

FINDING A BALANCE

AN ATTEMPT TO FIND A MUTUAL UNDERSTANDING
BETWEEN PROPONENTS OF PRIDE MONTH & MUSLIM
COMMUNITIES IN AN ONTARIO CONTEXT



PRESENTED BY:
THE MUSLIM
EDUCATORS
NETWORK OF
ONTARIO

MENO 
MUSLIM EDUCATORS NETWORK OF ONTARIO



WHY THIS DOCUMENT?

As struggles for inclusion of diverse identities increase in public spaces, so too does the blurring of lines between respecting differences and accepting differences. In recent weeks and months, the rhetoric around the Muslim community being endemically intolerant of 2SLGBTQIA+ realities in schools, and conversely, non-Muslim educators conflating perceptions of this intolerance with Islamophobia has become more pronounced. It is important to note that neither of these discourses serves to support students, families and educators who actually strive for peaceful schooling experiences where all stakeholders can thrive. These discourses only serve White Supremacist discourses and follow the same logics of divide and conquer, used in colonization. Thus, these discourses only serve to keep the privileged unaffected and do little to increase positive schooling experiences.

It's important to note that no changes to school curriculum have occurred to trigger the recent trains of dialogue, so a deeper reflection and analysis of what has instigated recent events and tensions is necessary for all stakeholders.

a deeper reflection & analysis of what has instigated recent events and tensions is necessary for all stakeholders.

For the pursuit those with Muslim identities. Muslims are not a monolith. The actions of a few organized, vocal individuals should not speak for an entire population. Like any religious community, there are different perspectives, views, and interpretations of practice. An overused and repetitive talking point for all minoritized people, but it needs to be reasserted once again in this context.

For those who are in support and deeply effected by the perceived rejection of identities centered to be celebrated by Pride events, the contention rejecting 2SLGBTQIA+ identities is interwoven with politics, class, religiosity, and “divide and conquer” tactics to establish contexts that are beneficial for a small population, and often subjugates or scapegoats another. We believe this may be at play in this situation as well.

There is some room for discussion around the conflation of issues that live in and amongst the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Asexual realities and those of Transgender, 2 Spirit and Intersex, namely, their experiences, realities and struggles are not identical, and thus need to be treated as such. In this guide, we are honouring this separation, and will be focussed namely on Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Asexual identities and how their experiences are integrated in Grades 1 to 8 Health Curriculum, and perhaps how their realities are normalized in everyday school activities, and highlighted in the month of June.

PERSPECTIVE



GOING DOWN THE ROAD - A LEARNING JOURNEY

This is just a beginning point. Every community is different, therefore this document is hoping to plant seeds of thought to find neutral territory where parties realize that similar outcomes are wanted for all of our children.

A productive next step to follow-up with/ from this document would be to engage in community consultations and coalition building to hear and seek to understand diverse perspectives.

It is important to note that seeking to understand diverse perspectives does not equivocate to agreeing or believing in the others' stances. The concepts of understanding/respecting and believing/agreeing should be separated. These conversations can be initiated by individual families, community groups/ centers, school professionals and/or administration.



ORIENTING OURSELVES TO GO DOWN SIMILAR PATHS

The following points, bodies of information, and frameworks are locations that we believe will help both parties understand that there are mutual hopes and ambitions for the type of schools and societies we want all children to be present in.

While we understand some of this thinking and knowledge may be new, we encourage you to read further about some of these points, and understand we share them knowing that the reader may need to engage in some compromising or disassociating with deeply held beliefs. This can be difficult, but such is a democracy - it's not easy.

1. **Ontario Human Right Commission & Human Rights Code**

All public spaces in Ontario, including schools, must abide by and embody the tenets of the Ontario Human Rights Code. This includes respect and holding spaces for all seventeen identities as listed by the code.

We understand simply by looking at the few that could be argued in this context might have the appearance of being "competing" with one another. That issue will hopefully be addressed more thoughtfully in this document.

Seeing the civic engagement that has erupted over Pride and its framed incompatibility with conservative family and religious values, we call on anyone who feels they have a stake in this topic is encouraged to engage in a less than hour learning experience understanding these rights of all in order to speak to them when they come up.

[Link to Human Right 101](#) facilitated by the Ontario Human Rights
Commission

2. The Pyramid of Hate

While this is not an endorsement for the other work the Antidefamation League contributes to, their pictorial explanation of how closely bias and discrimination are to violence are poignant and cause for concern.

Bias and discrimination against groups of people with particular identities germinate and fester in the absence of critical discourse, informed exposure, and positive models. Schools are sites for where those three items can occur with guidance and support.

As stated on the ADL pdf document [linked here](#), "Like a pyramid, the upper levels are supported by the lower levels. If people or institutions treat behaviors on the lower levels as being acceptable or "normal," it results in the behaviors at the next level becoming more accepted. In response to the questions of the world community about where the hate of genocide comes from, the Pyramid of Hate demonstrates that the hate of genocide is built upon the acceptance of behaviors described in the lower levels of the pyramid."



