

Ethics Furniture Project

Damara Juneau, Kacie Morin, Carina de Paz & Glenn Sawatzky

EDAN 101

University of Regina

November 30, 2018

Historical Reference

It has not always been common practice for teachers to show concern for the holistic wellbeing of diverse student bodies. For instance, classrooms in the past were often managed by way the ever-present threat of corporal punishment. Even into the second half of the twentieth century one can find instances of bodily harm inflicted on students by teachers (Lipovenko, 1979). Though it was not commonly used in more recent decades, it wasn't until 2004 that the strap was officially prohibited for use in schools by Canadian law (Axelrod, & EdCan Network, 2011). And while threats of violence now appear glaringly problematic, a more insidious way that disregard for student well-being has surfaced is through the physical design of classroom furniture. Studies have shown that desks requiring strict upright posture, such as those used commonly throughout the 20th century, for children into an untenable and ultimately unhealthy position.

While threats of violence and inconsiderate desk design ignored the physical and emotional health of students, other educational habits of the past effectively ignored or even repudiated student identities by failing to recognize diversity in the classroom. Students from minority racial groups have not always felt welcomed or represented in Canadian classrooms. One Indigenous student recalls that Indigenous figures from history were spoken of pejoratively, if they were spoken of at all (David, & Globe, 2017). Neural diversity, too, has historically been ignored or separated out of the system rather than accommodated for. Unfortunately, the historical struggle to meet the diverse needs of students continues to this day: many districts in Canada continue to search for best practices when it comes to supporting students with a range of learning disabilities. (Riva, 2016)

Current Response

By examining the official documents of the Saskatchewan Teachers' Federation (STF), one can observe an effort to redress some of these historical shortcomings in education. The STF Standards of Practice document states that teachers will “create and maintain a learning environment that encourages and supports the growth of the whole student” (6.3.1). Similarly, the STF's Code of Ethics states the imperative “[t]o treat each student justly, considerately and appropriately in accordance with the beliefs of the profession” (6.2.6). In recent years, significant strides have been made in the area of learning environments and holistic health. Many schools in Canada have adopted “whole child” philosophies that emphasise a multifaceted approach to engendering authentic student engagement within a supportive learning environment. (cite [<http://www.wholechilddeducation.org/about>]?). This shift has included a redesign of furniture as well as the replacement of Discipline as a threat of violence with a preventative approach of discipline through engagement and differentiation.

Regarding diversity, the Standards of Practice document states that teachers should “recognize and accommodate diversity within the classroom, the school and the community.” Teachings such as the widely adopted Circle of Courage – a program that recognizes diversity by incorporating Indigenous teachings in the public school system – point to work being done on this front. Additionally, the curriculum itself has changed to encourages teachers to make a more concerted effort to incorporate Indigenous perspectives across subject areas.

Finally, the STF Code of Ethics impels teachers “to support each student in reaching their highest levels of individual growth across intellectual, social-emotional, spiritual and physical domains” (6.2.8). In the past, students with acute challenges and differing abilities might have been from such support. Now, though, as evidenced especially by the push for inclusive

education, teachers (working alongside educational assistants and other support people) are encouraged to create classrooms truly supportive of all students.

Damara Juneau's Reflection

I have focused my research on the STF (Saskatchewan Teachers Federation) document on Code of Professional Ethics. The point in the document I focused on is: 6.2.8- To support each student in reaching their highest levels of individual growth across intellectual, social-emotional, spiritual and physical domains. I think that this point was added into the Code of Professional Ethics to raise expectations of how we teach students. I believe that it is important to focus on the student as a whole. When we center education around the child, we look at what a student needs to be successful in the classroom. I know that teachers are working very hard to accommodate the needs of all children in the classroom but this can be a very difficult task. Even though we have improved from our history we are still having difficulties focusing on the whole student. A mother from Calgary, Alberta, posed her concerns for her son's education. (Riva, 2016) Her son has autism, cerebral palsy and an anxiety disorder. This brought up issues that teachers cannot teach 30 students individually. It is not realistic in a classroom with very diverse needs. This would impact me in many different ways in the classroom. I am sure that I will have a variety of needs in my classroom. It is my job however, based off the Code of Professional Ethics, to find ways for each and every one of my students to succeed at their highest potential across all domains.

Effective teaching was viewed very differently in the 1970s and 1980s, where teachers were expected to teach explicit instruction, and had certain expectations on their role in the classroom. (Porter-Magee, Leming, Ellington, & Schug, n.d.) This teaching strategy did not involve working towards all students success. It generalized the class as a whole and involved

the teacher presenting the information, drilling the students, and the students practicing before they were tested on the information. This is an ineffective way of teaching, in my opinion, because it does not allow the teacher to focus on each need of the student and work towards understanding each student's needs. I am passionate about differentiated instruction in the classroom and I believe it is worth it to focus on each individual in the class. Students have the potential to succeed at their highest level. It is the job of the teacher to make sure we are working towards this goal each and every day.

Kacie Morin's Reflection

For this assignment, I specifically focused on point 6.3.4 in the 2017 STF (Saskatchewan Teachers Federation) documents on Standards of Practice that states; "To develop teaching practices that recognize and accommodate diversity within the classroom, the school and the community". I believe this point was added into the standards of practice because in the past education did not always recognize different types of diversity. For example, in the past many educational systems ignored indigenous views and history. And often if indigenous history was included in the curriculum, it was depicted to students in a negative light. As stated in the Globe and Mail, "Naim Cardinal was in Grade 5 when his teacher referred to Louis Riel as a "madman" – a term that stuck in the young boy's head as one of the times he heard Indigenous people described in a negative light" (David, & Globe, 2017). Other ideas for diversity that was not recognized in the past educational systems includes mental illness, learning disabilities and different cultures/ histories.

