it today. Racism refers not only to social attitudes towards non-dominant ethnic and racial groups but also to social structures and actions which oppress, exclude, limit and discriminate against such individuals and groups. Racist social attitudes originate in and rationalize discriminatory treatment. Racism in the larger society can be seen in discriminatory laws, residential segregation, poor health care, inferior education, unequal economic opportunity and the exclusion and distortion of the perspectives of non-dominant Canadians in cultural institutions (CARED, 2018).

## Theory of Oppression

There is an undercurrent throughout all of Western society that maintains a powerful expectation of assimilation into the dominant group's culture and ways, which effectively subordinates and "others" people into different groups. Further, many of those groups are more likely to live in adverse conditions and are removed from certain opportunities in society based solely upon an inherent trait, such as skin colour or place of origin (Mullaly, 2017).

The theory of oppression describes how there is a dominant or "privileged" group in society that thrives off of the subjugation of minority groups. There is a major power imbalance that exists between the predominantly white, male-dominated, white, Judeo-Christian culture and anyone who falls outside of this description. Some examples of this phenomena include, but are not limited to, men having more access to opportunity, job growth and financial success than women, as well as women having to exist in a paradigm of fear and alertness under the ever-real threat of domestic violence and sexual assault and harassment; Caucasians generally holding higher-esteemed and paid positions than immigrants or Indigenous people; the fact that heterosexual couples are not usually challenged with regards to their relationships, meanwhile same-sex couples face ongoing discrimination and inappropriate questioning regarding their relationships; people living with different abilities feeling invisible or ignored within society; and,

those who are born into poverty having many systemic barriers to attaining material wealth, while those born into affluent families are typically set up for success (Mullaly, 2017).

Racism is a significant component that fuels the cycle of oppression, and is the main topic we chose to focus our research on. It is important to note, however, that racism rarely exists in isolation, as those who are racialized, including children, also experience other components of oppression, including sexism, ableism, homophobia, transphobia, ageism, colonization, wealth inequality and religious discrimination.

## **Teacher Interviews and Surveys**

Our research sought to quantify and explore multiculturalism within primary and secondary education in Alberta. The interviews and survey, along with their implications and our recommendations, will be discussed in the following sections of this report.

### **Methodology**

From August 2017 to June 2018, research participants were contacted in person and online to complete a questionnaire. We also conducted in-person interviews in alignment with the questions on our survey. We contacted K-12 teachers in both rural and urban areas within Alberta. We received 150 responses overall, including rich commentary from teachers that will be anonymously shared throughout this section.

We began the interviews and surveys by asking participants for their names and the schools that they teach at for the purpose of proving eligibility. We informed them the information will not be shared, and at no time will we be releasing any identifying information about participants.

We then asked teachers the following questions listed below (under key results), while providing our standardized response options along with the ability to formulate their own response.

## Participants

*Note: some participants work with more than one grade segments, therefore they were able to pick more than one segment.*

There were a total of 150 participants who took part in our study and survey. 77 of the participants worked in rural schools (large variety of schools and locations), while 73 worked in urban schools (41 in Calgary, 32 in Edmonton). Listed below is what grades they work with.

Out of the participants:

- 22 participants teach kindergarten;
- 72 participants teach grades 1-6;
- 62 participants teach grades 7-9;
- 51 participants teach grades 10-12;
- 5 participants have an administrative role in K-12 schools.

**150 participants took part in our Alberta K-12 research study and survey participant breakdown:**

**22 Kindergarten teachers**



**72 Grades 1-6 teachers**



**62 Grades 7-9 teachers**



**51 Grades 10-12 teachers**



**5 Administrative roles in K-12 schools**



**Note: some participants work with more than one grade segments, therefore they were able to pick more than one segment.**

# Key Results

## 1. How does your school engage in and educate about multiculturalism?

*Note: participants were allowed to pick more than one answer.*

When asked how schools engage in multiculturalism, 76 per cent of participants said “art projects” as the number one activity used to teach about multiculturalism with students. Having guest speakers was at 59 per cent, while 58 per cent participants cited specific policies and protocols in place to address racism and teach multiculturalism. Going on field trips was at 50 per cent and 10 per cent, included diversity lunches, cultural events, immersive language programs and student groups.

As well, five per cent, indicated they have no formal or informal initiatives in place to engage or educate students about multiculturalism.

