

# Moving from EDID Words to Policy Action: A Case Study of a Teacher Education Program's Admissions Policy Reform

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## Abstract

Regardless of the commitments that universities and teacher education programs (TEPs) have publicly stated regarding equity, diversity, inclusion, or decolonization (EDID), rarely do these commitments impact their admission policies or practices. Through examining a small program's efforts at implementing EDID change over a three-year period, this article provides critical reflections, questions, and action steps for TEPs looking to move beyond talking about the importance of EDID, to actually altering policies and procedures to address systemic change. Utilizing the concepts of "equity in" and "equity

through” admissions, intake variables (Multiple Mini Interview [MMI], Program Preparation, GPA) were analyzed quantitatively and used in this beginning participatory action research project. Results illustrate the benefits of the MMI, the need for program admissions to account for capacities in relation to anti-racism directly, rather than just generally referring to equity, and the need for admission practices to reflect an appreciation of the complexities around identity and ethics.

*Keywords:* decolonization, diversity, equity, inclusion, admissions policies and practices

## Résumé

Quels que soient les engagements publics pris par les universités et les programmes de formation des enseignants en matière d'équité, de diversité, d'inclusion et de décolonisation (EDID), il est rare que ceux-ci se traduisent en impacts sur leurs politiques ou pratiques d'admission. En examinant les efforts déployés par un petit programme pour implanter les changements EDID sur une période de trois ans, cet article présente des réflexions critiques, des questionnements et des actions à entreprendre afin que les programmes de formation des enseignants puissent dépasser les discours sur l'importance de l'EDID en modifiant réellement leurs politiques et procédures dans une perspective de changement systémique. En utilisant les concepts d'« équité dans » et d'« équité par » les admissions, les variables d'admission (mini-entrevues multiples [MEM], programme de préparation, moyenne générale) ont été analysées quantitativement et utilisées dans l'amorce de ce projet de recherche-action participative. Les résultats montrent les avantages des MEM, ainsi que la nécessité pour les admissions aux programmes d'adopter des pratiques qui tiennent compte de leur capacité à soutenir directement la lutte contre le racisme — plutôt que de se contenter des notions générales d'équité — et qui reflètent une appréciation des complexités entourant l'identité et l'éthique.

*Mots-clés :* décolonisation, diversité, équité, inclusion, politiques et pratiques d'admission

## Introduction

Teacher education programs (TEPs) in Canada are primarily located in universities and are provincially managed. These programs include both university courses and practicum experiences in schools and are designed as concurrent (over five years) or post-degree (one to two years). Key foci for all Canadian educational institutes, especially teacher education, are the calls to action for decolonization, Indigenization, and reconciliation, as well as the need to address systemic inequities inherent in schools (Jewel & Mosby, 2021). These systemic inequities play a role in maintaining a teaching force that does not mirror the student population; having teachers that students from historically underrepresented groups in education can identify with plays an important role in helping students feel included, safe, and represented (Burke & Whitty, 2018; Cochran-Smith & Keefe, 2022; Villegas & Irvine, 2010).

The success rate for those students who get into a TEP is quite high (Hirschhorn & Sears, 2015; Thomson et al., 2011); how TEPs decide which applicants are admitted will have a real impact on whether the teaching force is better able to mirror the student population in the future (Falkenberg, 2010). This makes the admission tools used by TEPs extremely important (Childs et al., 2016; Holden et al., 2016; Petrarca & LeSage, 2014). Regardless of the commitments that universities and TEPs have publicly stated regarding equity, diversity, inclusion, or decolonization (EDID), rarely do these commitments impact their admission policies or practices (Holden & Kitchen, 2019). Tamtik and Guenter (2019) completed an analysis of 15 Canadian universities around policies and strategies related to EDID. While a number of these universities had statements in support of EDID, very few of them had policies to back them up. This means that very few institutions are actively addressing issues related to racism, decolonization, and social justice. Philosophical and well-meaning statements, while warm and fuzzy, will do little to address the inequities that are pervasive in our institutions. Universities and individual programs must take action to address racist and colonial policies and procedures that have been systemic in nature. Admissions procedures and policies act as a gateway and are therefore one of the most critical to address.

This study is a participatory action research project (James et al., 2008) set in a TEP in the Lower Mainland of British Columbia. The authors are all members of the teaching faculty within this program, and we are responsible for directing and supporting the

admissions process every year. Our TEP is committed to five key program values: social justice, pedagogical sensitivity, reflective practice, critical thinking, and the integration of knowledge and practice. Of these five, our flagship is social justice. The program handbook defines what social justice means to us by stating that the program:

believes that educators must be open to and respectful of diversity and difference. Educators require the ability to see beyond their own ways of defining the world and to be advocates of social justice and the inclusive classroom. A high value is placed on the ethical responsibilities of educators. (University of the Fraser Valley, 2022, p. 7)

This commitment to social justice permeates all aspects of the program. Teacher candidates (TCs) learn about the inequities facing K–12 students in the surrounding school districts and actively learn to plan and address those inequities in their teaching. Faculty strive to model this value in their delivery of the program, including their work in admissions. It is critical that the path for entry into the program is equitable and just, ensuring supports for maximizing the inclusion of under-represented groups.

