Canada’s population continues to become more racially diverse as current immigration and Canadian birth patterns change the face of the population. As the diversity of the general population has increased, so has the student population, particularly in the metropolitan areas. Despite this fact, the racialized teacher population has not kept pace with the racialized student and general population. In fact, it appears to be falling further and further behind.

Research conducted by James Ryan (Ontario Institute for Studies in Education [OISE]), Katina Pollock (University of Western Ontario), and Fab Antonelli (Ontario Institute for Studies in Education [OISE]) found that the proportion of teachers of colour in Canadian schools was consistently less than the proportion of students of colour. The greatest disparities were in the most diverse cities and provinces: Vancouver, Toronto, British Columbia and Ontario.

**RACE, EDUCATION, AND REPRESENTATION**

The authors emphasize that there are good reasons for increasing the number of teachers of colour. Research indicates that these teachers are able to establish strong relationships with students of colour, deliver relevant lessons, and prepare students of colour for a world that marginalizes them. Many educators recognize the value of having teachers of colour, but despite well meaning rhetoric that recommends increasing this workforce, the numbers of teachers of colour continue to fall further and further behind the numbers of students of colour.

**ACCOUNTING FOR TEACHER DIVERSITY IN CANADA: THE PIPELINE METAPHOR**

Scholars, educators and journalists commonly employ metaphors to explain why there are so few teachers of colour. The most popular of these is a pipeline. In education, the pipeline is used to illustrate how students are moved along from one place to another. Ideally, they enter the education pipeline as young children, are conveyed through the elementary, secondary, and post-secondary systems and into the world of work where, as adults, they take up positions as teachers, engineers, and so on. The explanatory power of the pipeline metaphor lies with the pipeline’s vulnerability: they do not always work, that is, they sometimes leak. Education systems, like pipelines, also leak, and because they do, students spill out at a number of places along the route. In the end, this spillage can significantly diminish the potential pool of teachers, particularly teachers of colour.

**LEAKY PIPELINES**

A leaky pipeline metaphor helps explain the shortage of teachers of colour in Canada, but only up to a point. There are two problems with it. The first is that numbers of students of colour do manage to get through the system. While some struggle and dropout, others succeed. If the Canadian education system was the only source of teachers of colour, it would leave the potential pool only somewhat depleted. But there are other sources. And this is second problem with the pipeline metaphor; it cannot account for the rich pool of teachers of colour that come to Canada from other countries or why they don’t get hired. The fact is...
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that internationally educated teachers have to overcome many barriers before they can take up positions as teachers. For example, they need to meet strict standards of performance or demonstrated ability before they are issued licenses or hired. But regulators and employers are often not familiar with international education, training, or professional standards. Most significantly, internationally educated teachers have to convince potential employers that they can do the jobs for which they have been trained and, in many cases, successfully practised in other countries. But according to the research, they have not had much success in doing this. So the fact that there are so few teachers of colour cannot be attributed exclusively to a leaky internal pipeline, but also to the reality that the many teachers of colour who come from other countries have trouble getting hired as teachers.

Filtered Pipelines
The leaky pipeline is not the only metaphor that people employ to understand this phenomenon. One variation on the pipeline metaphor is a filtered pipeline. This version of the pipeline metaphor is useful because it helps to explain the selective nature of the process. It can account for the fact that students of colour – as opposed to all students – are prevented from moving through the education system to get teaching jobs in Canada. However, it’s weakness is that it cannot account for the failure of racialized teachers who come from outside the Canadian system to get teaching jobs.

Bottlenecks
Another metaphor that is used to understand why many internationally educated professionals fail to get jobs in their fields is a bottleneck. But it also has its weaknesses. While this metaphor is able to capture dysfunctional hiring and licensing processes, it is incapable of accounting for the nature of these blockages. Bottlenecks simply slow progress down; eventually, though, all things pass through. This is not necessarily the case for internationally educated teachers and other racialized groups; many will never get teaching jobs.

Glass Ceilings
One final metaphor used to help us understand barriers that potential teachers of colour face is the glass ceiling. Ceilings are barriers; they limit how far one can proceed in a particular direction. For example, these metaphorical ceilings often prevent women from occupying upper management positions. The same thing happens to internationally educated teachers. Despite their qualifications, these teachers encounter an invisible ceiling that prevents them from gaining employment in their chosen profession. But this metaphor also has its limitations. It cannot account for the fact that students of colour do not make it through the school system (and into the teaching profession).

THE BOTTOM LINE
Despite calls for increasing the number of teachers of colour, the proportion of racialized educators in the teacher workforce continues to fall. These shortages can be traced to (1) inequitable schooling practices that limit the number of students willing and able to enter the teaching force, and (2) discriminatory licensing and hiring practices that exclude those who have already completed their teacher education programs. Although metaphors may shed light on aspects of the problem of the shortage of racialized teachers, they do not provide solutions. To be useful, metaphors need to capture the systemic manner in which students of colour are marginalized in the education institutions in which they learn and the manner in which teachers of colour are prevented from taking up jobs in their chosen profession.

If Canada is to have a more racially diverse workforce, then those working towards this end will need to acknowledge the role of the system in this shortage and incorporate such knowledge into any solutions. Measures need to ensure fair licensing and hiring processes for teachers of colour. Among other things, such efforts need to provide all parties with more knowledge of these processes and help licensing agencies and those who hire professionals of colour understand their own biases.