

"The World is Constantly arriving": The Intercultural Diversity Toolkit for Educators in New Brunswick

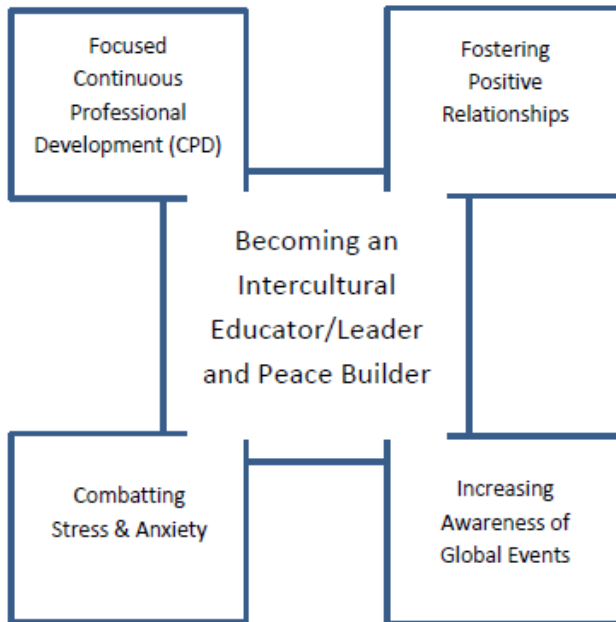
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In recent years, New Brunswick schools have enrolled hundreds of students from countries around the world (Donkin, 2015). Three consecutive provincial governments have intentionally planned to attract and settle newcomers across our province to promote the economic and social growth of New Brunswick (New Brunswick Government; 2014). For example, the recently-elected federal government welcomed approximately 25,000 refugee families to Canada from war torn Syria. (Guterras, 2015). These demographic changes have impacted our province as the New Brunswick Multicultural Council recently reported that we are in “a period of profound transformation - economic and humanitarian immigration have become central to the discussions about our province’s future. This past year, more than 4,435 immigrants arrived in our province” (2016, p. 1). Our research team continues to investigate the impact of these events for educators and schools leaders in New Brunswick and conceptualize ways to support them in their schools and communities.

What Does Research Tell Us About Teacher Preparation and Capacity in Demographically Changing Schools?

Five key thematic findings emerged from our research in ethnoculturally diverse schools in Alberta and New Brunswick

(Hamm, 2016; 2009; Hamm, Scott, & Massfeller, 2015). Figure 1 illustrates how the themes intersect with the current dominant theme of becoming an intercultural educator/leader and peace-builder during times of rapid demographic change.



Hamm 2016 Model

Figure 1 - Intersecting Themes from Research in Diverse Schools in Alberta and New Brunswick

Focused Continuous Professional Development (CPD)

Focused and continuous professional development (CPD) on immigration, intercultural education, and peace-building strategies will support educators and leaders during this era of

rapidly changing school contexts (Holmes, 2013). CPD is especially important if educators experience uncertainty and ambiguity working in increasingly diverse school environments (Shields, 2013).

Our data analyses confirm that educators and school leaders require focused, on-going learning opportunities to build their skills in intercultural pedagogies in diverse communities (Palmer, 2016). However, several of our research participants described in their interviews that the multiple and complex professional learning needs of subject area teachers and support staff in their diverse schools, are often relegated as lower PD priorities each year. For instance, when asked if the demographically-changing school he was leading had a focused professional development agenda on diversity and increasing immigration, one Alberta administrator said, “our PD hasn’t been specifically targeted; it’s on the agenda. We always end up talking about it as, is this something we want to look at this year? But it doesn’t ever seem to move up into that first or second slot” (Hamm, 2009, pp. 136-137). Given the rapidly changing nature of our society, we believe topics on diversity, immigration, and intercultural education should be top priority in Canada.

Increasing Awareness of Global Events

We also suggest that professional development topics in diverse schools address what is happening in the world and educators and leaders in New Brunswick be supported in becoming aware of global events that will have implications on their planning and teaching. As one New Brunswick educator told us, “The world is constantly arriving and we have to respond” (Hamm, Massfeller, Cormier, & Oulette, 2016). Knowing where students

and families are arriving from and the challenges they have faced getting to their new country and setting up their home will help all stakeholders build a shared understanding and empathy. Several research participants stated they only learned that the newcomers would be arriving “when they arrived in guidance” to enroll their children in their school (Hamm, Massfeller, Cormier, & Oulette, 2016). Research suggests that situations in schools, as described above, only allow the leaders and educators to be reactive in their intercultural approaches rather than effectively proactive and responsive in welcoming newcomer students and families. We have found this social reality countless times in the narratives of our research participants. This turbulence creates tension and anxiety in their school communities and at times leads to misunderstandings about the newcomers.