Working toward equitable and just admissions has been a continuous journey for our post-degree program; it is not a one-and-done. Originally our program evaluated applicants on grade point average (GPA), written statement, reference letters, and a resumé. After investigating and researching these admission variables, we had concerns regarding redundancies and a lack of alignment with social justice. In response to our three-year study (MacMath & Salingré, 2015), we implemented a behavioural interview, removed the written statement, and altered our admission variable rubrics to align with social justice dispositions. In the last few years, we have continued our examination given the lack of diverse candidates in our program. We became concerned that our admission variables may be restricting entry for members of under-represented groups. While we wanted to ensure that candidates entering our program had the best chance of being successful, we also saw a responsibility to maximize diverse representation in the profession. This led us to replace the behavioural interview with the Multi Mini Interview (MMI, discussed further below), which considered a greater number of dispositions than the behavioural interview (Salingré & MacMath, 2021). However, that adjustment also failed to alter the current demographic of our program. Consequently, we re-examined our admission variables in relation to the following questions:

1. Were attempts to evaluate applicants on a diverse set of dispositions, skills, and experiences successful?
2. Were there correlations between our intake and outtake measures?
3. How can representation from equity-seeking groups be identified and used respectfully through an admissions process?

Our work toward equitable admissions procedures is guided by two concepts: Childs et al.'s (2011) notions of equity *in* and equity *through* admissions; and Guinier's (2003) notions of *sponsored* and *structural* mobility.

## Conceptual Frameworks

Equity *in* admissions refers to equity for those applying to the program. Applicants of all ethnicities, socio-economic groupings, genders, and abilities must have equal access to teacher education. This is a requirement, enforced by law, in Canada's Charter of Rights and Freedoms, section 15 (subsection 1). As such, TEPs must take care in ensuring that their admissions procedures do not bias against any particular community.

In addition, in adherence to section 15 (subsection 2) of the Charter, our program believes it is important to go beyond equitable access to privilege admission to those communities that are under-represented in public institutions. Teachers in Canada, as a community, are a traditionally homogenous group; they are middle-class and of Western European heritage (Childs & Ferguson, 2015; Ryan et al., 2009). To address this under-representation of non-Western European, non-middle class, non-cisgender, and non-abled TCs, our program is guided by Guinier's (2003) concept of *sponsored* mobility. This involves making exceptions within the admissions process for those who are under-represented or potentially biased against with regards to post-secondary involvement. In Canada, of key concern are the lack of Indigenous teachers in schools (Hare, 2018). An additional issue identified by Hopson (2014) surrounds how under-represented groups are identified in the admissions process. Hopson asserts that there is ambiguity around how demographic information is used to strive for equity in the admissions process, and that racialized teachers may be made to feel very vulnerable, since they may not want their identity to be defined by ethnicity alone.

Our program also attempts to incorporate Guinier's (2003) concept of *structural* mobility. Structural mobility is more challenging to implement, as it recognizes that the

admissions procedures themselves need to be altered to align with the program's overall focus on social justice. As such, criteria for admissions would need to favour applicants who already demonstrate a cultural sensitivity and focus on addressing inequities. This would mean that it is not enough to seek selection of under-represented groups, but to ensure that those selected have a disposition or concern toward enabling equity for students from under-represented groups. This aligns with Childs et al.'s (2011) notion of equity *through* admissions. Teacher education is one of the few post-secondary programs that need to ensure equity not only for applicants, but for the elementary and secondary (ages five to 17) students that successful applicants will most likely be teaching.

Consequently, our program aims to ensure that the structure of our admissions favours candidates with social justice predispositions while maximizing the number of candidates from equity-seeking groups that are successful. Zeichner and Flessner (2009) argue that "diverse cohorts of teacher education students and diverse faculty are needed to create the learning conditions needed to educate teachers to be successful in today's public schools" (p. 298). By implementing Guinier's (2003) sponsored and structural mobility, and concerning ourselves with Childs et al.'s (2011) focus on equity *in* and *through* admissions, we sought to find ways to maximize both an equitable access to our program and a preferential bias toward applicants with a social justice disposition. Consequently, we examined research related to teacher education admissions.

