

EQUITY IN EDMONTON SCHOOLS

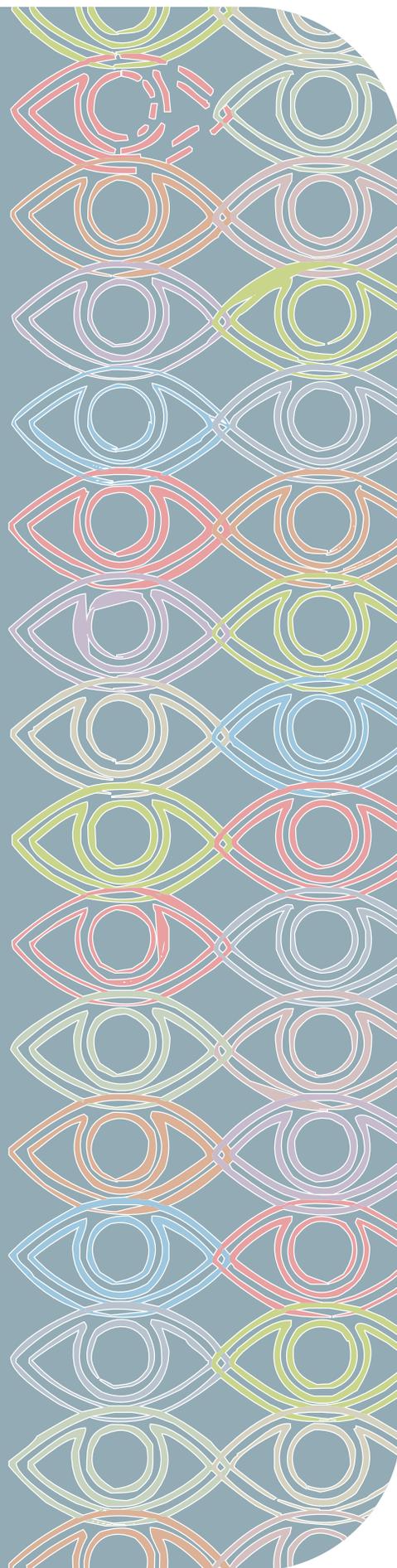
RESEARCH
REPORT

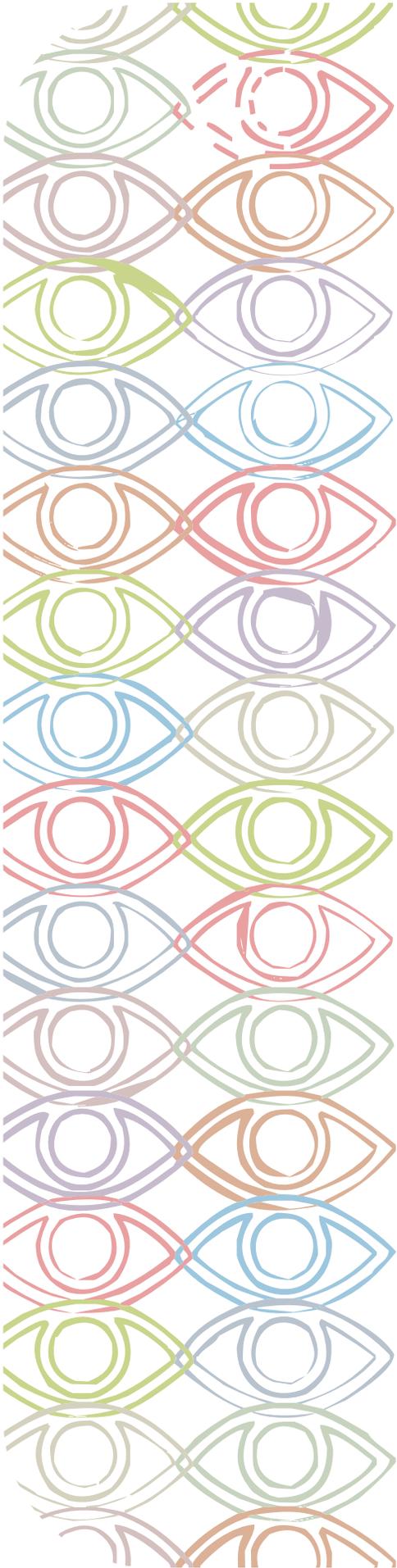
MARCH 2004

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WITH THE GENEROUS
FINANCIAL SUPPORT OF
THE DEPARTMENT OF
CANADIAN HERITAGE
AND
THE ALBERTA HUMAN
RIGHTS, CITIZENSHIP,
AND MULTICULTURALISM
EDUCATION FUND





LITERATURE REVIEW

Literature Review Abstract

The Edmonton school district is comprised of 209 public schools that served more than 80,498 students between 1999-2000 (Edmonton Public Schools, 2000) as well as 84 Catholic schools that served 32,554 students in the same year (Edmonton Catholic Schools, 2000). This section describes the demographic context in which these school systems operate, reviews the existing literature on the concepts of race and racism in general with a focus on Canadian research, reviews the research on racism in elementary and secondary education in Canada, anti-racism and equity in education, and legislation that relates to equity in education. Concluding comments address the rationale for working toward policies, procedures, and practices that address equity in Edmonton schools.

Demographic Context

Introduction

The proportion of visible minorities and Aboriginal people is increasing in Edmonton, as it is across the country, and this proportion will certainly continue to increase (Li, 1997, 2000; Statistics Canada, 1996). The 2001 Canada census reported that 19.7 percent of the population in Edmonton was visible minority (Statistics Canada, 2001). Demographic data also indicate that Edmonton has the second highest number of Aboriginal people of any urban area in the country with approximately 4.7 percent reporting Aboriginal ancestry. The Aboriginal population is younger than the general population and increasing at a faster rate than the general population (Edmonton Community Services, 2000:22, Statistics Canada, 2001). By 2012, in Edmonton, the proportion of Aboriginal students is predicted to rise to 20% (Simons, 2002). Currently, approximately one in four people are either visible minority or Aboriginal.

Quality of Life for Aboriginal and Visible Minority People