Fostering Positive Relationships

Many teachers, administrators, newcomer students and their parents struggle communicating effectively with each other. Rather than choosing to see this through a deficit lens and blame the parents and students (McKenzie & Scheurich, 2004), we believe there are strategies that can be put in place that will improve communication on multiple levels. For instance, many newcomer parents may not be able to comprehend the messaging they receive from school personnel. School leaders may have to explore different ways of connecting effectively with new students and their families. For example, teachers may consider visiting newcomers in their homes to ensure their messaging is understood and that parents know the school cares about them and their children (Hamm, Doğurga, & Scott, 2016).

Combatting Stress and Anxiety

When excessive change and accountability is imposed on the school environment, the culture becomes turbulent (Hamm, 2015) and educators and educational leaders experience undue amounts of stress and anxiety. We have confirmed this reality continuously in our research. In the next section, we will discuss a dominant theme in our research and describe how we are currently conceptualizing and building an intercultural diversity toolkit for peace-building that we will share widely with teachers and our colleagues to disseminate through their courses.

An Accessible Toolkit for Intercultural Education and Peace Building

We are concerned about the ability of educators and leaders to manage the increasing demands of their professional roles. With limited time and resources, how do educators go about building their cultural knowledge and capacity and develop healthy school environments for all stakeholders? It is our intention to support them further in the intercultural work they perform through the construction of a digital intercultural diversity toolkit. It is our hope that the toolkit will help them become increasingly confident, comfortable and competent as intercultural educators and peace-builders within their classrooms and communities.

Recently, our research team received a teaching and learning priority grant from the Centre for Enhanced Teaching and Learning (CETL) at the University of New Brunswick. Following the work of Darren Lund at the University of Calgary (2016), we plan to use this funding to develop an accessible toolkit that will provide educators with important online resources selected by professionals within their various fields.

Through the University of New Brunswick's online course management system (Desire2Learn), we will construct the toolkit and pilot it in a Masters of Education Leadership class in 2017. This class will consist of teachers and principals from across the province of New Brunswick who are also experiencing rapid demographic changes. We feel it is vitally important to also have an online discussion forum where educators can share their own resources, tips, and build relationships with others who are looking to become leaders and peace builders within their schools and communities.

At the conclusion of each case study in our New Brunswick project, we will present the toolkit to the schools and educators we are working with and encourage them to disseminate the toolkit widely. We hope that educators and administrators will use the resources provided to help combat the stress and anxiety that our research tells us is occurring, not only in the schools within New Brunswick, but in schools across Canada and around the world. Eventually, the toolkit will be moved to a more permanent location where it can be accessed by anyone with an internet connection and an interest in building their intercultural knowledge and competencies. Our ultimate goal in building this toolkit is to help educators feel more prepared walking into their ever-changing intercultural classrooms.

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Biography

Kevin Cormier (BA, Multimedia Studies) is an Instructional Technology Specialist and System Administrator for D2L Brightspace within the Centre for Enhanced Teaching and Learning at the University of New Brunswick (UNB) in Fredericton, New Brunswick, Canada. He is often found in a

troubleshooting and coaching role where he works closely with faculty, staff and students to help provide a positive online learning experience. In 2010, Kevin was the recipient of the NBITC Rising Star Award within the province of New Brunswick. He has co-authored several articles on Professional Development that have appeared in *Canadian Association of Principals*, *Antistasis*, *Journal of Contemporary Issues in Education* and the *CAE* blog. He can be reached at kcormier@unb.ca

Helen Massfeller (PhD., R. Psych.) is an Assistant Professor in the Faculty of Education at the University of New Brunswick in Fredericton. She teaches in the Counselling program and conducts research in the area of Counsellor Education, Supervision, and Positive Mental Health. Helen has a particular interest in promoting the mental health of teachers and administrators working in culturally diverse schools in New Brunswick. She can be reached at helen.massfeller@unb.ca

Lyle Hamm (PhD.) is an Associate Professor in the Faculty of Education at the University of New Brunswick in Fredericton. His research, broadly speaking, focuses on demographically changing schools and communities, Intercultural Education and Peace-Building, and Social Justice Leadership. Lyle served as an educator and administrator in Alberta for 22 years. He can be reached at lhamm@unb.ca

KayLee Oulette is a collaborator on the Intercultural Diversity Toolkit project. A recent graduate from Central Memorial High School in Calgary, she is interested in pursuing studies in First Nations and Counsellor Education.