## Literature Review

### Teacher Education Admissions

To provide context to admissions to TEPs in Canada, it is important to realize that a variety of admission variables are used to determine who enters a program. The most common is the use of an applicant's GPA, followed by using written responses, reference letters, and work experience (Casey & Childs, 2011; Caskey et al., 2001; Crocker & Dibbon, 2008; Klassen & Kim, 2019). Due to the costs and time restraints of conducting behavioural interviews (e.g., "Tell us about a time when you had to work with a diverse group of students. What did you consider?"), very few programs in Canada utilize this as an admission variable (Crocker & Dibbon, 2008; Klassen & Kim, 2019). Research examining these variables has revealed concerns around validity, evaluator bias, and relia-

bility (Byrnes et al., 2003; Casey & Childs, 2011; Evans, 2017; Salingré & MacMath, 2021; Salzman, 1991). To address some of these concerns and provide an opportunity to consider a greater diversity of applicant dispositions, Holden and Kitchen (2018) posit that the Multi Mini Interview (MMI) could be an admission variable poised to address these concerns.

## **The MMI**

The MMI is often an admission variable for entrance into medical school and utilizes a series of stations with separate, individual interviewers (Rees et al., 2016). Applicants move through these stations on a strict, timed schedule. The stations attempt to assess applicant dispositions and skills such as communication, professionalism, and critical thinking (Brownell et al., 2007; Eva et al., 2004; Knorr & Hissbach, 2014; Rees et al., 2016). Interviewers are instructed to use their professional judgement to evaluate the applicant's response only. Unlike a behavioural interview, the MMI requires applicants to respond to a prompt (e.g., an article, a song, or a scenario). For example, when our program utilized the MMI, we had interviewers rate each applicant on a Likert-5 scale in relation to professionalism, communication, and critical-mindedness.

While restricted to medical school admissions, research on the MMI reveals that it measures something separate from other measures (Eva et al., 2004; Jones & Forster, 2011; Lemay et al., 2007; Patterson et al., 2016). This is important, as the more skills, dispositions, and experiences being considered during admissions, the greater the opportunity for different applicant strengths (or challenges) to be considered. To illustrate, if GPA is the only admission variable, only success in post-secondary is considered; the more diverse the measures, the better it is for diverse applicant profiles. This is important given our program's focus on admitting applicants with diverse backgrounds (equity in admissions). Studies also report minimal gender, ethnicity, or interviewer effects (Brownell et al., 2007; Knorr & Hissbach, 2014; Griffin & Wilson, 2010; Rees et al., 2016; Uijtdehaage et al., 2011). This means that when statistical tests were done to see if people of different genders or heritage, or the use of different interviewers, showed a significant difference in scoring, there were no significant differences.

Fewer studies have been conducted looking at the congruence between MMI scores and success in the program. Congruence with outcome measures is important as you want to admit those applicants with the greatest chance of success in the program, given

the high cost of the program in Canada. Kelly et al. (2014) looked at the potential for the MMI and behavioural interviews to predict success in exit exams after the first year of medical residency. The MMI results correlated with exam scores, while the behavioural interview negatively correlated with success. Jerant et al. (2019) had similar correlations with students with honours scores at the end of a one-year clerkship position. Finally, Callwood et al. (2018) found similar results when comparing the MMI in their nursing program admissions and students' scores at the end of their first year. While these results are promising, it is important to remember that participant pools were limited to students who were admitted to these programs.

Similar to the MMI, there are fewer studies examining the correlation between admission variables and success in TEPs. Using practicum reports and mentor surveys, Casey and Childs (2011) reported that neither GPA nor written essays correlated with success in students' outcome measures. While Byrnes et al. (2003) reported GPA as being not predictive of success in the program, their use of group interviews revealed significant correlations with success. Finally, MacMath & Salingré (2015), using mentor surveys at the completion of a 12-week field experience, reported that GPA, written essays, and reference letters were not correlated with success at the end of the program. In contrast, behavioural interviews used during admissions did reveal a strong correlation with success.

While many Canadian TEPs identify principles of equity as key values, these do not always result in the same rates of representation that reflect the student population (Holden & Kitchen, 2018). Based on our review of the literature, evaluation of teacher education admission is being studied more. However, very few studies look at how a program can attempt to enact concepts of equity in and equity through admissions. This is where we locate our current investigation, as we attempt to describe how our program wrestles with maximizing student success while also addressing issues of equity.

## **Methodology**

We are reporting out on the first two steps of our study, which utilized a Participatory Action Research (PAR) approach (James et al., 2008). PAR involves four key steps: (1) distinguish factors that contribute to a problem, (2) act with intent to address the problem, (3) measure the results of actions taken, and (4) reflect on the process and determine next steps. Ultimately, PAR seeks actions that make a difference. Those differences need to



have a positive influence on the status quo, resulting in a liberatory effect for what is termed as vulnerable populations. PAR is meant to act as a continuous cycle of improvement. For us, the vulnerable populations that we are concerned with are those people from communities that are traditionally under-represented in teacher education and K–12 schools.