## 2. Do students at your school engage in racism?

When asked if students engage in racism at school, 52 per cent of the respondents answered yes; 18 per cent answered no; 17 per cent answered maybe; and five per cent answered I don’t know. The other eight per cent of respondents formulated their own results, which included answers such as:

*“This may happen on a case by case basis. As such, we do our best to address any issues of racism swiftly. Our staff has undergone significant training to address cultural issues in our community.”*

*“Students in my school are generally too young to understand the concept of racism, but do sometimes demonstrate preconceived notions learned from parents about other cultures and nationalities.”*

*“I think it is rare and I don’t know of any specific incidents, but I think I would be naive to think that this doesn’t happen.”*

# We asked teachers and administrative staff, do students at your school engage in racism?

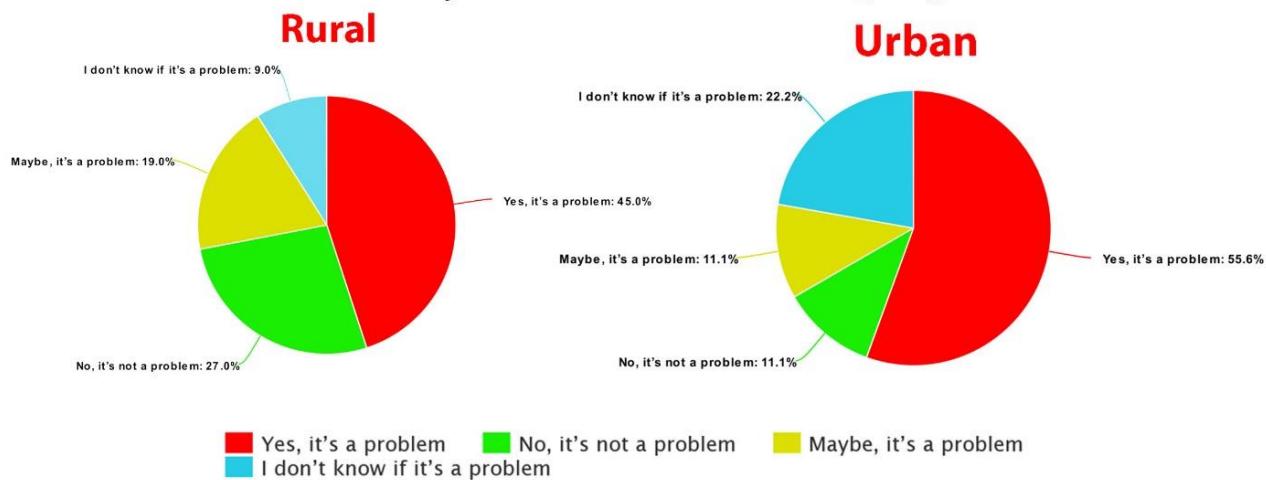
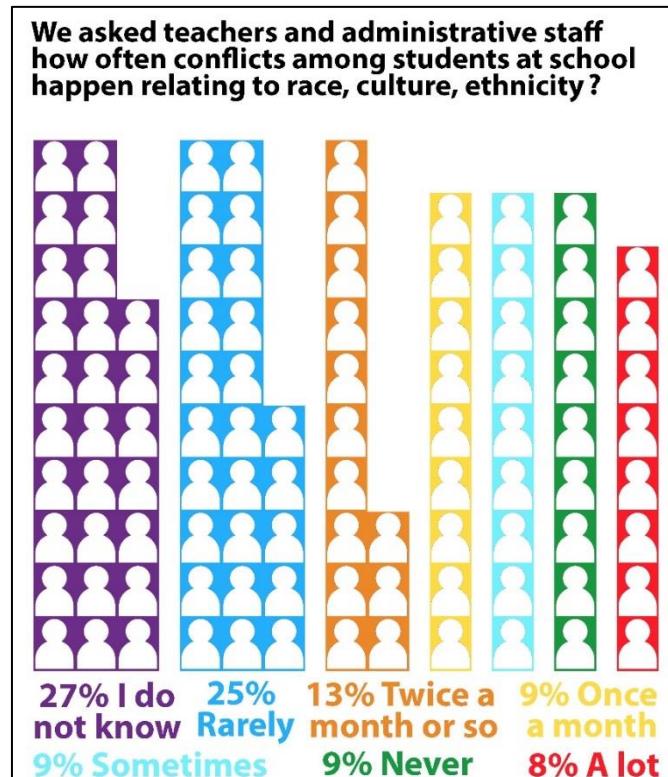


Figure above refers to question 2.