Our Aboriginal population lives with multiple hindrances to quality of life, on average. They are currently the least healthy, least educated, and most likely to be unemployed or to earn a very low income of any other population sector (55% poor) (Jackson, 2001). Aboriginal people are more likely to smoke and engage in substance abuse, more likely to be lone parents or homeless, and they make up the majority of the provincial and federal inmate population (Hanselmann, 2001).

Even though Aboriginal people are far less likely to obtain post-secondary level education, when they do achieve at this level, they are less likely than other Canadians with equivalent education to obtain employment, advance in their employment, and to earn an equivalent salary (Canadian Race Relations Foundation, 2000).

Recent immigrants, especially those belonging to visible minorities, face high unemployment and under-employment (Smith & Jackson, 2002). The 1996 Census revealed that the overall poverty rate in Canada was 21% (Jackson, 2001). In 1996, Lee, K. (2000) found that 30.0% of immigrants and 52.1% of recent immigrants (who had arrived after 1991), were poor. Moreover, this disadvantage was extended to all visible minorities, about 70% of whom were foreign born (37.6% poor) (Jackson, 2001).

Education is positively correlated with income; people with less education are more likely to live in poverty (Lee, K., 2000). For Canadians aged 15-64, it was found that those with less than secondary education were more likely to live in poverty (24%) than those with secondary (18%) or a post-secondary certificate (13%) (Lee, K., 2000; Jackson, 2001). Visible minorities are far more likely to be poor whatever their educational level. When employed, they faced difficulties advancing in their jobs and earned less than Canadian counterparts with equivalent qualifications (Canadian Race Relations Foundation, 2000).

Labour Market

Alberta Human Resources & Employment predicts labour shortages in the next decade. Employers must look to the Aboriginal and immigrant population as a source for employees that will be needed. It has been demonstrated that a diverse workforce is valuable to employers. Productivity and competitive advantage increase and better service is provided to diverse clients (Alberta Human Resources, 2002).

