

Return to School 2021: Equity, Diversity and Inclusion

Although Covid-19 is relevant to us presently, and the foreseeable future, this resource will still be applicable beyond this pandemic to help support empowered teaching, the conditions for youth agency, and ultimately social change. It is written with the Physical and Health Educator in mind, but for the entire school community as well.

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INTRODUCTION

As we edge closer to students being back in classrooms, it is of critical importance to consider how young people have been affected by the discovery of Indigenous children's bodies on the grounds of former residential schools, racism-fueled violence, the continual uncovering of discriminatory and racist practices within our colonial systems, and their consumption of the media and social media coverage of the outpouring of emotion and protests calling for justice for marginalized communities.

All of this has occurred atop of a global pandemic. The data shows that COVID-19 is not an equal opportunity disease. It has disproportionately impacted Black, Indigenous and communities that are living in poverty and the intersection of those identities. COVID-19 and additionally surfaced and widened the long-standing inequities. The cumulative effect has no doubt affected the students that will be walking through your school doors.

No two people have lived through the COVID-19 pandemic in the same way. The current economic and political state of the world, the disruption to routines and uncertainty due to COVID-19 have caused added stress, trauma, and confusion for many students and these distressing **feelings may have been disproportionately compounded** for racialized, Black, Indigenous, Women, those living in poverty, students with disabilities and the intersection of any of those identities.

2020 has been an unprecedented and challenging year but also a catalyst for change and hope.



"No two people have lived through the COVID-19 pandemic in the same way."

Our classrooms do not operate in a vacuum - we must be empathetic and understanding of what students may have experienced, seen and heard over the past several months. COVID-19 and its impacts has only revealed the ongoing structural inequities that have existed in our society for centuries. PHE Canada is committed to supporting social justice, diversity and inclusive education within Physical and Health Education. This commitment is shared by Vancouver School Board Trustee [Jennifer Reddy](#) who said in a [CTV News interview](#) this past summer that “anti-racism learning should be strengthened to include equity, diversity and inclusion lessons and discussion within elementary health classes... What I’ve learned as a trustee from young people, young Black learners in our school district, is that they want to learn more from an elementary age and want their peers to learn more from an elementary age.”

We have heard the same call from PHE Educators across this country who have been inspired to elevate their own commitment to equity. **While PHE Canada recognizes that the legacies of colonialism, slavery, patriarchy and heteronormativity are embedded, this resource aims to support educators in providing students with the knowledge and tools to respond to oppression and marginalization and understand its complex causes.**

Change starts with oneself - Understanding diversity is a journey that begins at a personal level. It is important to understand your social identity and social location by reflecting on your own experiences and how they may differ from your students. This self-reflection leads to cultural humility and then cultural safety.

CULTURAL HUMILITY

Cultural humility involves listening without judgment and being open to learning from and about others. Cultural humility requires us to learn about our own culture and our biases and is the building block to cultural safety. It is important to understand that many biases are implicit - that is, they impact our understanding and decisions without even realizing it.

CULTURAL SAFETY

Cultural safety is an outcome of cultural humility, defined and experienced by those who receive our service [the students in our classrooms] – that is, they feel safe within all intersections of their identity. Cultural safety requires an acknowledgment that we are all bearers of culture and carry our own attitudes, beliefs, assumptions, and values, and is based on respectful engagement that can help students find paths to well-being.

As Educators you have power and privilege - acknowledging this is a critical and important first step. We encourage you to consider your personal history, your pedagogical beliefs and approaches, knowledge of diversity, equity and social justice issues, knowledge of students, assumptions about learning, assumptions about knowledge, beliefs about society contribute to this.

“Those with power are frequently least aware of-or least willing to acknowledge-its existence. Those with less power are often most aware of its existence.”

- [Dr Benedicta-Egbo](#), University of Windsor

The Canadian Centre for Diversity and Inclusion has created a [toolkit](#) to help educators explore their power and privilege. It includes key questions and classroom scenarios, to start your diversity and inclusion journey.

Please also find [Dr. Benedicta-Egbo's checklist](#) (coming soon), including areas of self-reflection and sample questions on our webpage, to help begin the journey to understanding yourself and your place.

To begin, here are some key areas that we can start to question as we learn to understand diversity.

- What values and beliefs do I have as a result of my own personal history?
- What do I know about the values and beliefs of my students?
- What do I know about different types of knowledge systems?
- How does the way I use knowledge to construct meaning differ from that of my students?