The first step is to distinguish the problem. This step is meant to involve a variety of data from participants. The participants, for this study, are both the successful applicants to the program and the admissions committee. We utilized the quantitative data from admissions (scores for successful applicants) and critical reflections by our admissions committee. The quantitative data around our admissions process was used to evaluate correlations between and amongst admission variables (pre) and faculty mentor evaluations (post) over a 10-month post-degree TEP (post-degree meaning that applicants had already completed a four-year degree in a teachable subject area). The variables used for admissions included a MMI, evaluation of program preparation (e.g., time in K–12 classrooms, academic preparedness, international experience, etc.), and GPA. The program preparation evaluated applicants using both a resumé and academic transcript. The resumé provided information around classroom experience, or experience with children in general. The academic transcript provided a list of courses that applicants had completed. Bonus points were added to the program preparation for specific courses. For example, courses with Indigenous content and worldview, or that focused on the experiences of historically marginalized populations (e.g., 2LGBTQIA+, people of colour, disability experiences, etc.) were given a ½ point bonus. For elementary applicants, courses across a broad subject area were given a ¼ point bonus (e.g., two courses in physical education, second language learning, fine arts, etc.). At the secondary level, applicants with a second teachable subject area were given a ½ point bonus.

At the conclusion of the program, faculty mentors, who are responsible for supervising TCs during their practica (that include weekly observations over 15+ weeks), complete a 16-question, 5-point Likert scale survey evaluating candidates on their teaching (e.g., classroom management, effective teaching practices, communication, assessment and evaluation, knowledge of students, etc.), as well as their social justice disposition and their ability to think critically. These two sets of scores (admission scores, faculty mentor ratings) are compared using correlation and ANOVA tests of significance to determine those admission variables that appear to measure a variety of applicant skills, dispositions, and experiences; as well as those that may correlate with candidate success at the end of the program.

## **Data Sources**

All data came from a single, small TEP located in southern British Columbia for the 2019–20 intake year. Similar to other TEPs, the majority of applicants to our program are White, middle-class women (Childs & Ferguson, 2015; Ryan et al., 2009). On average we receive 180 applicants for 96 spots. The only data available regarding ethnicity, disability, or gender diversity was limited to what the registrar's office was willing to ask for: Indigenous heritage and male/female/do not wish to answer. When we prompted the registrar's office for additional opportunities to ask applicants, we were denied. The minimum application requirements included: specific courses (e.g., Canadian history, English composition, English literature, etc.), a minimum GPA of 2.8/4.33 (based on last 60 course credits), and a completed undergraduate degree. Once applications are screened for these minimum requirements, on average 150 applicants are invited for an interview. Completed applications result in a final score out of 10. This is made up of the GPA (out of 2), program preparation (which includes experience in schools and extra coursework, out of 4), and the MMI (out of 4). Admission offers are given to the applicants with the highest scores.

In the 2019–20 cohort, four interview stations were created. Each station had one interviewer. Applicants had two minutes to read a prompt before entering the interview room and responding for seven minutes. They repeated these steps through four interview stations. Prompts involved a scenario around cultural accommodation, a news article about authentic Indigenization of curriculum, a drawing of an ideal learning space, and a response to lyrics/music. These stations purposefully involved a variety of learning preferences. Each station was evaluated using the same three criteria. Using a five-point Likert scale, interviewers rated applicants on their professional demeanor, compassion, and communication. See Table 1 for the demographics.

Only those admitted to the program (96) were included in data analyses for ethical reasons. We only requested consent forms from those admitted to the program several months after the interviews had been completed. We felt that asking for consent on the day of the interviews constituted undue pressure on applicants trying to enter the program. The next set of quantitative data involved the post-practicum survey completed by faculty mentors who had consistently observed TCs in the field.

**Table 1***Frequencies and Descriptive Statistics*

	Years 2019–2020
Completed applications	136
Total accepted	96
Elementary	64
Sec Humanities	22
Sec Math/Science	10
# identified as women	80
# identified as men	16
Heritage <sup>a</sup>	
European	84
Indigenous	7
South Asian	5
Total successfully completed program	93

The third data source used in this study included critical reflections by members of the admission committee. Notes were kept during meetings regarding issues that were deemed as problematic. This is when we utilized our conceptual framework of equity *in* and equity *through* admissions to determine which practices were problematic. These critical reflections, combined with the quantitative data, encompass step one of PAR. We then used the results of this step to identify actions to implement (step two). The results section outlines the data we gathered, and we used that data to evaluate where changes needed to be made in our variables and procedures to increase the equity in and through our admissions.

## Results

We will be reporting first on the quantitative data of the admissions process for 2019–20, followed by the key points of our reflections. We leave the discussion to share step two of PAR where we list the actions that we took as a result of our reflections.

## Quantitative Data from the 2019–20 Admissions Process

The mean and standard deviations for the 2019–20 cohort can be found for all admission variables in Table 2.

**Table 2**

*Intake Variable Means and Standard Deviations*

	2019–2020 <i>N</i> = 96	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
GPA (out of 2)	1.18	.55
Class experience (out of 4)	2.98	.55
Interview (out of 4)	3.03	.41
Bonus	.49	.35
Total intake score (out of 10)	7.68	.99

The key areas of concern were as follows: (a) any gender and heritage effects across all variables, (b) correlations amongst intake variables, and (c) outtake correlations.