Trends in Local Education

In the mid 1990's there were substantial cuts to Education at the provincial level (Robertson, et.al., 1995). During 2001 and 2002, a dispute arose between the teachers in Alberta and the provincial government. Teachers were striking over class sizes and wages. "Researchers have determined that larger classes might well increase difficulties at the higher grades, particularly for at-risk, *minority*, special needs or *second language* students." (italics added – ATA, 2002). "Smaller class sizes ... appear to narrow the achievement gap between Caucasian and *minority* students" (italics added – ATA, 2002). Dei indicates that smaller classes are more likely to meet needs of students "at risk" of dropping out (Dei, 1997).

During the time of this labour dispute, the provincial department of Human Resources and Employment released *Prepared for Growth—Building Alberta's Labour Supply*. The report indicated that a shortage existed in the teaching profession (ATA, 2002).

The Concepts of Race and Racism

The term "race" is no longer accepted as a biological concept. Previously used to describe a hierarchy of humans with "white" or "Caucasian" seen as most highly developed or superior. "Race" is now used as a socially constructed term to examine differences in life quality for people with different colours of skin (Banton, 1998; Klass & Hellman, 1971:18-20; Littlefield, et.al.,1982).

Types of Racism

Racism is the combination of the power of one race to dominate over other races and a value system that assumes that the dominant race is innately superior to all others. Therefore, what has been deemed unacceptable in science has remained a substantive, if hidden, motivation for maintenance of this power. In examining patterns of racism today, researchers have identified several forms of racism that can be expressed either overtly or subtly including: systemic/ institutional, cultural, and individual racism (Canadian Race Relations Foundation, 2002; Henry, et.al., 1995; Satzewich, 1998).

Individual Racism

Individual racism manifests itself in individual attitudes and behaviours, both subtle and overt, conscious and subconscious, that have the effect of asserting the superiority of one race over another (Dodd, et.al., 1994). Racist attitudes find expression in, for example, simple preferences, glances, non-verbal gestures, jokes, racial slurs, and in crimes born of racial hatred. "The measure of racism is the effect on the oppressed, not the intent of the oppressor" (United Church, 2000:14). These effects can be feelings of sadness, inadequacy, and depression; confusion, frustration, and humiliation; and anger. In short, it causes emotional pain and must be considered a form of abuse. Examples of reactions include social withdrawal, lowered levels of performance, and verbal and physical aggression. It takes a strong individual, usually backed by a strong support system, to be able to handle frequent racism in a way that maintains one's own self confidence.

Canadian society has succeeded in rejecting most overt forms of racism in their laws, institutions, and everyday lives, but the more subtle forms are not easily condemned and still remain prevalent in Canadian society. The fact that much individual racism is unconscious presents complex challenges (Henry, et.al., 1995).

Cultural Racism

According to Dodd, et.al. (1994) cultural racism is one root of both individual and systemic forms of racism. Cultural racism substitutes the cultural category "European" for the racial category "white" (see Amin, 1989). This theoretical structure rationalizes continued dominance of communities of colour in the third world and within western societies. Cultural racism therefore, according to Amin (1989), asserts the superiority of European civilization and thus the supposedly more mature, evolved, rational character of Europeans and their descendants.

Institutional or Systemic Racism

Racism also manifests itself in systemic forms. According to Henry, et.al. (1995), systemic racism consists of the policies and practices of organizations, which directly or indirectly operate to sustain the advantages of peoples of certain "social races". Visible minorities are disadvantaged in a way that makes it difficult to identify any individual act of discrimination (Levine-Rasky, 2001; McIntosh, 1990). System-wide racism is the accumulated effect of centuries of racism (Kivel, 1996:160).

In Canada, racism is found in most institutions: education, politics, legal systems, small and large businesses, religious organizations, courts, police systems, professional associations, unions, access to health and social services, in sports teams, and in the arts. When racism is endemic in all institutions, it perpetuates a cycle for Aboriginal people and those of visible minority. When people of colour achieve a certain level of education, they are less likely to acquire the same quality of job and achieve the same level of income as a white person with the same education. They therefore live in lower cost housing, their children end up going to poorer quality schools, which help determine whether they go to university to get jobs that are harder to get anyway (Satzewich, 1998: 274). This is the cycle of racism.