Although the way educators teach now is changing and experts say that efforts to revamp provincial history lessons that involve taking a hard look at the stories Canadians tell themselves about their country and those who were on the land before them is improving, I still believe that

there is improvements to be made in our classrooms today (David, & Globe, 2017). As a future teacher, these ideas will impact my classroom for many reasons. Firstly, I need to remember that it is my duty to recognize and accommodate diversity in the classroom. For example, this may be making adaptations to a holiday lesson so my students that have different belief systems are included in our classroom. Secondly, I need to make sure that the diversity in my students is recognized and accommodated not only in the classroom but also in the school and community. Lastly, I also need to insure that i am constantly incorporating diversity into the classroom to insure that the same mistakes that were made in the past, will not be made in the future of my classroom.

Glenn Sawatzky's Reflection

My focus for this project was the commitment, stated in the STF Standards of Practice document, “[t]o create and maintain a learning environment that encourages and supports the growth of the whole student.” In imaging the historical instance(s) that necessitated this stated commitment, I thought of the once-common practice of corporal punishment in schools. Even after the strap became an uncommon tool, some teachers, as evidenced in Lipovenko, 1979, resorted to violent behaviour as a strategy for classroom management. One hopes it is obvious that an environment in which a student must learn to fear physical reprisal is inimical to the goal of a holistically supportive learning environment. Yet as we strive to create safe, supportive environments for students, is it enough to refrain from causing bodily harm? Or can we renounce violence in a deeper, more thoroughgoing way?

As I reflected on this question, the Residential School system came to mind. At the Treaty Four Gathering I sat in a sharing circle next to a woman who voiced support for some parts of the Residential School system, arguing that education in general is to be valued, and

First Nations children were empowered through their experiences in the schools. Indeed, not all schools were rife with abuse at all times in their history. Yet taking a larger view, did not the Residential School system contain within itself an inherent violence? Is not any education that seeks to separate a child from familial, cultural, spiritual identities a violent system? At the very least, can we not agree that such a system fails to create “a learning environment that encourages and supports the growth of the whole student.”

Supporting the growth of the whole child will mean environments accepting of difference and respectful of diversity. An Indigenous child, for instance, will be not be fully supported in an environment that disallows expressions of that student’s culture. We cannot glibly assume that we have successfully created a supportive environment simply because our classrooms are free from corporal violence. Nor should we assume, for that matter, that we have successfully created a supportive environment simply because we have or have table groups, or exercise balls, or whatever other differentiated learning tools we use. If we are truly to support whole students, we will have to carve our space for authentic expressions of cultural, spiritual, and linguistic diversity. This will not be easy. But I hope I will have the sensitivity to remain open to possibilities and to learning ever new ways to support the holistic health and growth of a diverse cast of students.

Carina de Paz’s Reflection

6.2.6 states that a teacher has to treat each student justly, considerately and appropriately by the beliefs of the profession. As a teacher, I believe that would promote social justice and consider the diverse needs of my students. I learned through this activity that I would not only be critical with my lesson planning but also how I would design and choose the furniture in the classroom.

Our group look at the different desk used throughout the history. Traditional set up made the students sit in a neat row and face the teachers, and the black board. This scenario shows that the teacher is in authority and the students have to just listen to whatever the teacher is saying. As a teacher who promotes social justice. I would diversely arranged my classroom on how the students would be sitting that would allow them more freedom of expression.

Furthermore, I learned that there is a conflict between children's natural impulses towards physical movement and the need to maintain an extended sedentary position for educational purposes. I learned that not all school furniture fit student anthropometric characteristics, and the desk do not the appropriate design that would fit the students' anthropometric characteristics. This concept made me realize that each student would have different needs on how they would be sitting or standing as we go through our activity that would help them gain a better focus and accomplish an assigned task. I am then looking into a more open classroom concept design.

References

Axelrod, P., & EdCan Network. (2011, January 6). Banning the Strap: The End of Corporal Punishment in Canadian Schools. Retrieved November 30, 2018, from <https://www.edcan.ca/articles/banning-the-strap-the-end-of-corporal-punishment-in-canadian-schools/>

David, & Globe. (2017, November 12). Across Canada, educators are changing the way they teach history to better include Indigenous perspectives. Retrieved November 30, 2018, from <https://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/national/education/history-canada-indigenous-education/article36157403/>

Lipovenko, D. (1979, Jan 09). Trustee thinks board should be tougher report cites 7 cases of teachers using force. *The Globe and Mail* Retrieved from <https://login.libproxy.uregina.ca:8443/login?url=https://search-proquest-com.libproxy.uregina.ca/docview/387159475?accountid=13480>

Porter-Magee, K., Leming, J., Ellington, L., & Schug, M. (n.d.). *Teacher-Centered Instruction: The Rodney Dangerfield of Social Studies* (pp. 94-110, Rep.). Retrieved November 30, 2018, from <http://lexiconic.net/pedagogy/TeacherCenteredSocialStudies.pdf>
Written by Mark Schug, Chapter 5

Riva, N. (2016, September 08). Lots of labels but not enough resources for students with special needs | CBC News. Retrieved November 30, 2018, from <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/special-ed-iep-support-1.3751522>