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## Preparation of Teachers to Work with Immigrant Children on the Examples of Belgium and Canada

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### Abstract

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The development of many countries in the context of expanding process of immigration actualizes issues of finding science-based ways of integration immigrants into new socio-cultural conditions that are primarily concerned with their education. This background places critical demands on teachers to work with cultural and linguistic diversity.

The objective of this paper is to explore the preparatory experience of teachers in Belgium and Canada, countries that welcome a lot of new immigrants each year, to work with immigrant children. The authors characterize the content of the courses of professional and psychological and pedagogical cycles of specific universities of these countries and reveal the value orientations in teacher training.

Results: The study showed that preparation of teachers to work with immigrant children in Belgium and Canada is carried out mainly in the Departments of Education of the universities and is realized through the learning content. The pedagogical cycle is constantly updated with courses, which expand the teachers knowledge of the representatives of different cultures, promote the formation of ethnic and cultural tolerance in a multicultural landscape of the countries.

Conclusions: The key issue of multicultural education in Belgium and Canada is the challenge of improving conditions to provide high quality education at all levels, to all students, regardless of their ethnic, social, cultural, religious identity and the deepening of principles of equity and social justice across teacher education programs.

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**Keywords:** Immigration process, immigrant children, Initial Teacher Education, academic programs, multicultural education, cross-cultural education, multicultural competence.

## 1. Introduction

### 1.1. Problem statement

In recent years, educational systems of many countries are responding to considerable challenges related to the regulation of cultural and linguistic diversity. The need to address this diversity requires



new approaches to education; this, in turn, demands changes in the way teachers are prepared for the new reality they face in their classrooms.

The fundamental problem is the integration of immigrants into the educational system at its various stages. One obvious challenge for schools is that the children of immigrants have a different cultural background, which frequently involves their speaking a language other than that of the host country.

### *1.2. Research questions*

The development of professional and personal potential of teaching staff is impossible without the improvement of new educational ideology based on modern concepts of education, involving the adjustment to ethical and cultural aspects of the educational process, non-discrimination and equal opportunities for all students.

### *1.3. Purpose of the study*

The fact that the educational, social and emotional success of immigrant pupils differs so widely across countries, and that countries pursue such different policies and practices in dealing with the potential of immigrant children, underlines that there is much that countries can learn from each other. The objective of our study is to explore the preparatory experience of teachers in Belgium and Canada, the countries that welcome lots of new immigrants each year, to be ready to work jointly with immigrant children.

### *1.4. Research methods*

This study was based upon a scientific review and analysis of Belgian, Canadian and other international scholars, focused on cultural aspects related to professional standing of international educators. The authors cover such issues as: the selection of teachers, the structure, content of the academic programs, forms and methods of teaching; the development of teacher competencies, quality of education. Moreover, the article reflects an internet-based survey of the academic courses that are provided by the universities of the aforementioned countries.

## **2. Findings**

### *2.1. Selection of future teachers*

The OECD international report notes that the selection of teachers in schools is a key factor to ensuring the academic success of immigrant students (Nusche, 2009).

In Canada, in many programs, strong consideration is given to non-academic factors such as background experience and evidence of interest in or disposition toward teaching, in addition to academic requirements. Frequently, applicants are required to provide written statements, letters of reference, proof of relevant work or volunteer experiences, and participate in interview processes (Casey & Childs, 2007). For example, the University of Toronto requires applicants to identify themselves socially, in terms of gender, race, socio-economic status, sexuality, religion, geographic region, ethnicity, age, dis/ability, and other characteristics, and asks, "How and why do you think your

social identity will influence your work as a teacher with groups of students who are diverse in their social identities?" (Childs and others, 2010).

Significant challenges do arise in attracting a diverse population of applicants that reflect and serve the increasingly diverse population of students in schools. For instance, the University of Toronto reserves a number of places in the program for Internationally Educated Teacher Candidates and provides a support program that includes cultural orientation, language training, and additional support in field practice assignments, to enable this group of student teachers to adjust to the culture of teaching in Ontario (Gagné, 2009).

In all Communities in Belgium, the certificate of completion of upper secondary education is the only requirement in relation to the selection process of potential candidates for initial teacher education. With regards to the recruitment process, teachers enter the profession mainly through open recruitment methods (Donlevy and others, 2016). There is no discouraging policy in teacher education for any minority group. When students apply, sometimes an interview and even a short assessment is done, but this is rather seen as supportive. Overall, there seems to be a greater policy focus on addressing the diversity in the learner population than promoting teacher diversity in relation to migrant background. But some measures were introduced to support increased teacher diversity. The project *Choose consciously the teaching profession* led by Network of Teaching Trainer Flemish Community (2008-2012) in Antwerp was used to increase the influx of persons with minority background into initial teacher education and teaching profession. Furthermore, as part of the SIRIUS initiative, the Flemish Education Council held a stakeholder meeting on the topic of the under-representation of people with a migration background in education (EU, 2016).