Racism in Housing

Research indicates that visible minorities and Aboriginal peoples have difficulty renting apartments and getting bank loans to purchase homes. These problems are exacerbated when the individuals are new to Canada, when they are poor, and when their skin is very dark (Centre for Equality Rights in Accommodation). When they do find housing, they are often not fully accepted into the community.

Racism in Justice

Institutional racism is also found in the justice system, in policing, in the imprisonment and in the administration of the law for Aboriginal people and people of colour in Canada. York (1990) reported that there is a disproportionate number of Aboriginal, African Canadians, and Asian-Canadians in Canada's correctional system.

Kivel indicates that white people actually commit the most crime in the United States. It is often corporate crime and tax evasion. These crimes are rarely reported in the media; the public does not perceive white people as tending to be criminal. Kivel also notes that when guilty of identical crimes, white people get lighter sentences (Kivel, 1996).

Racism in the Media

The mainstream media in this country is complicit in reproducing “racism in a number of ways – negative stereotyping, ethnocentric judgements, the marginalization of people of colour, and the racialization of issues such as crime and immigration” (Henry, et.al., 1995: 232). Aboriginal people and people of colour are most notable by their absence in general news and general interest stories. There are very few media images of resilience and strength among non-white people; their portrayal most often fits the stereotype of their group. News coverage about criminal activity, however, paints a picture of a high level of crime within these population groups (Kivel, 1996:193). Immigrant criminal rates are in fact lower than rates for those born in Canada (Henry, et.al., 1995).

During the past few years in Edmonton, issues that have received biased coverage are the “Asian Gang” coverage of violence in 1999, reports on illegal Chinese immigrants in 1999, coverage of September 11, 2001 and its aftermath, the continuing bias in coverage of events in Palestine and Israel, and the recent media reports of conflict between the U.S. and Iraq.

“(M)any white people rely almost entirely on the media for their information about minorities and the issues that concern their communities” (Henry, et.al.,1995: 232). Broadcast media is subject to regulation by the Canadian Radio and Television Commission (CRTC) but there is no such body governing print media. There are press councils in each province that deal with issues of bias, but editorial comment does not fall under their jurisdiction and this is where much of the bias appears.

White Supremacy

It must be acknowledged that in spite of the white supremacist movement being on the fringes of society, it is an insidious force with frightening potential. Beginning with the birth of the Ku Klux Klan in post-civil war southern United States, White Supremacist (hate) groups are now found throughout the western world. The names and the targets of the groups have changed over the years. Target populations have changed over time; in the early part of the 20th century, Irish, Catholic, and Ukrainian people, along with people of colour were targets of hate activity. Current targets are gay and lesbian people and anyone with skin that is not white.

During the 1970s and 1980s, the Ku Klux Klan and the Aryan Nations were formally operating in Alberta. Both Jim Keegstra and his lawyer Doug Christie were involved in local politics in this time period (Kinsella, 1995: 30-65).

In the 1990’s the movement seems to have gone underground, using the internet as its main source of spreading hate propaganda. Warren Kinsella, author of the *Web of Hate*, notes that the number of hate sites had risen to 3000 in the year 2003. Some of the sites are “hard core”, and some are subtle, manipulative, and aimed at children and alienated white youth. Musical groups spread hatred through their lyrics.

Although White Supremacist groups may only directly affect a small proportion of our population, their aggressive targeting of youth and their history of involvement in politics means we must be acutely aware of their potential to impact society in powerfully negative ways. We must never forget the speed and ease with which Hitler came to power in Germany.

