



Distance Education: New Paradigm For a Literacy Program

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Abstract

Canada's ethnocultural profile has become increasingly multiethnic and multicultural. The last national census revealed that over two hundred different ethnic groups now inhabit Canada's 13 provinces and territories. Since 1901, Canada has welcomed 13.4 million immigrants. Before 1961, 90.4 % of all immigrants came from European countries. Since then, the sociocultural demographics of immigrants have changed significantly. In fact between 1991 and 2001, of the 2.2 million immigrants who were admitted to Canada (the highest number for any decade in the past century), 58% came from Asia, including the Middle East, 20% from Europe, 11% from the Caribbean, Central and South America, 8% from Africa, and 3% from the United States.

For years, Ontario has welcomed the bulk of these newly landed immigrants, and currently about half the province's population is made up of people from minority ethnocultural group. Consequently, Ontario now hosts a multicultural society within its provincial borders and educational institutions. Ontario's educational institutions are now faced with the challenging task of educating an increasingly diversified student body, of which the majority no longer originates from Europe. Consequently, our attempts as educators to interpret, and then teach the provincial curriculum to ethnocultural students remains an ongoing endeavor.

As public educators, we are expected to understand and validate the differing ways in which various ethnocultural students respond to a distance education program. It is important for us to acknowledge that our personal backgrounds—cultural, racial, gender, sexual, class, linguistic, and ethnic identities—play a critical role in the ways we respond to the changing ethnocultural landscape of Ontario classrooms programs.

It seems important therefore that teachers in a distance education program reflect on why understanding the cultural nature and meaning of the "what" and "how" they teach, with respect to worldviews, can affect the learning outcomes of students.

This study examines the teaching and learning strategies that underpin the specific ethnocultural issues that surround students in a distance education program. These strategies seem to take root amidst a culturally responsive pedagogy.