

Teacher Training

Jurisdiction: Northwest Territories

Contact: Muriel Tolley

Level: Post-Secondary

Theme: Teacher Training Programs

Description of Practice:

All courses in the Aurora College Teacher Education Program are in the process of being systematically revised and updated to insure that each is taught from the NWT Aboriginal cultural perspective.

Background:

The Aurora College Teacher Education Program, in partnership with the University of Saskatchewan, has evolved over the past 36 years since its inception. The program has expanded and several delivery models have been used to maximize the accessibility of teacher education to all parts of the Northwest Territories. Although the majority of students in the program have been Aboriginal, the Aboriginal perspective in the courses was dependent on the knowledge and background of the instructors who taught the courses.

As part of the preparation for extending the Aurora College Teacher Education Program (TEP) to a full degree, a review was carried out in 2002. The resulting report recommended that the philosophy of the program be clarified and clearly articulated. The NWT Committee on Teacher Education, which represents all the stakeholders and provides guidance to the program, was expanded and a requirement of fifty percent Aboriginal membership was introduced. The first task of the Committee was to develop a Statement of Purpose and Guiding Principles for NWT teacher education. Secondly, a working group of Committee members made up entirely of Aboriginal educators was formed. This Aboriginal Cultural Perspectives Working Group took on the task of developing a set of Aboriginal Cultural Perspectives Guidelines to serve as a filter for all TEP curriculum development. All TEP courses are in the process of being systematically revised and updated since the review and the Aboriginal Cultural Perspectives Working Group meets annually to vet any new or revised TEP courses using the guidelines they developed.

Development:

The expanded NWT Committee on Teacher Education with fifty percent Aboriginal membership represents the Department of Education, Culture and Employment, Aurora College, the Northwest Territories Teachers Association, Divisional Education Councils, Teaching and Learning Centres, TEP Alumni, TEP students and the University of Saskatchewan. This is a successful, collaborative model of leadership that has had a remarkable impact on teacher education in the NWT.

The Aboriginal Cultural Perspectives Working Group is made up of members of the larger committee and all are Aboriginal educators.

Evidence:

The course outlines in the Aurora College Teacher Education Program now have the Aboriginal cultural perspectives imbedded and include appropriate culture-based resources that are used by the instructors in the program. Aboriginal students are finding themselves and their cultural values, beliefs and worldviews reflected in the courses thus reinforcing their confidence and identity as future Aboriginal teachers. Non-Aboriginal students are being introduced to the Aboriginal cultural perspectives giving them the opportunity to examine their own values and belief, gain an understanding of how they may differ from those of Aboriginal people and an opportunity to embrace difference in a positive light.

Both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal teacher graduates from this program will be better prepared to teach Aboriginal children which are in the majority in the NWT. The teachers' knowledge and understanding of cultural differences will help them to reinforce Aboriginal students' cultural pride and sense of identity, to avoid cultural conflict in the classroom that contributes to lack of Aboriginal student success and to communicate more effectively with Aboriginal parents.

Adaptability:

The Aboriginal Cultural Perspectives Guidelines that were developed for the teacher education program could be used for developing curriculum in other post-secondary programs.

Further information:

Muriel Tolley
Consultant, Teacher Training/Teacher Induction
Department of Education, Culture and Employment
Muriel_tolley@gov.nt.ca (867) 873-7372