**Gender and heritage effects.** For any intake variable, it is important to investigate whether certain groups of applicants may be biased against by any variable or combination of variables to try and ensure equity in our admissions process. When looking at possible areas of discrimination, we used ANOVA tests in relation to gender and heritage against all intake variables (GPA, interview, program preparation), as well as the overall total score for all three intake variables. If the assumption of homogeneity of variance could not be assumed, a Chi-square non-parametric test was used.

For the 2019–20 year, there were no differences due to gender in relation to the GPA, overall MMI score, each of the four individual stations, each of the four interview criteria, classroom experience, bonus scores, or total scores. There were no significant differences due to heritage in relation to any intake measure, except for the scenario station,  $F(2, 93) = 4.67, p = .01$ . A Bonferroni Comparison revealed that candidates with European heritage ( $N = 84, M = 15.95, SD = 3.38$ ) scored significantly higher than candidates with Indigenous heritage ( $N = 5, M = 11.60, SD = 7.50$ ); however, great caution must be taken given the extremely low number of candidates with Indigenous heritage.

**Correlations between intake variables.** To examine whether our admission variables considered a diverse set of dispositions, skills, and experiences, we examined the correlations between the variables themselves. Table 3 details these correlations. These results were concerning as the MMI correlated with program preparation, Pearson's  $r(96) = .22, p < .05$ . This means that we were potentially measuring the same things in both variables, which was not the intention. We interpret this cautiously, as data from the previous year lacked correlation between these two, Pearson's  $r(93) = .06, p = .60$ . Additional monitoring is required.

**Table 3**

*Inter-correlations Between Intake Variables*

Years	Variables	1	2	3	4	5
2019–2020	GPA	—	.19	.07	-.14	.60 <sup>a</sup>
	Interview		—	.21 <sup>b</sup>	-.19	.56 <sup>a</sup>
	Class exp			—	-.15	.65 <sup>a</sup>
	Bonus				—	.14
	Total					—

<sup>a</sup>Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

**Correlations with outcome measures.** As detailed in Table 4 below, when compared against faculty mentor ratings on 14 goal areas (i.e., classroom management, effective teaching, connecting with students, etc.), social justice dispositions ( $N = 96, M = 4.55, SD = .66$ ), and critical thinking skills ( $N = 96, M = 4.42, SD = .69$ ), the MMI had the strongest number of correlations. The important correlations of note are between the MMI and the overall total outcome score (Pearson's  $r(96) = .29, p < .05$ ), social justice disposition (Pearson's  $r(96) = .24, p = .02$ ), and critical thinking skills (Pearson's  $r(96) = .21, p = .04$ ). Program preparation only correlated with a social justice disposition (Pearson's  $r(96) = .20, p = .05$ ). These results indicate value in the MMI for selecting candidates with the greatest potential for success. In addition, when thinking about equity through admissions, the MMI shows the greatest promise.

**Table 4***Correlations Between Intake Variables and Outcome Variables*

Intake	1*	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	Total
						2019–2020									
GPA	.04	.00	.02	.04	.04	.17	-.11	.16	.07	.02	.04	-.10	.05	-.11	.04
Interview	.17	.22 <sup>b</sup>	.22 <sup>b</sup>	.26 <sup>a</sup>	.28 <sup>a</sup>	.28 <sup>a</sup>	.15	.20	.29 <sup>a</sup>	.21 <sup>b</sup>	.13	.18	.22 <sup>b</sup>	.25 <sup>b</sup>	.29 <sup>a</sup>
Program Prep.	.14	.02	.00	.04	-.04	.03	.15	.01	-.06	.01	-.01	.20	.14	.06	.07
Bonus	.05	-.06	-.09	-.13	-.06	-.10	-.07	.09	.01	-.04	.04	-.09	.06	-.02	-.05
Total score	.21 <sup>b</sup>	.07	.07	.10	.11	.17	.06	.21 <sup>b</sup>	.12	.08	.08	.08	.21 <sup>b</sup>	.08	.16

\* 1=professionalism, 2=connecting with students, 3=classroom management, 4=reflective practice, 5=working with feedback, 6=clear and observable vision, 7=knowledge of students, 8=knowledge of content, 9=effective communication, 10=effective teaching practices, 11=reliable assessment, 12=inclusive and individualized, 13=working with guardians, 14=contribute to school community.

<sup>a</sup> Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed), <sup>b</sup> Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed)

After sharing these quantitative results with the admissions committee to initiate discussions and reflections around equity in and through admissions, we recognized several issues that needed to be addressed in future admission cycles.

## **Critical Reflections**

The critical reflections of the admissions committee represented the second half of the data for this first step in this PAR. As noted in the conceptual framework above, the purpose of this research was to identify how to better achieve equity in and through admissions. Using that lens, the admissions committee evaluated their experiences, along with the quantitative data, to produce the results below.

