

EDITORIAL: PREPARING TEACHERS FOR DIVERSITY IN THE  
NEOLIBERAL AND NEOCONSERVATIVE “NORTH” — RE-IMAGINING  
TEACHER EDUCATION

The very first issue that the *MJE/RSEM* published sixty years ago was on activism. How appropriate that sixty years later, to mark the longevity of the journal’s contribution to the field of education, we are publishing a special issue that also engages with activism. When we, as guest editors, first issued the call for this special issue, sociocultural and political changes were transforming the global landscape of education (Nieto, 2017; Sleeter, 2024; Vertovec, 2023)—and nearing the issue’s publication, they are doing so again, and with renewed force. Teachers have increasingly been expected to critically understand, respond to, and teach through and for diversity in ways that go beyond surface-level approaches. Recognizing that diversity is a complex construct that encompasses but is not limited to culture, language, religion, gender, sex, age, ability, race, and ethnicity (Banks & Banks, 2019), educators face the challenge of fostering inclusive and equitable learning environments. This involves not only acknowledging and valuing students’ diverse identities and experiences and ensuring that students’ cultural and linguistic experiences and perspectives are reflected in the curriculum, but implementing pedagogical approaches that provide meaningful learning opportunities for all students (Beaudoin, 2024).

Our special issue focuses on reimagining teacher education in Northern contexts in times of growing neo-conservatism and neoliberalism that threaten the expectations mapped out in our opening paragraph. Our particular focus is on the “North”, broadly defined as the Global North, though not necessarily understood geographically; we consider perspectives from diverse sites: Canada, Finland, Germany, Iceland, and Norway, this in the form of nine articles and one Note from the Field. The issue is timely, as neo-conservatism and neo-liberalism gain new ground globally and in education. Neo-conservative groups tend to construe diversity as a threat to political and social stability, framing it negatively as

interfering with the vision of one nation-people-language (Nowicka, 2018; Perry & Scrivens, 2019). Such ideologies impact the aspiration to inclusion, well-being, and sense of belonging of students and teachers of diverse and minoritized backgrounds in education (Shirazi & Jaffe-Walter, 2021). Diversity in education is also being undermined by neoliberal policies and discourses, which (mis)appropriate education for marketing purposes so as to benefit institutions, rather than by confronting and changing “racial and other forms of inequalities that exist in our social system” (Kubota, 2015, p. 9).

We turn to explaining how each article and one Note contribute to this special issue.

Benediktsson’s study explores career aspirations and educational experiences of seven Danish-born student teachers of a transnational background in their final year of study who will become teachers in compulsory schools in Denmark. Through interviews, Benediktsson found that the student teachers, though generally satisfied with their experiences, reported encountering different forms of discrimination in their programs. The teachers were nevertheless determined to challenge social injustice and bring positive change to the compulsory education system.

Lukala and Dervin investigate the positioning of “the migrant student” in a European Union-Finland project which aims to prepare teachers for social justice migrant education. Given that the project operates within a neoliberal economic-political supranational institution, the authors were interested in examining potential tensions between principles of social justice, on the one hand, and neoliberalism, on the other hand, as reflected in project documents. The findings revealed that “the migrant student” is often portrayed as different, disadvantaged, and problematic, highlighting the issue of othering. The article addresses the consequences of such portrayals and offers recommendations for the ethical treatment of marginalized groups.

Keeping with the focus on migrant students, through a case study and narrative analysis, Pélissier and Théberge research whether and how educational practices in Ontario’s French-language schools are adapted to support newcomer students amid growing cultural diversity. As immigration reshapes the Ontario Francophonie, sustaining linguistic and cultural vitality depends on inclusive, responsive schooling. Despite existing policies promoting diversity and equity, the complexity of minority and multilingual contexts demands deeper understandings. Pélissier and Théberge identify practices that foster inclusion and

academic success, while highlighting the role of interculturality in meeting the varied needs of immigrant students and that can therefore constructively inform teacher training.

At a time when neoliberalism and neoconservatism compel teachers to focus narrowly on their own contexts, Strong-Wilson and Al-Madhoun ask how cross-national conversations between Canada and the Northern countries can break down boundaries and provide important insights for teaching to social justice. The authors discuss how to critically introduce and respond to literature's presence in the elementary and secondary classroom, especially given national identities formed through Northern/Nordic exceptionalism.

Brinkmann and Gerwers analyzed how identity-based pedagogies focused on diversity and inclusion can relate to student teachers' beliefs about resisting neoliberal and neoconservative structures in the educational system. Eleven student teachers participated in an asynchronous discussion forum in a university-level Spanish language pedagogies course; the discussion was then analyzed. The researchers found that the student teachers were engaging with different aspects of diversity—equity, othering, and agency—and that this was especially the case for student teachers who had personal experiences of poverty and racism.

Drawing on the authors' experiences as professor or student of French as a Second Language at a university in Ontario, Canada, Lamaison and Sarchese suggest ethical and cultural accommodations to support the learning of D/deaf and hard-of-hearing individuals in oral language classes. The study was informed by a critical analysis of existing resources for teachers at Ontario universities. The analysis revealed that despite commitments to social justice through legal guarantees for people with disabilities, a large number of individuals continue to encounter major barriers to inclusion. The authors provide pedagogical and practical advice for better accommodating D/deaf and hard-of-hearing students in both classroom and online settings.

Fuglseth addressed how teachers can respond to and resist growing neoliberal and neoconservative orientations in Norwegian education. The author revisits *Bildung*-pedagogy, a theory rooted in Enlightenment ideals of autonomy, responsibility, and diversity, to suggest how old principles can meet new challenges, particularly regarding religious and cultural diversity in Norway. Through a textual analysis of the Norwegian national curriculum, Fuglseth shows that the curriculum reflects neither clear neoliberal nor neoconservative models. A new theoretical model of knowledge presentation for teachers is proposed.

Potvin, Tremblay, Doré, Low, Lefrançois, and Demers explored the impact of Quebec's *Loi sur la laïcité de l'État* (Loi 21/Bill 21), passed in 2019 amid rising tensions over religious neutrality and reasonable accommodation. Extending restrictions on religious symbols to teachers and school leaders, Bill 21 reflects broader neoconservative trends limiting individual rights. Using a sociology of law approach, the authors analyzed a 2020 survey of 972 education professionals and students, results from which highlighted the negative impact of the Bill. The authors critically situate the findings within broader debates over secularism, diversity, and rights in Quebec.

In Iceland, Óskarsdóttir and Emilsson Peskova focus on the need to prepare student teachers to work with learners from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds in schools. Using a policy framework analysis, the authors argue that effectively practicing inclusive pedagogy in multicultural and multilingual school environments – where neoliberal and neoconservative influences are increasingly present – requires developing teachers' knowledge, awareness, and perspectives on diversity, as well as equipping them with robust pedagogical tools.

Finally, the special issue includes a Note from the Field by Miquelon. We appropriately conclude with the student. Miquelon reflects on reader autobiography as a genre that can be used in the classroom to enhance students' personal engagement with their reading. By promoting cultural diversity in the literary corpus, this autobiographical approach offers students opportunities to see themselves reflected in their school readings, all the while discovering diverse life paths.

We hope you will enjoy reading this special issue.

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