3. Come and do the work in Good Faith

Like all difficult work that works on tolerance and eventually inclusion/ acceptance, compromises need to be had, and some items, while contentious and may have strong feelings held with them can't be stipulated or argued as they will undoubtedly sidetrack the goals and objectives of a cross-collaborative resolution and bridge building endeavor. The following list are just a few items that are, in the context of public education, not up for debate in pursuing this work.

No one (Muslims and Non-Muslims) is to use the equity work that has been done for Muslim communities and the fight against Islamophobia as a “bargaining chip” for forced acceptance. For example, using the argument, “We celebrate Islamic Heritage Month and make space for you during Ramadan, therefore you must....” is not prudent in building tolerance, mutual respect, or eventual acceptance.

Sexuality is *not* a choice. Whether believed or not, for the purpose of solidarity, peaceful relations and mutual understanding, this is not up for debate at this juncture in the tensions that are everpresent. To engage in this debate will be a deviation from any opportunity to find similar beliefs and understandings we want for our kids and their schools. Again, for the sake of these conversations, sexuality is not necessarily a conscious, controllable choice.

If seen from an intersectional lens (two or more intersecting identities that inform and have an impact on one's lived experience), unquestionably it is individuals who identify as Muslim and as having queer identities that are profoundly marginalized by these tensions.

Theology, religious scriptures, perceptions of the “type” of people comprise each party, and more are also not up for debate in this discussion. If any experience in schools is deemed to impede on one's understanding of their religion, a relevant, thoughtful conversation must be had as to how it defies one's beliefs simply to be present in the discussion of the matter, and furthermore, how it falls inline with the Ontario Human Rights Code.

The participation or lack thereof from Pride events might have much more to do with the centring of sexuality than it does anything around conflicts with gay, lesbian, transgendered and queer identities. A certain amount of patience, grace, and withholding judgement and assumptions should be exercised when we are assessing the intentions behind family and student decisions to withdraw from Pride events.

Exposure to varied lifestyles in and during instructional hours should always have some link back to curriculum, student interests, and/or community building. For example, if a drag story time were to be held at the school, there should be some link to the context of the story or curriculum to rationally speak to why the speaker was in drag. Further, if a Muslim community leader came and spoke about religion in a public space, it should very well be apart of a series where other religions are heard of with similar learning opportunities.



CAN WE FIND COMMON GROUND?

It is important to understand that many Muslim families do not discuss or acknowledge any sexuality in any context, including heteronormative realities and this leads to discomfort with these conversations in the context of child-rearing.

The choice of families to not engage in in-depth discussions with their children on topics of sexual health and sexuality should be respected. Again, respected is not the same as agreeing.

Muslims are not a monolith, and if hate or intolerance comes from a family that claims a Muslim identity, this does not give leave for educators to assume or treat another Muslim family in the same way. Questions and conversations should be had to understand each family as individuals, just as the same respect would be extended to non-Muslim identifying families.

Identities should not be used as transactional bargaining pieces, ie. Perceptions of lack of inclusion of any community for another is not justification or grounds for not continuing inclusion work for all identities.

Added burden to prove respect for LGBT communities should not be placed on Muslim students and families.

Discourses on teaching families "Canadian Values" are often rooted in ideals adjacent to White Supremacy.

Not everyone needs to agree or disagree to anyone else's realities of the world, but they must respect that these realities exist.

Conservative (religious and ideological) beliefs are entitled to space in public discourse and education (granted they don't infringe on OHRC seventeen identities)

Could there be a mainstreaming of diverse ways of living all year long? The sharing of diverse lived realities should be balanced and spread out. There should not be the over representation for any single identity - this can be misconstrued as forcing people to believe in your views.

If there is evidence of inappropriate force of disregard for any protected grounds, a conversation with the teachers and administrators of the school should take place to best understand the context of the comments that had been made. Oftentimes, the reality of what has been discussed is missed in single hand accounts.

Main stream attention and discussion about one's sexual identity humanizes people that are often seen as abstractions in popular culture and society in the past and present. Acknowledging their existence, and not "hiding" them or erasing their everyday experiences is good for empathy and diverse understandings of the human experience

Acknowledging someone's existence, and knowing about it in some detail is NOT the same thing as indoctrination. Indoctrination can not simply happen from simply knowing about diverse ways of being.

It is important to verify information that is being shared or presented. Look for the sources of information as much of the current dialogue has been based on misinformation.

Having conversations with children about diverse realities and your lived realities is important. It is what leads to understanding. Understanding serves as a root to acceptance and respect for the eventual pursuit of:

- Co-existence & Tolerance (in the least), and/or
- Acceptance & Inclusion (in the most optimal situations).

Everyone has the right to speak their mind, but ensure it's based in fact, and not on the assumptions or presumptions put forth by parties that are not affiliated with your child's school.