***Equity in admissions.*** Equity in admissions is concerned with maximizing the number of under-represented groups in teacher education. There were four areas of concern that emerged in our committee reflections: (a) designated seats for Indigenous applicants only, (b) inconsistency in how we identify applicant heritage, (c) lack of ways to recognize under-represented groups other than heritage, and (d) interviewers lacking diverse representation.

***Designated seats for Indigenous applicants only.*** When focusing on the qualifications and social identities of applicants, we had reserved 10% of our available seats for applicants with Indigenous heritage, but not for any other under-represented group. This allowed us to favour applications through a process of sponsored mobility (Guinier, 2003). We were able to make some exceptions for these students in terms of usual criteria in order to achieve more equitable results in our student demographic. Examples of exceptions could include accepting a lower-than-required GPA, waiving a prerequisite course, and concessions made around time spent in schools. What we noticed though is that not all of these admitted students ended up being successful in completing the program, leading us to examine the critical supports needed throughout the program itself. We needed to provide a recommendation to address this with faculty.

***Inconsistency in how we identify applicant heritage.*** There was also inconsistency in how we identified applicants with Indigenous heritage. When we looked at how we identified Indigenous heritage, we utilized a variety of strategies: applicants may have checked a box upon admission disclosing Indigenous ancestry, others made reference to it in their resumé, and, for those who had done neither but had met with the advisor, were included. An additional concern was that the solicitation of demographic information by

the Registrar's Office only included Indigenous ancestry. However, we still wanted to gather information about other under-represented groups, at the very least students of Asian or South Asian ancestry (given the demographics of our local schools). Consequently, we relied on information from the advisor, if applicants had attended a meeting, and we sometimes also just based it on the applicant's name. We realized in our reflections that this equated to racial profiling. This was exceptionally problematic, regardless of intent. We realized that what was most critical was that applicants needed to choose to self-identify, we could not make that decision for them. Self-identification is a complex issue. There are many reasons why someone from an under-represented group would choose not to self-identify. In our committee discussions, we shared many examples of previous students who had wrestled with self-identifying. They were concerned with the fact that they may be judged solely on the box they checked, rather than the skillsets and dispositions they brought to the program. Applicants might have also been conflicted about whether or not to disclose this information and could be uncertain of how this information might be used. This concern was also raised by Hopson (2014).

In addition, given the restraints of the Registrar's Office, if applicants were representative of an under-represented group other than Indigenous heritage, they would not have any means to communicate this to the program given our current admission variables. We wanted the applicant to be in a position to share this information within the context of knowing why this information was being solicited.

**Lack of ways to recognize under-represented groups other than heritage.**

Beyond heritage, under-represented groups in teacher education include LGBTQ+, males in primary, varying physical abilities, lower socio-economic status, single parent, recent immigrant, and first generation post-secondary students. We were limited by the Registrar's Office as they would only provide the means to identify Indigenous heritage and binary male/female genders. This was problematic, as none of our admission variables provided the opportunity for applicants to share more detailed information.

**Interviewers who lacked diverse representation.** The interviewers for the MMI were recruited on a volunteer basis (with the exception of faculty members of the department). Their volunteer commitment included a three-hour training on a Thursday evening and a minimum of a four-hour shift that took place either Friday evenings or Saturdays. For the 2019–20 admissions cycle, the demographics included 17 interviewers of which 16 were White, and one was of Indigenous heritage; 11 identified as female, 6 identified



as male. While this was representative of the teachers in our local school district, it was not representative of the students within those districts. This was a problem for a program seeking to increase diversity. Part of the problem, we realized, was we were giving priority to those familiar with our program. We realized that if we wanted to change the demographics of our program, we needed to make this the priority in selecting interviewers, as opposed to having familiarity with the program. We needed to make concerted efforts to look beyond our program.

***Equity through admissions.*** Equity through admissions focuses on ensuring that applicants who enter the program have dispositions toward social justice and supporting students from under-represented groups. Childs et al. (2011) discuss the importance of choosing applicants that are able to work with equity-seeking groups. To us, this ability requires a strong disposition toward social justice and equity. To examine this issue, the admission committee reflected on two issues: (a) correlations between intake and outcome variables, and (b) the ability of intake variables to address dispositions for social justice comprehensively.

***Correlations between intake and outcome variables.*** For this issue, the admissions committee looked at the quantitative data gathered from the 2019–20 admissions year. We were concerned that the MMI was significantly correlated with program preparation<sup>1</sup>. To us, this meant that these two measures examined potentially similar things. Given that we wanted to look as broadly as possible at each applicant, we actually wanted no correlations amongst intake variables. However, we were encouraged that the MMI correlated with the outcome measures of social justice dispositions and critical thinking skills. Program preparation correlated with social justice dispositions only. While these results were concerning, we did have evidence that both the MMI and the program preparation variable had value. We chose to have these remain in place as intake variables and commit to monitoring them in future years.