### 3. How often does conflict happen among students at your school relating to race/culture/ethnicity?

When attempting to quantify racially, ethnically, and/or culturally motivated conflicts at school:

- 27 per cent responded I don't know
- 25 per cent responded rarely
- 13 per cent responded twice a month or so
- nine per cent responded once in a month
- nine per cent responded sometimes
- nine per cent responded never
- eight per cent responded a lot



#### 4. What are the biggest personal challenges in teaching about multiculturalism?

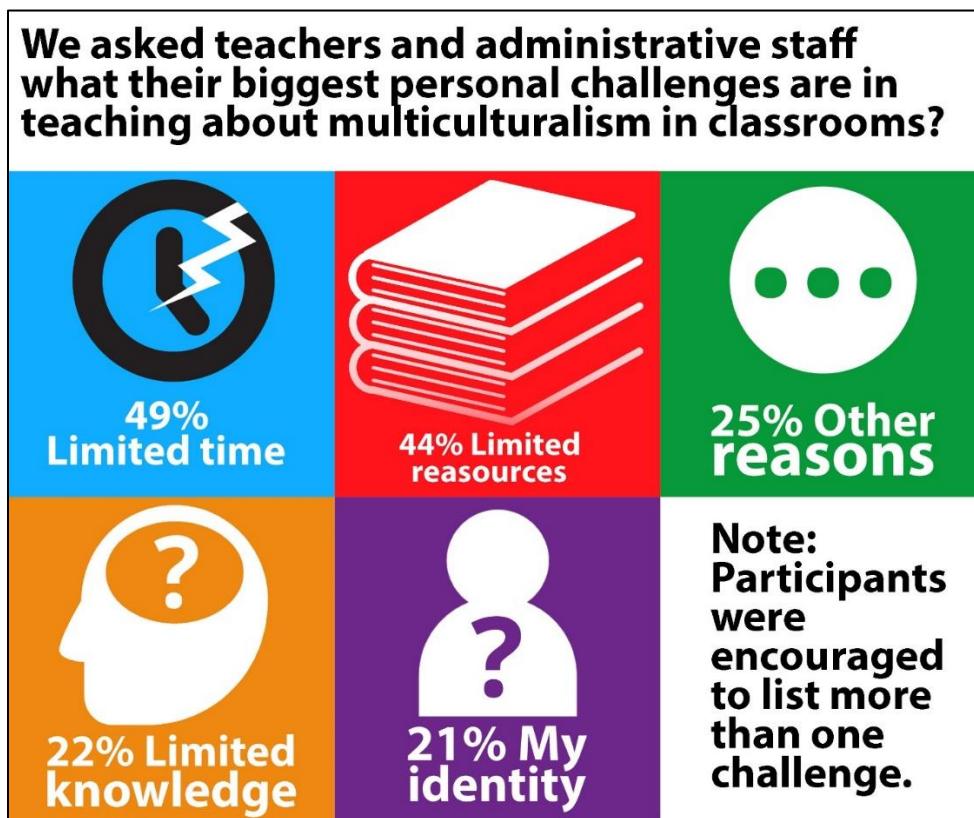
*Note: participants were prompted to talk about more than one challenge.*

When asked the biggest personal challenges in teaching about multiculturalism, 49 per cent of participants responded with "limited time" as the number one answer, with "limited resources" a close second at 44 per cent. 22 per cent of participants selected "my limited knowledge", and 21 per cent selected "my identity" as major limitations to teaching multiculturalism. The remainder of participants chose to formulate their own responses such as:

*"I'm hesitant because [I] don't want to offend anyone."*

*"The community I work in doesn't value this type of education."*

*"Denomination and historical beliefs of surrounding communities."*



## **5. What are the biggest systemic-level challenges in teaching about multiculturalism (i.e. in curriculum or policy level)?**

*Note: participants were prompted to list more than one challenge.*

When responding to the question of what systemic-level challenges exist when teaching multiculturalism, "Eurocentric curriculum" was the number one response, at 40 per cent. 36 per cent of respondents cited no guideline or policy in place to guide teaching multiculturalism, while 31 per cent cited limited exposure within the school. 30 per cent answered "limited funding" and 21 per cent cited "limited support from management". The rest of the teachers provided their own unique responses, including:

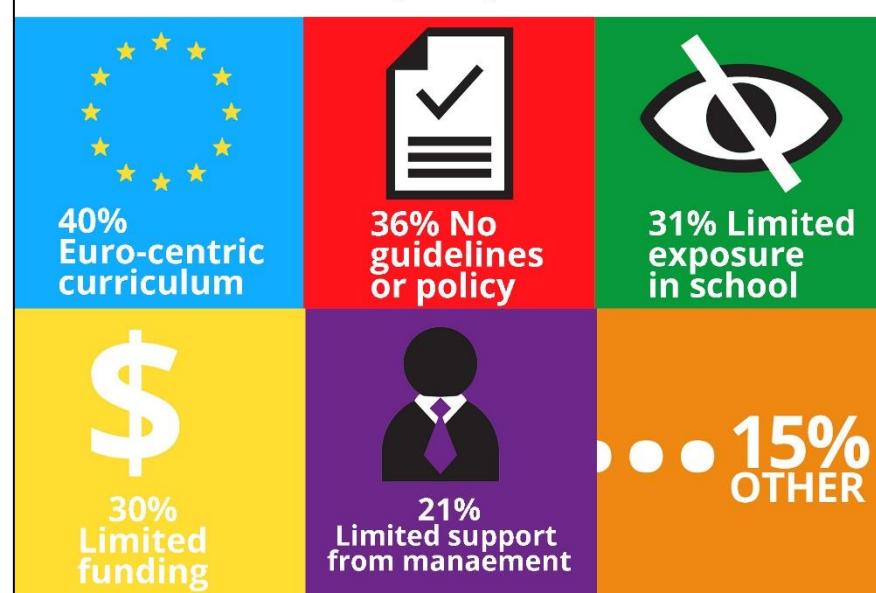
*"We have limited resources for English as a Second Language learners."*

*"There is a pushback from parents when we try to engage in multiculturalism."*

*"Curriculum changes are occurring to support/infuse the Indigenous community, but not to address other multicultural identities and diverse cultures."*

*"Our bigger challenge is the implicit racism evident in our socioeconomic structures."*

### **What are the biggest systemic level challenges in teaching about multiculturalism? (ie. in curriculum or policy level)**



**6. What teaching resources do you use to address multiculturalism within your classroom?**

Teachers offered a plethora of resources in response to this question, including: Alberta Education curriculum fiction and nonfiction books, textbooks, conversations with guest speakers, involving families in the school community, YouTube videos, art history, government websites and publications, having a cultural coordinator such as an Indigenous liaison, current events such as the news, talks about identity, colleagues, student stories, Google and other websites, pop culture, personal knowledge, Indigenous knowledge, and personal anecdotes.

**7. If you do not use any resources to address multiculturalism in your classroom, what are the reasons?**

This was not presented as a mandatory question. Out of 64 responses to this question, 26 respondents indicated that they do not know where to find good resources, 16 cited not enough time to research resources, and 15 indicated that the subject they teach does not have a specific connection to multiculturalism. The remainder of the participants had unique responses such as:

*"We are mostly a Caucasian school, we don't teach much about other cultures other than the Social Studies curriculum."*

*"We do not have the funding needed to purchase additional resources, this is seen as not essential."*

*"Other than YouTube or Google, we don't have resources to talk about multiculturalism or diversity in general. This is not a priority in my school."*

**8. When we complete our project and launch our K-12 Multicultural resource hub, would you be interested in using it, and what do you think is the best way for distribution?**

92% of the participants said they would be interested in using the resource hub. The vast majority of teacher participants asked that the resource hub be distributed digitally, either through Google docs, social media, a website or app, by email, or a combination of electronic avenues.

## **Limitations**

There are a number of research limitations to consider when reviewing our survey results. First, our sample size was relatively small (150 teachers), and may not be an exact reflection of teacher sentiments on multiculturalism and the pervasiveness of racism within K-12 schools in Alberta. Further, the survey and interviews were exclusively a self-reporting research method, which cannot account for personal biases or determine a strong ability to recognize the different forms of racism as they occur (i.e., a teacher may be more adept to pick up on overt discrimination rather than subtle racism, and thus report accordingly).

We also measured the differences between rural and urban experiences. However, the results are subject to further examination due to the potential of higher levels of diversity overall in urban centres, where racism may be more prevalent. Conversely, being the only non-white child in a small school in a rural area may draw more negative attention to the fact. This could potentially be an interesting topic for future research: the variability of perceptions of classroom racism between rural and urban settings in Alberta.

To mitigate personal researcher bias, the Canadian Cultural Mosaic Foundation is made up of members from a variety of racial, ethnic, and cultural backgrounds who have all contributed to this report, thus providing the crucial element of lived experience and personal knowledge to the project as a whole.

Finally, **intersectionality** was beyond the scope of this report, as we chose to focus primarily on ethnicity and culture as determinants of diversity.

