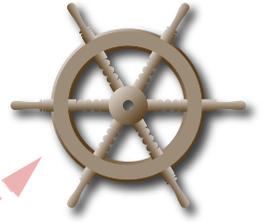




# Charting Your Course FOR PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT



## The TRANSformation of Equity in Schools

by Gérard Cormier, Executive Staff Officer, Outreach Programs & Equity Services

When looking back on Nova Scotia public school classrooms over the years, it becomes apparent that education about equity issues has undergone some major changes. It was not all that long ago when segregation existed in Nova Scotia be it based on race, gender, religion, or ability. Racial segregation legally ended in 1954, most religious and gender segregation ended in the late 1960s, and the 1980s saw the inclusion of special needs students. However, it was not until the early 1990s when legal protection was afforded Aboriginals, gays and lesbians with changes to the Nova Scotia Human Rights Act.

All of these societal changes are eventually felt in the classroom as schools are mini societies and as such are a reflection of them. Educators working within the system, however, had received very little to no education in some of these areas beyond courses in Special Education. Professional development opportunities were also limited to non-existent. Educators may not have had a direct voice in the societal changes that were happening but they were certainly expected to be able to deal with the issues that would arise within the educational setting.

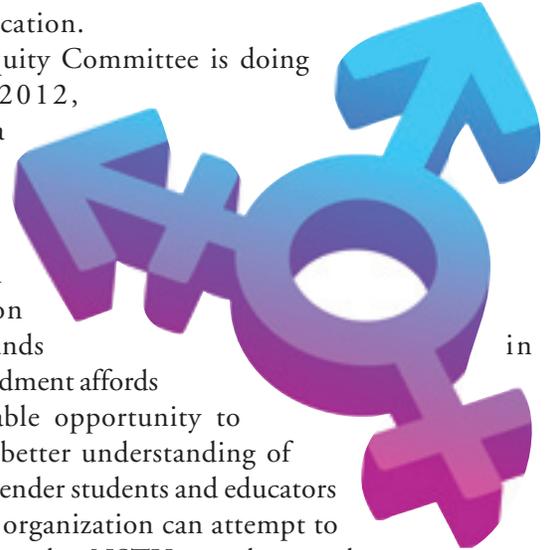
Across the country teacher professional associations saw the creation of committees that would help educators deal with equity issues in the classroom. These committees had a variety of names such as Women in Education Committee, Diversity Committee, Equity Committee, Social Justice Committee, and Human Rights Committee just to name a few. Their work was, and continues to be extremely important as they help create inclusive policies for their organization as well as provide valuable professional development opportunities and resources for their members. For example, in 2009, the NSTU was the first teacher professional association east of Montreal to host a conference dealing with sexual minority issues in schools. It was entitled *Taking Pride in Equity* and was one of the most successful PD events to date. Finally, equity committees also monitor legislative changes that may occur which may have

an impact on education.

The NSTU Equity Committee is doing just that. In 2012, the Nova Scotia Human Rights Act was amended to add gender identity and gender expression as protected grounds in the Act. This amendment affords educators a valuable opportunity to assess and gain a better understanding of the needs of transgender students and educators and how we as an organization can attempt to ensure that transgender NSTU members and students have equal opportunity to education regardless of gender identity. This is extremely important work given that the results of EGALE Canada's recent school climate survey entitled *Every Class In Every School* show that the instances of transphobia that transgender students face in education are even greater than the instances of homophobia faced by gay and lesbian students.

This year the equity committee is reviewing NSTU Policy 19 Anti-Homophobia and Anti-Heterosexism to see if it is indeed inclusive of gender identity and gender expression. Any suggested amendments will be sent to the Provincial Executive for consideration. It is also looking into the creation of a poster and pamphlet which deal with transgender issues in Nova Scotia schools. Also, in planning the upcoming equity conference in April it will be ensuring that transgender issues are dealt with in this professional development endeavour.

The **TRANSformation** of Canadian society will be reflected in Nova Scotia schools and classrooms.



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