***Ability of intake variables to address dispositions for social justice comprehensively.*** Beyond looking at the quantitative data, the admissions committee also reflected on the content of the variables themselves. When we looked at the MMI stations in the 2019–20 admissions year (news article on Indigenous content, a scenario with

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1 Interestingly, this was the opposite result of the previous year, when the MMI correlated with GPA, but not program preparation.

cultural accommodation, a drawing of an ideal learning space, and reflection on lyrics/song), we were happy that both Indigenous content and a variety of learning preferences had been included. We committed to continuing with that. Given the recent global events around Black Lives Matter, we were concerned that none of our stations addressed anti-racism explicitly.

The admissions committee also critically reflected on the bonus points given for certain courses prior to applying to the program. While points were given for Indigenous content, that did not encompass all the dispositions of social justice. For example, courses on critical race theory, diversity, gender issues, or ability issues were not included. This was a concern for the committee. Alternatively, the committee was comfortable with the bonus marks for a variety of subject areas for elementary applicants, as this preparation aligned with elementary candidates having to teach a variety of subject areas. In contrast, the quantitative data revealed that the bonus marks did not correlate with any of the out-take measures, including social justice dispositions or critical thinking skills. Further analysis revealed that the one-point bonus given to secondary applicants for an additional teachable subject area was skewing the data (all other bonus points were  $\frac{1}{2}$  point or less). Originally, our program gave this bonus point to aid program coordinators in finding practicum placements, as having two teachable subjects allowed for greater flexibility. This no longer was a priority for the department. The admissions committee felt strongly that intake variables needed to prioritize equity through admissions rather than ease of practicum placement.

Having reviewed the quantitative results and the concerns of the admissions committee, we turn ourselves to the second step of PAR: what action to take (James et al., 2008).

## Discussion

We investigated three questions: (1) Were attempts to evaluate applicants on a diverse set of dispositions, skills, and experiences successful? (2) Were there correlations between our intake and outtake measures? (3) How can representativeness from equity-seeking groups be identified and used respectfully through an admissions process? To accomplish this, we used Childs et al.'s (2011) notions of equity *in* and equity *through* admissions. Below we outline the actions decided on by the admissions committee.

## Equity in Admissions

The admissions committee identified four areas of concern: (a) designated seats for Indigenous applicants only, (b) inconsistency in how we identify applicant heritage, (c) lack of ways to recognize under-represented groups other than heritage, and (d) interviewers who lacked diverse representation.

**Concern #1: Designated seats for Indigenous applicants only.** The committee decided that it was important to keep the designated seats for applicants with Indigenous heritage, as this relates directly to Calls to Action 62 and 63 of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2015). To maximize the success of candidates with Indigenous heritage in the program, the department would create a Student Support Team to identify, monitor, and support students who may experience difficulty in the program. This action would benefit all candidates.

**Concerns #2 and 3: Inconsistency in how we identify applicant heritage and recognize under-represented groups.** When looking at ways to identify applicants from equity-seeking groups and provide them increased opportunities to enter, we quickly realized that we would not receive support from the Registrar's Office. That meant that we needed to add something to our admission variables to gather this information. We decided to invite applicants to submit an optional third page to their resumé. We would provide the following prompt:

The...program is committed to social justice and anti-racism. With the goal of creating a community of teacher candidates who more accurately reflect the diversity of students in our K-12 public schools, we are seeking to increase representation from diverse communities. Applicants have the option of attaching an additional page to their resumé that describes the ways in which they see themselves addressing this deficiency in the K-12 school system.

For those applicants whose third page identified themselves as being: (a) Indigenous, Black, or a Person of Colour (IBPOC); (b) a member of the LGBTQ+ community; or (c) an individual with a physical disability, they would receive an additional ½ point toward their total intake score. For those applicants whose third page identified themselves as being: (a) someone from a lower socio-economic community, (b) a single parent, (c)

a recent immigrant, (d) a first-generation post-secondary student, or (e) someone who identifies as male applying to the elementary program, they would receive an additional  $\frac{1}{4}$  point toward their total intake score. We decided on the use of bonus points over sponsored mobility (Guinier, 2003). This would have involved assigning designated seats to a variety of equity-seeking groups, like what we did with students with Indigenous heritage. Guinier discussed four drawbacks to sponsored mobility. These include enabling unconscious bias from admissions staff to continue, assuming that individuals do not change in relation to their environment, perpetuating reliance on the same admissions processes that enabled the inequity in the first place, and making it easier to not critically examine one's own admissions criteria. As an admissions committee, we believed that it was important to examine our admission policies and criteria continually and critically, recognizing that there was a purpose to those criteria. Consequently, we avoided sponsored mobility, and instead implemented bonus points that were significant enough to move someone from the middle of the road to a higher category. For example, a  $\frac{1}{2}$  point bonus could move someone from probably being admitted to being admitted.