As mentioned above, some children who are racialized may also be experiencing economic uncertainty, including food or housing insecurity, learning difficulties due to having English as a second language, facing gendered inequalities due to being a girl or a young woman, experiencing the social ramifications of being part of the 2SLGBTQIA+ community, living with a disability or a mental illness, or any combination of these circumstances.

Furthermore, racism specific to Indigenous people in Canada is a direct result of colonialism and intergenerational trauma that has created deep, harmful and pervasive patterns in our society towards the perception and treatment of First Nations, Métis, and Inuit citizens in Alberta and beyond. Therefore, Indigenous children may also be facing other barriers within the colonial school setting, and these specific circumstances were not accounted for in our research.

A research project that aims to measure and draw attention to the other elements of oppression that affect school aged children in Alberta may be useful to maximize teacher preparedness and work towards a more inclusive and comprehensive curriculum as a whole.

# Implications

As we uncovered through our research, half of the 150 participants indicated that racism is, in fact, occurring among their students of all ages. This is a significant percentage of educators in terms of research results, and this number may be even higher if all teachers who participated in our research were specifically-trained to notice and identify racism.

Before we delve into the adverse effects that racism has on school-aged children, we will present a critique of the concept of multiculturalism, as it is often presented as a one-all solution to prejudice and discrimination, and we will discuss the complexity of cultural and ethnic identity in the context of Albertan students.

## **Multiculturalism: A Critical Perspective**

Though true **multiculturalism** is an ideal that can certainly be aspired to, the term itself often glosses over the power dynamics that exist within our society. In the Canadian context, multiculturalism was an official policy announced in 1971 by the Liberal government.

Multiculturalism as a philosophy has been criticized for only addressing surface level issues, such as recognizing and valuing the contributions of different ethnic groups in Canada, and by celebrating these differences through various avenues. However, it fails to take into account the “critical role that racism plays in preventing this vision from materializing...[and] it promotes a static and limited notion of culture as fragmented and confined to ethnicity” (CARED, 2018, p. 20-21).

In effect, multiculturalism is an idealistic view of society, often sought after through cultural celebrations, assertions of equality with no explicit action taken, and an overall fascination with the entertainment aspects of different cultures (i.e. traditional foods, dance, and ceremony). Though these are undoubtedly important aspects of a multicultural society, they do not address the oppressive social and economic inequalities that certain groups face, or the day-to-day prejudice that they often endure (CARED, 2018).

For example, many cultural events in Alberta include Indigenous dancers, drummers, and entertainers dressed in eye-catching, colourful traditional attire, performing for the audience. Though celebrating Indigenous people and their respective traditions is a positive thing, many people turn a blind eye to the adverse conditions that face Indigenous people in Alberta and

Canada at large. These include often inadequate and overcrowded housing and unclean drinking water on reserves, higher rates of addictions, substance abuse, and domestic violence, over-incarceration, missing and murdered Indigenous women, and a lack of resources to address these issues (Carniol, 2010). Further, Indigenous people, including children, in Alberta are often the recipients of racism, stereotypes, and prejudice. This unfortunate juxtaposition speaks to the affinity of the “exotic”, meanwhile choosing to ignore to the social realities that certain groups experience.

Syed (2010) argues that there are three different types of "multiculturalism": conservative, liberal, and critical. Syed (2010) explains how conservative multiculturalism entails an expectation of all other cultures assimilating into the dominant white-European society, and that any perceived threat to the ascribed superiority and power of that culture creates resistance and opposition. Liberal multiculturalism, on the other hand, "focuses on the equality of diverse peoples" (p. 256), with an emphasis on concepts such as **colour-blindness**, political correctness, and an idealization of a true multicultural society.

However, Syed (2010) questions the liberal philosophy, as it fails to address the power differences between those belonging to the dominant group and those who are expected to conform to it. For example, a family from Iraq may be able to publicly celebrate their culture and traditions once a year at an event showcasing diversity, but still must attend and adapt to a school system built upon European beliefs and ideas such as hierarchy, standardization, and bureaucratic processes. Evidently, a power imbalance remains between the two groups.

Acclaimed social work author Bob Mullaly (2017) titles this phenomenon “cultural imperialism”, whereby “the dominant group universalizes its experience and culture and uses it as the norm” (p. 28). Mullaly explains how “our social institutions are based on the culture and experiences of the dominant group [and] we are socialized into this ethnocentric view of the world” (p. 28). Primary and secondary education are perhaps the most influential social institutions that mold one’s evolving worldview, beliefs, and cultural norms.

Critical multiculturalism, however, addresses the power difference that exists between the dominant culture and those who are measured against it (Syed, 2010). In the context of K-12 education, we believe that an emphasis on the *lived experiences* of marginalized students is integral in mitigating the influence of the culture that holds more privilege and power.