WHAT DOES CULTURAL SAFETY LOOK LIKE IN THE CLASSROOM?

Cyril Indome, high school Physical and Health Educator in Winnipeg's Louis Riel School Division, in reading the drafts of this document told PHE Canada "as Phys Ed teachers we have the opportunity to address Equity, Diversity and Inclusion in our physical and health curricula head on. We don't need to embedded this in a game."



(Cyril Indome)

Below are some helpful hints of how to create a culturally safe in-person or remote learning environment this fall:

First weeks of school:

- **Reflect on your own perspectives and biases** as they relate to your teaching and lessons. Think about your background, your home life, communication style, your values and your beliefs, and evaluate what experiences and styles you may not be familiar with.
- **Learn about your school's community and its families** - What are some of the benefits and challenges associated with your school's location? Consider how the experiences and backgrounds of your school community will affect patterns of behaviour, expression, values, beliefs and communication.
- **Ask your school leaders and administrators for the school and board plan** to ensure that diversity, equity and inclusion is planned, coordinated and properly resourced so that as an educator, you are empowered in making your classroom an equitable and safe space.
- Ask yourself, **what does my classroom look like, sound like and feel like when it is equitable, diverse and inclusive** and when instruction is responsive to the full range of student diversity?
- Empower yourself by reviewing some of the additional resources listed below to **expand your horizons** and toolkit.
- Recognize that becoming an educator who creates cultural safety may mean an **unlearning** process for you and students. This may mean unlearning and relearning historical information, cultural beliefs, and ways of knowing.
- This process may be controversial and uncomfortable. Be courageous.
- Ensure that you have **teaching resources and materials reflective of your school community and Canadian diversity** with a focus on Indigenous and Black voices.

First month of school:

- **Get to know your students** - the more you know about each student, the more insight you gain in how to best support their learning and development.
- Use [trauma-informed](#) and anti-racist approaches to guide your initial classroom get to know you conversations. For example, rather than asking students about their summers, ask them about what they are looking forward to this school year.
- Work on **developing meaningful relationships with your students**. Listen to what they have to say and give them space to share their personal experiences.
- Allow students to do this both publicly (small group or large class discussions) and privately (journals, exit slips, email, Microsoft forms).
- View students' diverse cultures and first languages as a strength while also being mindful not to treat students as representatives of "their people" leading to feelings of being othered.
- Students need the skills to navigate unjust realities. Take initiative and reach out to all students individually. Students may bring this to an uncomfortable place – know that change requires humility, time and most importantly effort – it just needs to be done responsibly.
- **Have students contribute to the setting the ground rules** at the beginning of the school year and be sure to include equity, diversity and inclusion within them. Reassess ground rules every few weeks. Involve students in the assessment and reflection of how ground rules are being adhered to. If we truly value it, we'll continue to revisit this.
- Develop **clear methods of communication** to connect and disseminate information to students and families in diverse ways (newsletters, emails, via the student, etc.) in multiple languages.
- Prevent triggering students and focus on what you can do to support each and every student.



When lesson planning:

- What considerations need to be in place to **ensure PHE is accessible and inclusive**, in particular for those who are most marginalized or whose needs and identities are rarely centered? When it comes to families who are struggling financially, what can educators do to help? When students have intersectionalities, what additional considerations will this year bring - will there for example, be adequate teaching assistance?
- Social-emotional learning (SEL) including self-awareness, social awareness, self-management, relationship skills, and responsible decision making, can help foster courageous conversations.
- Of equal importance, schools and educators will need to **foster a culture of safety and belonging for all students**.
 - **Embed student centered and inquiry-based learning into your lesson plans** to unlock student's individual potential and meet them where they are at. Use current topics to foster social awareness.
 - Provide students opportunities to reflect on identity and equity to build self-awareness. **Give choices and promote student agency** by involving each and every student in decision-making processes and goal setting.
 - Continue to **promote autonomy, challenge by choice, productive struggle, and problem-solving** for each and every student. Provide intentional attention to students who come from groups that have been historically marginalized.
 - Confirm that all teacher led, remote and **online classrooms are secure**.
 - **Use new social distancing guidelines** as an opportunity to try new activities and sports that you haven't done in the past. Could Cricket be incorporated into your classes? What about various Indigenous dances?
 - Think beyond your typical activities to **diversify your lesson plans**. Question whether your materials are culturally diverse and inclusive of the 3 distinct Indigenous groups in Canada (FNMI).