**Concern #4: Interviewers who lacked diverse representation.** It was important to recognize that the MMI interviewers were volunteers dedicating upwards of eight hours over and on top of regular workdays. This potentially limited our pool of interviewers. However, when we first began seeking volunteer interviewers, we placed priority on those people who were knowledgeable of our program. This included principals and teachers who had worked with TCs in the field. Given that we had a lack of members of equity-seeking groups in the program, it was understandable that the interviewer pool was equally lacking in diversity. As a result, we decided to change our priority. Rather than seeking volunteer interviewers familiar with our program, we placed priority on seeking out volunteers from equity-seeking groups. To do this, we decided to send an invitation to all local principals specifically requesting interviewers from minoritized groups. In this way, we hoped to address Guinier's (2003) concern over enabling unconscious bias to continue. Having looked at our concerns related to equity in admissions, we now turn to concerns raised around equity through admissions.

## **Equity Through Admission**

Three concerns were identified in relation to equity through admissions: (a) while the MMI stations did include a scenario about culture and different learning preferences, it lacked any focus on anti-racism; (b) the MMI correlated with the program preparation; and (c) bonus points were given for courses with Indigenous content and breadth of preparation only.

**Concern #1: Lack of anti-racism in MMI stations.** Including a station focused on Indigenization or decolonization, as well as addressing a variety of learning preferences, was important to continue. We decided that one station had to also address the topic of anti-racism and/or critical race theory going forward.

**Concern #2: MMI correlated with program preparation.** Having the MMI correlate with program preparation suggested that we were measuring similar skills and/or dispositions. This was the opposite of what we were hoping to achieve. However, the MMI did correlate with outcome measures, including evaluations of candidates' social justice dispositions and critical thinking skills. The same could not be said for program preparation. Given these confounding results, we decided to continue with the MMI and commit ourselves to ongoing monitoring of these intake variables.

**Concern #3: Limited bonus points.** We identified two issues in relation to assigning our bonus points. First, we assigned bonus points for courses with Indigenous content, but not to courses in critical race theory or anti-racism. Second, we provided one full bonus point for secondary applicants for an additional teachable subject area, which tended to skew results in favour of that breadth. Originally, we put this into practice because of challenges around placing students in practicum. This almost guaranteed those applicants with two teachable subject areas a spot in the program, even though it had nothing to do with our priorities around social justice, Indigenization, and/or anti-racism. Given that placements could still be an issue, especially for secondary humanities, we assigned ½ point rather than one full point for qualifying in a second teachable subject area. We also decided to give bonus marks for courses around anti-racism, critical race theory, and diversity in this category for both elementary and secondary applicants.

## Contributions to the Field

“Racism itself is institutional, structural, and systemic” (Kendi, 2019, p. 18).

Returning to our three research questions, we had mixed evidence around our ability to evaluate applicants on a diverse set of dispositions, skills, and experiences. Given the correlations that were observed in our intake and outtake measures, further study was warranted. Through our discussion of equity in and equity through admissions, we identified a series of small steps that we will take toward respectfully increasing representation from members of equity-seeking groups in our admissions process (step three of PAR).

Based on our work so far, the critical actions we are taking going forward include:

1. Continuing to use the MMI. The multiple station approach enables us to prompt applicants in relation to anti-racism, decolonization, and social justice. We are also able to ensure that a variety of mediums are used (e.g., news articles, images, drawings, music, etc.).
2. Ensuring that applicants are always given the right to choose if they wish to be identified as a member of an equity-seeking group.
3. Purposefully and transparently seek interviewers and applicants from equity-seeking groups in all communications.
4. Ensuring that all evaluation tools and stations are reviewed by members from equity-seeking groups.
5. Providing some way of addressing (or compensating or equalizing) the inequities that applicants have faced on their journey to applying to teacher education. For example, someone having to work two jobs to pay for school will not have as much classroom volunteerism as someone who is financially supported in their schooling.

Admissions procedures and policies act as a gateway and are therefore one of the most critical to address. In this article, we used Childs et al.'s (2011) concepts of equity in and through admissions to move beyond welcoming statements. It is not enough to say that “we welcome applicants from diverse backgrounds.”

In no way have we solved the problem; addressing racism and colonialism will never be complete. Each of us on the admissions committee is a cisgender, White, middle-class educator who has grown up within these systems and we each have ongoing learning

to attend to. However, still needing to learn does not give us a pass on inaction. In this article, we attempted to demonstrate how we started these critical reflections on admissions policies and procedures and how we are attempting to enact change through a three-year Action Research project. These changes are small, but focused on systemic change. We encourage all institutions and programs to critically examine their admissions policies and procedures and take action, even if it's small, toward a more equitable teaching force in Canada. This article is meant to start conversations about what can be DONE at institutions across Canada. What are your admission variables? Who is getting into your programs? Do the successful candidates in your programs mirror the schools around you? If not, what are you doing about it? Programs need to first gather the data necessary to even evaluate if their policies and procedures are equitable. Then they can start to look at how they assess and how to make that process more equitable and decolonized.

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