Racism and the Education System

Significant research analyzes the experiences of visible minority and Aboriginal people through the attitudes and behaviours of other students and adults within the system, and due to the systemic nature of the inequalities in educational institutions (Calliste, et.al., 1995; Codjoe, 1999; Edmonton Immigrant Services Association, 2001; Mennonite Centre for Newcomers, 1994: 30-31; Ng, et.al., 1995). “There is a large body of research that suggests educators need not hold any particular malice for systemically inequitable outcomes to be realized. However, a critical investigation of this polemic reveals that we cannot escape the reality that ‘schooling’ is geared toward engaging some students while disengaging others” (Dei, 2000: 119). “By the same token, teachers can become social reconstructionists, reversing instead of reproducing the norms and values that dictate attitudes and behaviours. They can transform society by deliberately forming a new consciousness in its people. Such a social formation of consciousness can potentially impact the ideologies and behaviours that have oppressed and marginalized minorities for generations” (Solomon, 2001: 1).

It is imperative that educators, administrators, and elected officials be given an opportunity to critically evaluate their own attitudes and behaviours while system-wide analysis seeks for opportunities to ensure that the learning experience for all students is equitable.

Each individual who is involved in the education system must acknowledge the very recent history of Aboriginal cultural genocide, carried out and condoned by church and state in our nation. Severe restrictions on and abuse of Aboriginal people both inside and external to the education system have deeply affected individual people and entire societies. Indigenous people, struggling to regain dignity and respect, continue to face individual and systemic racism in this society. Their problems in education are complicated by family breakdown, lack of cultural relevance in teaching style, few Aboriginal teachers and a high turnover of white teachers on reserves, and an almost total absence of topics that deal with their lives and their culture. Rate of graduation from high school is 20% nationally (Henry, et.al., 1995).

Several studies have examined interlocking systems of power and multiple forms of oppression in the school context including racial, linguistic, ethnic, social class, and gender (Calliste, et.al., 1995; Codjoe, 1997; Dei, et.al., 1997; Dei, 1997; Endicott & Mukhuerjee, 1999). When individuals are recipients of more than one form of subjugation, for example, persons of colour¹ who are poor and female, their lives are subject to discrimination in so many ways that routes to success are severely limited.

The Effect of Racism on Students

On Students of Colour

Each experience of racial discrimination produces emotional pain. We wish to note that the experiences may be qualitatively different for new immigrants, for people of colour who have lived in Canada for several years or more, and for Aboriginal people. In the case of new immigrants, racism is usually not

¹ It is most appropriate to refer to visible minority people and Aboriginal people distinctly, because of the many differences with their circumstances. To make reading easier, in this document, *People of Colour*, will refer to both groups. Our apologies if this is offensive to the reader.

something they had expected to be dealing with when they left their homes to come to Canada. And it is often something they have never experienced in their lives. For the newcomer, racism can be confusing, frustrating, shameful, and shocking. For people of colour who are not new to Canada, their reactions vary but there is often a resignation and an ongoing feeling of anger. Many Aboriginal people experience racism all of their lives, and their emotions are often complicated by the issues outlined above.

Of course when the recipient of racism is a child, the sadness and anger are harsh. "Racism can be so unexpected and painful for small children but they may not speak about it to anyone. When children are abused, whether by individuals or by a social system, they may find it hard to understand why it is happening, and may not know how to get help, even from their parents" (Canadian Ethnocultural Council, 1997: 3). In many cases these emotions lead to decreased academic performance and/or behaviour problems. If alienation is left unassisted, it may eventually lead to dropping out of school, depression, violent behaviour, or inappropriate use of drugs or alcohol.

Jennifer Kelly (1998), in her study of black students in Edmonton schools, found that young people who were alienated and alone in elementary schools, found comfort and protection in groups of youth from the same racial background when they reached secondary school. She found conflict between racial groups, especially in high school. Her study, like another done by the Edmonton Social Planning Council (1992), discovered that physical conflict between racial groups was common.

On White Students

White students hold a position of privilege in our public education systems. "Their parents understand the workings of the system, having succeeded in the same or similar system. Teachers who are almost entirely from the dominant group, understand and validate their culture, as normal and invisible." White children get more attention and teachers have higher expectations for them. "In short, the requirements of success for these students, or their *success needs* are consistently being met, in nearly every aspect of home, school and community life" (Dei, 2000:147).

