

Equitable Teaching Practices in Trades Training Programs in British Columbia

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Abstract

As both a trades training educator and a tradesperson in British Columbia, this paper examines the impact of the trades training educator in acknowledging and implementing equitable teaching practices in trades training programs for trades training students. Trades training educators play a critical role in addressing systemic inequities within trades training programs when implementing equitable teaching practices through inclusive learning environments and intentional supports for underrepresented learners. To advance equity within trades programs, this research recommends expanded professional development for instructors, intentional redesign of curriculum, and strengthened relational engagement for inclusive learning environments. These strategies enhance daily student experiences, improve trades apprenticeship retention, and support long-term professional success. This research highlights that while many trades training educators demonstrate a personal commitment to equitable teaching practices, there remains a significant systemic gap in both equitable teaching practices and focused professional development opportunities for trades training educators.

Introduction

Theoretical Paradigm and Positionality

Paulo Freire

Critical Pedagogy

John Dewey

Pragmatism & Experiential Learning

Nel Noddings

Ethics of Care

Education should challenge systems of power and oppression while actively creating inclusive and equitable learning environments for all students.

The Research Problem

Initial Research Question: How do trades training educators implement equitable teaching practices within trades training programs in BC?

Addressing equity requires an understanding of social identity, social location, and intersectionality.

❖ In the context of trades training, these intersecting identities shape learners' access, participation, and success; often determining who feels included, supported, and valued within educational spaces.

For the trades educator, critical reflection on one's own social identity and positionality is essential.

❖ By examining our assumptions, privileges, and biases, educators can model critical reflection for students and co-create inclusive learning environments that value multiple perspectives.

Trades training has traditionally emphasized technical competence and productivity at the expense of inclusive pedagogy and critical engagement with issues of equity.

❖ By cultivating reflection, dialogue, and care within trades training classrooms, trades educators can help deconstruct system barriers and create pathways for all learners to thrive equitable within skilled trades environments beyond traditional instruction.

Thesis Statement

Trades training educators in British Columbia play a critical role in addressing systemic inequities within trades training programs when implementing equitable teaching practices through inclusive learning environments and intentional supports for underrepresented learners. Through a lens of critical pedagogy, trades training educators could create awareness, challenge systemic inequities, and promote a community culture of social justice to represent the diversity present in trades training.

Literature Review

The research explores the implementation of equitable teaching practices in trades training programs in BC, as inequity within trades in Canada is well-documented.

Trades Training

- ❖ More than 300 designated skilled trades across Canada, including landscape horticulture, carpentry, electrician, plumbing, hair stylist, cooking, and metal fabrication
- ❖ Skilled trades accounted for 1,620,680 jobs as of 2021 (Statistics Canada, 2024)
- ❖ Trades programs require one to four apprenticeship training levels in addition to a required number of work-based hours, ranging from 1,000 to 9,000 total hours, to complete the nationally recognized Red Seal Journeyperson designation (SkilledTradesBC, 2024)
- ❖ Trades apprenticeship training is a combination of classroom training (20%) and workplace training (80%).

Inequity in Trades Training

- ❖ While steps have been taken to address inequities with additional funding to encourage women, Indigenous peoples, and minority groups to enter the trades; systemic issues, social stigma, and attitudes remain
- ❖ Inequities remain for underrepresented students including women, Indigenous peoples, and minority groups who are already working in trades across Canada

Equity in Education relating to Trades Training

- ❖ Inequities in trades begin pre-apprenticeship training and continue past the completion of the Red Seal Journeyperson certification
- ❖ Trades apprenticeship recruitment, retention, and completion corresponds with gaps, barriers, and inequities across Canada for women, Indigenous peoples, and minorities
- ❖ Unequal social push for university over trades training: trades training programs are often associated with lower status work and receive less support by parents and secondary schools