## **The Complexity of Identity**

Acknowledging the overall complexity of cultural and ethnic identity is vital in listening to, valuing and incorporating the lived experiences of others as part of classroom learning objectives. Often, a hyper-liberal emphasis on diversity and multiculturalism erases the individual identities that make up the collective, and both must be understood as complementary to each other rather than in opposition. To name a few examples, an Indigenous identity in an urban setting may be vastly different from that of an Indigenous student who lives on a reserve. Or, one may identify as “Canadian”, but still celebrate Ukrainian Orthodox Christmas in January with their family. With a traditionally “blended” historic identity, the dynamics can be even more complex: one who is Métis may identify with more traditional First Nations philosophies, while others may identify with a hybridity of Métis history and customs coupled with the French language and culture. Others who have a familial Métis background may not identify as Métis at all. This could also be a result of a general disconnection to the culture, a lack of interest, or in some cases, the shame and stigma attached to being Indigenous.

Therefore, it is important to allow individuals to subscribe to their own individual and collective identity, or identities, at their own pace and within their own understanding. However, we also must recognize that, due to a systemic and pervasive power imbalance that exists between the dominant culture and all other cultures, not all individuals are afforded this opportunity in their own right. Children are especially among those who have questions or conflicts with their identity(ies). As we will discuss, identity formation is an integral component of childhood development, and experiencing racial prejudice or discrimination as a child can seriously impact healthy development (Aronson, 2006).

The most important aspect with respect to identity is providing one equitable access, value, and respect when they choose to explore, confirm, validate or celebrate their own cultural identity. It is also important to recognize that, even today, not all cultures can be openly celebrated free from stigma, negative commentary, or stereotypes attributed to them that are derived from the dominant perspective.

For example, for many years, Indigenous traditions, beliefs and ways of life were outlawed, stolen, and trampled upon throughout colonization. The way settlers have mistreated and oppressed the Indigenous peoples of Turtle Island (Now known as North America) has been increasingly referred to as cultural genocide. This genocide has resulted in intergenerational trauma resulting from colonialism, the residential school system, the sixties scoop, and

misleading treaties which sought to elevate settler's desires over Indigenous rights. This oppression still exists today in numerous forms, as is evident by the aforementioned high addiction rates, over-incarceration, substandard living and a severe lack of clean drinking water on reserves, as well as harmful stereotypes and the amount of Indigenous children in care (Gray, 2011). However, Indigenous people in Canada have proven to be incredibly resilient and powerful, and the imposed circumstances that surround Indigenous people are constantly being challenged and dismantled by inspirational Indigenous activists, politicians, public figures, and allies.

By the same token, there is often significantly more stigma attached to observing Ramadan than there is celebrating Christmas, and many Canadian citizens are fearful that an emphasis on equitable diversity means that major Christian holidays, such as Christmas, are under imminent threat (Cain, 2017). Though there is no true threat to celebrating Christmas in Canada, anytime the dominant perspective is under any sort of perceived threat, many people seem to panic and thus resist any sort of change, even if this change has the potential to foster a healthier and more inclusive society as a whole.

### **Effects of Racism on Children**

Many school-aged children are able to perceive societal and structural discrimination in a way that makes sense to them, according to their stage of development (Fisher et al., 2000; Rowley et al., 2008; Brown & Bigler, 2005; Szalacha et al., 2003). According to development theory, the main developmental task for mid-childhood and adolescence is integrating a belief system, personality, and identity, which makes this period most vulnerable to adverse experiences (Chavous et al., 2003; Chavous et al., 2008; Spencer et al., 2001; Yip et al., 2010).

Experiencing racial discrimination can affect a youth or child's self-esteem, psychological wellbeing, and cause behavioural problems and poor academic performance (Chavous et al., 2003; Chavous et al., 2008; Spencer et al., 2001; Szalacha et al., 2003). Although youth and children also perceive discrimination in various public settings such as at the playground or in a restaurant, the primary context where they maintain important personal relationships is at school (Graham & Juvonen, 2002; Yip et al., 2010).

Further, stereotypes and mistreatment based on one's ethnicity or culture can create a self-fulfilling prophecy (Mullaly, 2017; Aronson 2006). For example, if an African-Canadian child is treated as if they are "intellectually inferior" (Aronson, 2006., p. 281), they are more likely to perform poorly on academic tests. Further, the more awareness and cognizance that they have

of perceived or actual stereotypes against them, the higher the chance that they will internalize the stereotype and have their academic performance impacted as a result (Graham & Juvonen, 2002). Many researchers further stressed that experiencing racial discrimination daily has a high level of association with depressive symptoms, low self-esteem, and higher level of substance abuse in adolescence (Brown & Bigler, 2005; Fisher et al., 2000; Pachter et al., 2010; Szalacha et al., 2003).