Henry, et.al. (1995: 177) note that children between ages four and seven first form racial preferences. From ages eight to twelve, they develop a deeper understanding of status and difference between racial groups. "At this stage, overtly prejudicial behaviors may emerge". White students need to become aware of their privileged position. Many of these students need guidance from teachers on ways to be critical of their attitudes and behaviours and in developing values for equity. They also need practice in appropriate ways to speak out against racism or ways to take other appropriate action.

Barriers Created by Racism

Barriers: School Response to Racial Incidents

As commonly found in western research, students of schools in Edmonton and area reported during several consultations that the way teachers and administrators deal with racial incidents is often inappropriate and in many cases these incidents are not dealt with at all (*Canada's Regional Consultations*, 2000; Edmonton Social Planning Council, 1992; Kelly, 1998; Northern Alberta Alliance on Race Relations, 2001). Research participants believed that many teachers and administrators perhaps did not understand the situation clearly and may not have been aware of appropriate ways to deal with these situations. In *Because of the Color* (Edmonton Social Planning Council, 1992), teachers showed

awareness of the problems but felt there were few programs to assist them in dealing with racism in the schools. The effect on the student when nothing is done is to make them feel even more powerless and lonely. We must point out that even when parents make formal complaints to school authorities, complaints are often dismissed. We also suggest that with racism being a highly sensitive issue in contemporary society, that as Henry, et.al. (1995: 185) point out, school officials and teachers may be hesitant to report racial incidents because this would make the school or the teacher 'look bad'.

Young people and their parents have also indicated that because of the frequent inaction from school authorities toward racial incidents, students are forced to deal with demeaning treatment from other students on their own. When these instances happen repeatedly, it is natural for feelings of sadness, frustration, and anger to build up to the point where they erupt in violence. Participants in local research send a strong message that when this happens, it is usually the student of colour or the Aboriginal student who is dealt with harshly. Yet, when violent acts are committed by a white student toward a student of colour, the situations tend to be either dismissed or not handled with the same severity. NAARR has data indicating that parents become so frustrated with the abuse their children are suffering in the school setting, that they are left with no choice but to recommend violence to their children (*Canada's Regional Consultations*, 2001; Edmonton Social Planning Council, 1992; Kelly, 1998; Northern Alberta Alliance on Race Relations, 2001).

Barriers: Identity Formation

The Safe and Caring Schools project of the Alberta Teachers' Association notes that "(c)hildren are vulnerable targets of prejudiced or discriminatory behaviors because they are just beginning to form a sense of their own identity – who they are and the groups to which they belong. "When this identity is challenged, they are at risk of internalizing and accepting the unfair treatment as truth" (ATA, 1999:5). Some children develop 'own-group hatred' (Coreblum & Annis, 1993:10). NAARR has seen evidence of this when parents report that children request to change their last name or their religion (Northern Alberta Alliance on Race Relations, 2002b) and when children wish they were white. One consequence of developing a positive racial or cultural self-image can be a feeling of being more comfortable being with one's own racial or ethnic group. This is often seen by school officials as a negative phenomenon and a kind of 'reverse-racism'. It can make good relations between racial groups even more challenging and may contribute to inter-group conflict (Edmonton Social Planning Council, 1992; Kelly, 1998).

White children come to school with attitudes they have learned at home, in society outside the home, through their literature, and via the media. Some come from homes that have taught respect for all people and have been able to counteract other forces in their children's lives. They may take steps to work with and form friendships with children of colour, but may themselves be criticized for associating with the 'other' and may not be able to deal with this. "Alia Miel (1976) also found that White children learn to be hypocritical about differences at a very early age. The prejudices of their society were still very much with them, but they had it drilled into them that it was 'not nice' to express such feelings" (Derman-Sparks, 1989:3). These children, like many adults, will tend to be very subtle and polite about expressing their discriminatory attitudes.

When of teachers of colour are few, it is more difficult for children of colour to develop positive identities. The dearth of role models who are like them will feed into existing doubts about their self worth. For white children this situation reinforces a sense of superiority.

Barriers: Expectations, Achievement, and Dropping Out

Specific findings in the area indicate that such barriers have been detrimental to minority students' academic progress (Calliste, et.al., 1995; Bascia, 1996; Kelly, 1998; Khalema, 2001a). In particular, research reveals that minority and Aboriginal students are often disengaged from schooling not because they are not interested in learning, but because of what Codjoe (1999) and others describe as a "hostile" school environment. Thus, students who find school boring, or believe that teachers do not value or care about them, or that learning is irrelevant to their lives, are at a high risk of dropping out of school (Dei, et.al., 1997; and Skutnabb-Kangas & Cummins, 1988).

The Ministry of Learning in Alberta has released a report wherein they identify issues such as negative teacher-student interaction and low teacher expectations as strong factors contributing to students dropping out of school. In this study, the issue of racism is not mentioned, but all of the barriers to completion of school identified in the study are barriers that can be created by racism.

Negative interaction between students of colour and their teachers is not universal, but has been identified by researchers, parents, and the students themselves as forming a barrier to success in school. Some of this has been discussed above in the section dealing with the ways teachers and administrators handle racial incidents. The issue is, however, broader than this. Here we move into attitudes and behaviours that teachers are most commonly unconscious of and aspects of systemic disadvantage to students of colour.

Empirical examinations of classroom practices reveal that the kinds of questions asked of learners in the school setting, and the limited range of responses for which these allow, provide minority, immigrant, and Aboriginal students with little opportunity to become active participants in classroom dialogue, and this often leads to negative evaluation of students abilities (Dei, et.al., 2000; and Gossetti & Rusch, 1995; Michaels, 1986). It is clearly demonstrated in the literature, that teachers tend to expect a lower level of achievement from Aboriginal and visible minority students (Dei, 2000; Edmonton Immigrant Services Association, 2001; Edmonton Social Planning Council, 1992:v). Students who feel that school personnel are not interested in them and do not care much about them, find themselves in what Dei refers to as a 'network of disinterest' (Dei, 1997:72). Effects on the student are therefore emotional and cognitive.

One consequence of this downward pressure on achievement is a tendency to direct too many visible minority and Aboriginal students into special education and non-academic streams as noted in a report by the Canadian School Boards' Association (Endicott & Mukhuerjee, 1992:11) and by Henry, et.al. (1995).

Student success is also strongly affected by their familiarity with English. A significant proportion of students of colour are English as a Second Language (ESL) students, including many Aboriginal students. When school and school district policies fail to provide for the specific needs of ESL students, they are not providing equal opportunity for these young people. New immigrants are frequently placed with their age cohort with no extra assistance with English. In secondary school, they often end up in non-academic streams, not necessarily because of their ability but because of their skills with English. They are then extremely unlikely to pursue post-secondary education. This is a particularly significant issue for refugee children who come from situations where they may have little or no formal education. Flexibility needs to be exercised with these youth, for example with the Alberta policy that ends funding for public schooling at age 20.

Researchers have attributed inadequate intercultural related instruction to low teacher expectations of minority students (Calliste, et.al., 1995; Codjoe, 1999; Dei, et.al., 1997; Henry, 1992; Rist, 1970). Different values and modes of communication, including the non-verbal type, affect the ability of newcomers as well as Aboriginal students to succeed in school and of their parents to communicate with school officials.

When problems exist with student achievement, and the same students also feel alienated, uncared for, and unwelcome in school, and may experience a hostile environment, emotionally and sometimes physically, it is not surprising to realize that Aboriginal students and visible minority students tend to have higher rates of dropping out of school. Dei notes the “recent recognition that early school leaving is a process – not an event – typically a long process of gradual disengagement” (Dei, 1997:3). Dei reports that these students would often skip school and then get suspended for skipping, without school authorities being aware of the reasons they felt uncomfortable there. Dei’s conclusion is that the students were ‘helped out the door’ or ‘pushed out’ (Dei, 1997). The Alberta Learning Report finds that negative teacher-student interaction and low teacher expectation for students are associated with dropping out of school. The same report indicates that dropouts feel at risk, unsafe, and victims when they are in school (Alberta Learning, 2001).