Resources and Support for Equity in Trades Training

- ❖ *Macro, Organizational, Interpersonal, and Individual Barriers include:* social attitudes regarding gender roles and trades expectations, gender based practices and standards of organizations, wage gaps, bullying, discrimination, harassment on work sites, and individual perceptions of self and skills
- ❖ *Resources and Supports include:* advocacy from organizations and government leadership, equitable hiring practices including employer services and support, supportive professional networks, and individual support with tools and resources

The Role of the Educator

- ❖ Educators are essential to challenge these barriers; and strengthen equitable resources and support systems in trades training programs
- ❖ It is essential for trades training educators to engage in self-reflection and asking critical questions that lead to dialogue and understanding, and following through with the implementation of equitable teaching practices

Research Gaps for Future Research

While both inequity in trades training education and the importance of the educator are documented, there is minimal specific literature directly connecting the trades trading educator and equitable teaching practices. Broad research discusses equity in trades education, but there is little research that expands on how trades training educators practice equity in trades training programs and how they as educators actively dismantle stigma and social expectations. Many reports focus on inequity within trades training programs and discuss barriers to access and retention of underrepresented students, the role of the educator is not mentioned.

Research Gaps:

- ❖ Demographic of trades training educators
- ❖ Philosophy of teaching of trades training educators
- ❖ Professional development opportunities for trades training educators
- ❖ The impact of trades training educators on underrepresented student groups

Summary

Trades training educators would benefit from further knowledge and practice of equitable teaching practices to cultivate an inclusive trades culture for underrepresented students in trades training programs. Significant research on trades apprenticeship training has identified areas of concern and barriers including gender, race, and funding inequities.

Recommendations

#1 Recommendation: Professional Development for Trades Training Educators

- ❖ While instructors are highly skilled in their respective trades, they often lack formal pedagogical training
- ❖ Employment and Social Development Canada (2023) identifies the limited professional development of faculty members as a significant barrier for successful entry into and completion of trades apprenticeships by trades apprentices
- ❖ Specific training in equity, inclusion and accessibility would provide trades training educators the resources and space to engage in critical self-reflection and incorporate inclusive pedagogy into their classrooms

#2 Recommendation: Intentional Redesign of Trades Training Curriculum

- ❖ Large scale curriculum redevelopment for trades training
- ❖ Immediate classroom – level implementation: inviting diverse guest speakers, integrating inclusive content and perspectives, facilitating respectful dialogue with global contexts, and ensuring physical accessibility and inclusivity (i.e. lighter tools for smaller framed individuals, language subtitles for in-class videos)
- ❖ Asking important questions such as: “What are you teaching for?” and “For whose benefit?”

#3 Recommendation: Meaningful Relationships between Educators and Students

- ❖ Trades training has traditionally been viewed as a technical exchange of skills instead of a relational or reflective educational experience
- ❖ The short durations of trades programs can be relationally challenging in addition to teaching the required practical skillsets
- ❖ Certificate programs run for six to ten months, apprenticeship level training programs are four to six week blocks

Barriers

- ❖ **Social and cultural resistance**
- ❖ **Financial constraints**
- ❖ **Limited time available or funding for professional development; individually or institutionally**

Conclusion

This research highlights that while many trades training educators demonstrate a personal commitment to equitable teaching practices, there remains a significant systemic gap in both equitable teaching practices and focused professional development opportunities for trades training educators.

As a trades training educator, I recognize how my own positionality as a white, cisgender woman influences my perspective and highlights the importance of continuous learning for the sake of my students and educational community. As educators, we must engage in continuous critical reflection on our individual and social realities and how these shape our educational practices.

In conclusion, implementing equitable based teaching practices in trades training education requires intentional and reflective engagement by the educator, focused professional development for trades training educators, institutional commitment, and intentional curriculum design.

By addressing the lack of equity-focused training and teaching practices for trades training educators, trades training programs can become more inclusive, accessible and equitable to represent the diversity of students and educational communities.

References available at:

