

Specialization in Aboriginal Education – University of Prince Edward Island

Jurisdiction: Prince Edward Island

Contact: Dr. Fiona Walton and Dr. Basil Favaro

Level: Post-Secondary

Theme: Teacher Training Programs

Description of Practice:

The Faculty of Education at the University of Prince Edward Island offers a Specialization in Aboriginal Education to students enrolled in the second year of the Bachelor of Education program.

The Specialization is designed to:

1. Enable preservice teachers to become critically knowledgeable about and competent in meeting the needs of Aboriginal students in the early, middle, and senior school years;
2. Deepen beginning teachers' understanding of the complex issues that shape curriculum and teaching in Indigenous communities; and
3. Encourage and facilitate the integration of Aboriginal themes and issues across the curriculum from the Kindergarten to Grade Twelve level.

The Specialization requires completion of the following courses:

Ed. 449 Introduction to Aboriginal Education

This course provides an introduction to current issues relevant to Aboriginal Education and an opportunity to investigate successful projects and teaching practices in First Nations and Inuit schools in Canada. Course activities include visits to Aboriginal communities and presentations by Indigenous educators.

Ed. 451 Integrating Aboriginal Themes in the Curriculum

This course examines ways that curriculum and teaching can acknowledge more positively the history, contributions, challenges, and futures of Indigenous Peoples. The focus is on the integration of First Nations and Inuit themes across the curriculum from K - 12.

Ed. 463 Culture and Society in Education

This course introduces students to the role of culture and society in education. Students develop an awareness of global issues in education. These issues are explored in Indigenous, multicultural, and international contexts.

Students also complete an elective course in either English as a Second Language or Enterprise Education.

Practicum

A supervised practicum placement of up to six weeks, usually working in small teams in an Aboriginal setting, is an essential component of the program. The practicum may take place in a school serving Aboriginal students in Prince Edward Island, a First Nations or Inuit community in Canada, or an international Indigenous setting

Background:

Bachelor of Education students at UPEI started taking courses in Aboriginal education as electives in 2001. The *Introduction to Aboriginal Education* was developed first and was soon followed by *Integrating Aboriginal Themes into the Curriculum*. The Specialization in Aboriginal Education officially started in September 2004 and 12 students successfully graduated in May, 2005. Several graduates are now teaching in Indigenous contexts in Canada including Labrador, Nunavut, and Northern Quebec.

Seven students are enrolled in the Specialization in Aboriginal Education for the 2005-2006 academic year. One student has combined this focus with the Specialization in International Education by completing a four-week practice teaching placement with Aboriginal students on PEI and a six-week placement in Kenya.

Development:

The Specialization in Aboriginal Education is a new initiative for the Faculty of Education at UPEI and has been very well received by the students. It provides the space to consider the needs of Indigenous students, look at best practices to meet those needs, as well as support the development of knowledge and skills related to Indigenous education.

Dr. Fiona Walton and Dr. Basil Favaro hope to work more closely with the individuals who teach the Culture and Society course to ensure that issues related to Indigenous education and the needs of Aboriginal students are integrated and addressed. The Faculty of Education at UPEI believes it is important that all preservice teachers have the opportunity to consider the needs of Indigenous students.

Evidence:

The graduates of the Specialization in Aboriginal Education have provided testimony indicating that they felt prepared for the challenges of teaching in First Nations and Inuit contexts. They believe they developed higher levels of awareness, sensitivity, and appreciation in the courses and practice teaching. A survey of graduates is planned following the third year of the program.

Adaptability:

The Specialization in Aboriginal Education can be adapted and uniquely shaped by any other university interested in implementing the program. A key component of the learning is the involvement of Indigenous educators and scholars as teachers and facilitators. The Specialization considers a range of issues related to decolonizing Indigenous education including the role of non-Indigenous educators in promoting efforts to improve Aboriginal education.

Further information:

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