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To be sure...

Approaching Equity Diversity and Inclusion head on within Physical and Health Education will not only support the development of life skills, it will also prepare students to become the changemakers and citizens our society needs.



Equity

Equity is a just, fair and principled approach to uphold equal treatment for all. It does not just mean equal treatment for all, it means acknowledging and dismantling the barriers that cause people to experience things differently.

Diversity

Diversity has many facets that intersect, such as race, ethnicity, gender, gender identity and expression, socio-economic status, nationality, citizenship, sexual orientation, ability, age, family status, religion, and language. It also refers to the unseen dimensions of identity - beliefs, ideologies, world views, and knowledge systems.

Inclusion

Inclusion means that all people have the right to be valued, appreciated and respected as members of your classroom and school community. Fostering a sense of inclusion is critical for supporting all students.

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- Define, discuss, equity in an age appropriate, respectful way with students. Great opportunity for them to learn about this concept and provide them the tools to consider equity in their decision making.
- When in school, be cognizant of asking students to bring additional outdoor clothing or personal equipment kits as this may limit their ability to participate fully.
- Students will have different access to technology, space and equipment. Be conscious of this when planning activities and timing of classes, trying to **use as little space and equipment as possible**.
- Step up during a professional development day at the start of the year to ensure equity, diversity and inclusion a focus at your school.
- Work with all staff members to develop a school equity strategy. A comprehensive approach utilized by all staff members will result in a better experience for students who feel marginalized or oppressed. This is also an opportunity to provide students with a voice and engage them in the development of this plan.
- Critique the selecting learning materials and approaches against the current sociopolitical and racial context.

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It is very important to recognize your own identity. What are you bringing into the classroom that will shape your teaching and classroom culture? Hamachek writes,

“Teachers teach not only a curriculum of study, they also become part of it. The subject matter they teach is mixed with the content of their personalities and experiences” (as cited in Gay, 2013¹).

¹ Gay, G. (2013). Teaching To and Through Cultural Diversity. Curriculum Inquiry, 43(1), 48-70. doi: 10.1111/curi.12002

Racism and discrimination do not only impact students, but Black, Indigenous and racialized teachers as well. According to Rohan Thompson, Clinical Social Work/Therapist, MSW, RSW with Breakthrough Counselling Services and Wellness and Workplace Equity Manager with Peel District School Board,

“It impacts their sense of belonging, sense of safety, mental health and opportunities for promotion”. This can lead to increased stress and anxiety, which can negatively impact teacher performance. Teachers who are under chronic stress have been shown to have less effective classroom management strategies, lack clear teaching instruction for students and have a lower ability to create safe and nurturing classrooms for their students. Teachers and educators who experience racism in the workplace, have the stress that comes with being a teacher and the additional stress and anxiety of having to cope with racism in the workplace.” - Rohan Thompson



(Rohan Thompson)

Mr. Thompson, drawing on the 2015 report from the [Ontario Alliance of Black School Educators](#), suggests it is vital that schools and school boards get serious about dismantling racism and discrimination in their schools. It will lead to better teacher performance, increase sense of safety for Black, Racialized and Indigenous educators, reduce staff turnover and positively impact student experience.

Within your Health Classroom

- Project-based assignments that invite students to conduct research about their own heritage or utilize critical thinking skills to question historical approaches can be effective ways to engage students, develop understanding and build relationships and demonstrate that you value diversity and social justice. It is important to always proceed with empathy and sensitivity when addressing these approaches.
- Explore Indigenous Ways of Knowing and doing.
- Use current topics or ask students to identify a community issue to research and solve to foster social awareness.
- Recognize the changes in students sleep, screen time, movement and play behaviours and how this will have impacted students with regards to adverse behaviours and readiness to learn. [See more.](#)

Within your Physical Education Classroom

- Formatively assess movement skills, and **have students self-assess** cognitive and emotional domains.
- Be aware that students may move, think, feel, and act differently now and may need time to relearn physical, social and emotional skills.
- Get creative about ways for students to connect emotionally and **build skills like communication, cooperation, teamwork, and responsibility** while still following physical distancing guidelines.

INCLUSION

Inclusion means that all people have the right to be valued, appreciated and respected as members of your classroom and school community. Fostering a sense of inclusion is critical for supporting all students.