## 2.2. Competences for teachers in multicultural contexts

The development of professional and personal potential of teachers is impossible without the improvement of new educational ideology based on modern concepts of teaching, involving the adjustment to ethical and cultural aspects of the learning process. It is recognized that in order to function successfully in a diverse cultural environment, the teacher should be ready to be engaged in a dialogue with another culture, be able to understand different scales of values and accept someone else's "I".

In Canada, along with the standards of professional work of the teacher, there are *The Ethical Standards for the Teaching Profession*, which reveal the essence of the process of decision-making and actions of members of the school community, their professional roles, attitudes and values. There are four ethical standards - Care, Respect, Trust and Integrity, which constitute the basic criteria for the teaching of ethics. Members of the Ontario College of Teachers, in their position of Respect, model respect for spiritual and cultural values, social justice, confidentiality, freedom, democracy and the environment (OCT, 2006).

Recommendations for teacher training *Common European Principles for Teacher Competences and Qualifications*, adopted jointly by the Ministries of Education of the European Union (Belgium is also taking into account as its integral part) point to the need of formation of important skills of the future teachers on completion of initial teacher education, and one of them is: the ability to teach effectively

in heterogeneous classes with students from different social and cultural environments, taking into account the wide range of their abilities and needs (Eurydice, 2009).

### 2.3. Course content

The classification of topics as core content is a reaction to the changing educational context. New teachers need to have the knowledge of culturally relevant pedagogy, ethnolinguistics, ethnic psychology and skills in differentiating for learners with varied backgrounds, strengths and needs. A recent report from the College of Teachers in Ontario has recommended that a course in special education should be considered as an essential element of initial teacher education for all teachers (Gambhir and others, 2008). The study showed that in Canada the pedagogical cycle is constantly updated with courses, which provide knowledge and understanding of diversity that should be taken into account in training and education: *Identification and education of children at risk; An intercultural approach in education; Education as Communication; Teaching English Language to Learners in Mainstream Classrooms*; etc. Modern teacher training programs in Canada allow to expand the knowledge of future teachers about the representatives of different cultures, promote the formation of ethnic and cultural tolerance and readiness for productive inter-ethnic and intercultural cooperation in a multicultural landscape of the country. The course *Transitions, Access, and the Education of New Canadians* examines the construct of “new” Canadians and issues of transition and access at the secondary and post-secondary levels in the Canadian educational system and considers the salience of ethnicity, gender, race and social class in the education and employment of immigrants. The course *Comparative Perspectives on Global Migration and Education* highlights comparative education theory, causes of global migration, and pertinent issue areas including social inclusion and exclusion, gender, language, religion, international organizations, and globalization. *Race, Culture and Schooling* reveals the prevailing attitudes and beliefs about race, ethnicity and culture in Canadian society and their effects on the schooling of minority group students (York University, 2016).

In Belgium teachers' training covers a variety of subjects, including education in the sciences, development of communication skills, introduction of new computer technologies, and, above all, provision of pluralist education for immigrants. The subjects or modules linked to the core curriculum of teacher preparation, in which there is or could be some content related to the treatment of cultural and linguistic diversity, for instance: *Society, family and school; Society, family and education; Sociology of education: Education for Diversity, Education in the modern world; Sociology of Education; Organization and structure of the cultural sector; Social and Cultural Transition Strategies for Sustainability and Development*. The course *Approaches to Language Teaching and Learning for Multilingual Education* deals with the theory and practice of multilingual education. It covers differences and similarities in how multilingual education is implemented throughout Europe and the world (Vrije Universiteit Brussel, 2016). Students are expected to carry out a small research project, preferably related to their country of origin.

Teacher education in Belgium and Canada has been extended taking into account the multicultural nature of the society with a wide range of forms and methods of teaching: discussion in small and large

groups; projects preferably related to their country of origin; role-playing games; ethnographic observations.

### 3. Conclusions

In recent years, European and North American educational systems have been facing the challenge of responding effectively and equitably to the dramatic increase in linguistic and cultural diversity in schools and classrooms. A more comprehensive approach to diversity is needed, not only for the sake of newcomer students or minority students, but for all students, because diversity will be a feature of their school lives, communities, and future workplaces. Diversity education is not only a goal of initial teacher education curriculum but also for admission policies, recruitment efforts, key competences of teachers.

Critical understanding of the experience in implementing the ideas of multicultural education in Belgium and Canada leads to the possibility of using them by Russian scientists and international practitioners to gain a positive theoretical and practical experience in the integration of multicultural education in the educational process and further reforming the national education system on the basis of the principle of multiculturalism.

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