More broadly, discrimination also negatively influences the environments of the students, putting their overall well-being at risk. When they are segregated through social stratification via race or ethnicity, this influences their neighbourhood socioeconomic status, their peer groups, and the parental messages that they receive (Fisher et al., 2000; Pachter et al., 2010).

### **Structural Discrimination**

We know that racial discrimination is not inherent nor inevitable, but is socially constructed. We also know that this racism is not isolated to individual circumstances, as it also exists within a structural level. Gillborn (2005, 2006) argues that racialized youth are unfairly judged and evaluated on their progress based on ‘white standards.’ To further disadvantage racialized students, systemic racism is harder to pinpoint, and therefore address and take action.

Though diversity is often emphasized through curriculum, an educational system that is based on colonial principles does little to secure the success of racialized students. Since colonization, Canada’s school system has been primarily centered around European influence, including methods of teaching, the physical structure of schools, and the curriculum offered in classrooms. Zinga (2006) argues that schools in Canada “continue to teach from a Euro-centric curriculum, and despite attempts to incorporate ‘multicultural education’ into these systems, the systems primarily serve to perpetuate the illusions to students that Canada is the country of the white majority” (p. 210).

### **Preparing Teachers**

When our foundation conducted interviews with some of the participants, most teachers expressed sentiments not of ignorance, but of fear. Our interviewees identified their lack of knowledge with regards to different cultures as the biggest personal challenge in teaching multiculturalism. They were afraid that they might deliver incorrect information when referring to

a specific cultural or religious belief system or tradition, which may potentially offend and upset students or their families. When the culture is not their own, teachers reported that they tend to feel afraid and extremely careful with what they do and do not say in a classroom setting. In turn, this fear compels the teachers to not speak about the culture at all, as they feel it is the safest option. Unfortunately, this limits classroom learning opportunities and teachable moments that could in fact promote understanding between the students and foster both acceptance and respect. The K-12 Resource Hub that the CanadianCMF is seeking to implement in the upcoming years could potentially mitigate these type of occurrences when utilized by teachers.

Another personal challenge that teachers attributed as a barrier when teaching multiculturalism was their own cultural identity. This issue was raised primarily from Caucasian teachers throughout our interviews. They explained that being Caucasian makes them feel ill-equipped to talk about multiculturalism and thus, prevents them from speaking about the issue with ease. This is not a shortcoming of any particular teacher, necessarily, but is more so related to the lack of critical diversity training available for teachers to enhance their own understanding meanwhile developing effective strategies to teach multiculturalism. Our research supports the idea that teachers require ongoing and adequate support, resources, and encouragement in order to promote and foster diversity and understanding within their classrooms. Schools also need to ensure that they hire diverse teachers as well.

One of the other major areas of concern from the teachers that we surveyed was the issue of time. The majority of teachers indicated that a lack of time is the primary barrier to teaching multiculturalism within the classroom. One of the goals of the K-12 resource hub is to make it as user friendly and as least time consuming as possible, as we are aware that teachers are extremely busy with an overabundance of responsibility, including (but not limited to): lesson planning, marking assignments, coordinating with parents, classroom management, addressing student behaviours, fulfilling expectations of the schools, and sometimes having to work with the police and child and family services in traumatic and emotional circumstances. We also are aware that teachers ultimately know what will work best for their classrooms, and thus our aim is to ensure autonomy and customization when accessing the resource hub. Overall, when developing our resource hub, we will be guided by the value of supporting teachers, rather than adding more to their workloads.

# Alberta K-12 Curriculum

In Alberta Education's program rationale and philosophy for K-12 Social Studies, there are a number of values that guide the current curriculum. These include opportunities to:

- "appreciate and respect how multiple perspectives, including Aboriginal and Francophone, shape Canada's political, socio-economic, linguistic and cultural realities"
- "understand the challenges and opportunities that immigration presents to newcomers and to Canada"
- "understand how social cohesion can be achieved in a pluralistic society" (Alberta Education, 2005, p. 2)

The document further elaborates upon these concepts, where they are outlined and ordered in a manner that is relevant and progressive to the grades of the students. The document explores notions such as the importance of including Indigenous and Francophone experiences and perspectives, exploring the complexity of the Canadian identity, and learning how to foster multiculturalism, diversity, and pluralism within our society.