Fostering **an inclusive environment will enhance the overall experience of all students** within your class and school. An inclusive PHE environment, in particular, will help students thrive, which will lead to lifelong success.

- Don't group all students together - respect that **every student has their own path** and will need different supports to be truly included.
- Make sure that all students can see themselves in your lessons and classrooms. Your lessons should not only reflect your lived experiences, but those from different cultures and lifestyles.
- Try not to put the emphasis on competition - competitive environments can be very isolating and hurtful for some students. This is not the time to push those boundaries - **focus on competencies such as collaboration and cooperation** when planning activities and lessons.



ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- Bookmarks: Celebrating Black Voices
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GuLk5Kx5mVw>
- PHE Canada - Teach Resiliency
<https://phecanada.ca/activate/mentalhealth>
- Teaching Tolerance
<https://www.tolerance.org>
- PHE Canada - Reboot Intramurals
<https://phecanada.ca/programs/reboot-intramurals>
- TED talk: The Danger of a Single Story
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D9lhs241zeg>
- PHE Canada - We Belong
<https://phecanada.ca/programs/we-belong>
- Every Kid Needs a Champion - TED Talk
<https://phecanada.ca/programs/teach-resiliency/resources/every-kid-needs-champion>
- PHE Canada - Spotlight Series
 - Supporting LGBTQ+ Youth in School and Sport (Eric Radford)
 - Any Game, Any Brain (Chris Wilson and Mikaela Wilson)<https://phecanada.ca/connecting/events/phe-spotlight-series>
- Voices of Ontario Black Educators: An Experiential Report
http://onabse.org/ONABSE_VOICES_OF_BLACK_EDUCATORS_Final_Report.pdf
- Equity & Healthy School Communities: You Can't Have One Without the Other (Kike Ojo-Thompson)
https://phecanada.ca/sites/default/files/content/docs/HSCForum2019/Session%20PDF/Keynote_Kike%20Ojo-Thompson_HSCForum2019.pdf
- Open Letter to the Community
<https://www.canadianblackeducators.org/open-letter-to-the-community/>
- Online Dance Resources Supporting Equity and Inclusion in the Arts (Canada's National Ballet School)
https://phecanada.ca/sites/default/files/content/docs/HSCForum2019/Session%20PDF/Atlantic_JennaRose_OnlineDanceResources_HSCForum2019_Session1.pdf
- Social Justice in Physical Education: Critical Reflections and Pedagogies for Change
<https://www.amazon.ca/Social-Justice-Physical-Education-Reflections/dp/1551308940>
- Cultural Safety: Respect and Dignity in Relationships
<https://youtu.be/MkxcuhdglwY>
- Why We can't Afford Whitewashed Social-Emotional Learning
http://www.ascd.org/publications/newsletters/education_update/apr19/vol61/num04/Why_We_Can't_Afford_Whitewashed_Social-Emotional_Learning.aspx
- Social determinants of health: The Canadian facts
<https://hccdh.ca/resources/entry/social-determinants-of-health-the-canadian-facts>
- How to Be an Antiracist Educator
http://www.ascd.org/publications/newsletters/education_update/oct19/vol61/num10/How-to-Be-an-Antiracist-Educator.aspx
- How to Talk "Taboo" Topics with Young Students
http://www.ascd.org/publications/newsletters/education_update/sept19/vol61/num09/How-to-Talk-Taboo-Topics-with-Young-Students.aspx
- Education as a Social Determinant of First Nations, Inuit and Métis Health
<https://www.nccih.ca/docs/determinants/FS-Education-SDOH-2017-EN.pdf>
- The Campus Equity Toolkit
<https://campusmentalhealth.ca/toolkits/>
- Anti-Racism Education in Canada: Best Practices
<https://cfrac.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/aares-report-forprint.pdf>
- Indigenous Ally Toolkit
https://gallery.mailchimp.com/86d28ccd43d4be0cfc11c71a1/files/102bf040-e221-4953-a9ef-9f0c5efc3458/Ally_email.pdf
- GSA Forum by Canadian Centre for Gender and Sexual Diversity
<https://ccgsd-cdgs.org/fr/gsa-forum/>
- Canadian Healthy School Standards
<https://www.healthyschoolsalliance.ca/en/resources/canadian-healthy-school-standards>



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With respectful acknowledgement that the land where PHE Canada's National Office is located is on the traditional unceded territory of the Algonquin Anishnaabeg People.