In 2016, Alberta's previous education minister announced a plan to completely overhaul curriculum, to "include topics such as climate change, gender diversity, and sexual orientation" (Bennett, 2016). The curriculum was also announced to be redeveloped in both English and French for the first time. The curriculum will also place an emphasis on teaching the perspectives and histories of francophone, First Nations, Métis and Inuit peoples" (Bennett, 2016).

In July 2018, the previous education minister posted some working drafts of K-4 education changes. Some of the highlights from these documents include:

- a strong emphasis on First Nations, Metis, and Inuit history, cultures and influence
- the influence of Francophone settlement, history, and presence throughout Alberta
- emphasis on sharing stories and connection through storytelling, drama, art, music, and dance
- diverse communities with diverse needs
- how diversity can shape a community
- individual rights within communities that need to be protected

- how settlers affected change in communities
- global citizenship
- implications of treaty rights
- cultures prior to 1905 in what is now known as Alberta
- the importance of storytelling and including community experiences in overall learning
- oral traditional stories shared by knowledge keepers and elders
- how Francophone and other settler groups have contributed to communities
- diverse historical perspectives of First Nations, Metis, Francophone and other groups
- teaching critical thinking
- our collective responsibility to the land we live on, and how this is shaped by FNMI traditional knowledge
- examining the spiritual connection to the land by various groups
- equity, fairness, respect, and inclusive treatment of individuals and groups
- exploring inequity and prejudiced action towards First Nations and Metis communities, as well as analyzing attempts to mitigate this injustice
- social and cultural diversity (Alberta Education, 2018).

Although these are all rich, progressive and extremely important concepts to be introduced and discussed with students, and while we commend the strong, consistent inclusion of Indigenous, Francophone and diverse perspectives, there are gaps that require addressing. Namely, there is no apparent mention of the importance of teaching **anti-racism** to students, or understanding and working against oppression in these early drafts. There is also an absence of the value of incorporating immigrant perspectives, and there is no clear differentiation between immigrants of colour vs. immigrants who are of Western-European ancestry.

There is, however, a fairly thorough emphasis on equity, identity, global citizenship, and inclusivity throughout the initial documents. Due to the young ages of the students targeted with the first draft (K-4), these principles may be enough to build a solid foundation among students to later educate them on anti-racist and anti-oppressive education when they are in the higher grades. As students age, they increasingly have a deeper understanding of the world around them, as well as how they as individuals interact with the society that they live in.

Further, the current Alberta Government run by the United Conservative Party, has promised to “shred” any perceived ideological changes, or changes that divert too far from the “fundamentals” (Bennett, 2018).

Regardless of which government is in power over the years to come, the CanadianCMF will be persistent and thorough in creating and implementing a multicultural resource hub for teachers that aims to enhance teacher knowledge and work to mitigate ignorance, prejudice and racism against students; and in place, foster understanding, acceptance, and celebration of all identities, groups, and cultures present within Alberta.

## Recommendations

- K-12 Anti-Racism campaign focused on training school staff and teachers on understanding and identifying racism, along with solutions, as well as a progress report as part of the evaluation process.
- K-12 Stop Racism campaign focused on educating all students on racism and bringing it to an end. This campaign should ideally be led by youth and children and implemented through methods that are in alignment with the students developmental ages (for example, different initiatives for K-4, 5-7, 8-12, etc.). Further, there should be a progress report as part of the evaluation process for this program.
- All K-12 schools should implement mandatory and no-tolerance school policies with regards to overt or covert racism. This should include identifying racism in all its forms, including subtleties, perpetuating stereotypes, microaggressions, and problematic statements. All teachers and staff should be trained on these policies through interactive and meaningful training sessions.
- We call on the municipal, provincial, and federal governments to implement recommendations from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission that will impact primary and secondary education in our cities, provinces, and throughout Canada, with the ultimate hope that it will diversify Eurocentric school curriculums and challenge the colonial school system as a whole.
- Create a user friendly online K-12 Multicultural Resource Hub for teachers to access and potentially upload their own resources to share.
- Incorporating lived experiences into teaching plans.
- Educate students on how they can understand and address racism, perhaps as an add onto the anti-bullying units.

- Clear consequences within the anti-racism policies for students and teachers who engage in racist behaviour, with education being the first response to a student who is engaging in racism or prejudice.
- Similar research projects focused towards other subsets of diversity and/or intersectionality of race with other elements of diversity.
- Continue incorporating Indigenous knowledge and worldviews.

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