When students have difficulty achieving in school, teachers often blame the student themselves and their family or their culture for not supporting educational success (Dei, 1997; Dei, 2000:146). There is certainly much in families and in society that affects student learning and these factors are more prevalent in families of colour, but education systems must acknowledge the complexity of the issues and that racism does exist within their own systems before these students can begin to reach their full academic potential. White teachers, administrators, and elected officials must also be able to acknowledge their own relative privilege in society (Dei, 2000:146).

Alberta Learning’s list of recommendations for ways to create schooling that is more responsive to students prone to dropping out is an excellent set of goals. Schools and school systems that move in the directions proposed in this list would be working to decrease racism.

- listen to and support students – to overcome barriers
- manage student alienation
- increase students’ knowledge of self and the effects of labeling
- develop cross-cultural sensitivities for teachers

“Alberta Learning is committed to ensuring Albertans have the knowledge & skills they need to be successful and to learn quickly and flexibly throughout their lives.” “As such, the ability of every student to successfully complete high school is fundamental to continued success and quality of life” (Alberta Learning, 2000:i).

We applaud this commitment.

There are many schools and classrooms in Edmonton that recognize the racism that affects their students and that engage in initiatives to ameliorate its consequences. Young participants in this study “noted that within respectful and supportive schools and social environments, their learning and adjustment experiences improved immensely” (Edmonton Social Planning Council, 1992:iii).

Curriculum

When examining the success of curriculum in integrating issues related to the oppression of minority groups in Canada, we need to look at curriculum from two perspectives: first, the content areas, and second, the manner in which curriculum is delivered. "Gosetti and Rusch (1995) suggest that the conversations, the writings, and the professional activities that construct our understanding of teaching arise from a privileged perspective that has largely ignored issues of status, ethnicity, race, and gender. Thus, the history of exploitation and oppression of minority and Aboriginal groups within the Canadian context has not been clearly integrated into the curriculum.

It is necessary that students become aware of hate literature, its proliferation on the internet and in music, and hate crimes. All students need to be equipped with tools for assessing literature and incidents critically. This was a specific recommendation from the consultations held in Edmonton prior to the World Conference Against Racism in 2000 (Canada's Regional Consultations, 2000).

If teachers are given the opportunity to develop awareness of the oppression of racial minorities in Canada and in our education system, they will be better equipped to approach all of their teaching in a manner that attempts to address the existing imbalances. Blades believes that "for most of secondary school curriculum it is the approach to the curriculum that needs to change, not the existing set of topics" and that "advice on how to approach topics from a culturally responsive perspective" would take teachers a long way in meeting the needs of all students" (Blades, et.al., 2000:47).

Teachers

The following section is taken entirely from an article written by one of the authors of this report, Khalema (2001b).

According to Calliste (1982), teachers of visible minority background serve as role models and mentors for visible minority students. Furthermore, researchers have indicated that the absence of visible minority teachers as role models or mentors is crucial in explaining why minority students do not excel in school (Bascia, 1996; Codjoe, 1999; Cummins 1986; Huberman, 1989; James, 1990). Other researchers have demonstrated that visible minority teachers serve as symbols of success, and are ideally positioned to enrich the curriculum with cultural and cognitive strategies. This, in turn, has led to greater success in schools by minority students (Blesse, 1997; Brown et al, 2000; Callender, 1997; Cummins, 1986; Desjardins, 1996).

In addition to the role model effect, researchers indicate that exposure to minorities as professionals may benefit dominant-group students, by helping them to modify any stereotypes and negative beliefs they may have about minorities in general (Callender, 1997). The survey of Brown, Cevero, and Johnson-Bailey (2000) of how racial identity affected the teaching philosophies and styles of seven African-American female teachers in technical schools, indicated that their social position as visible minority teachers helped them develop a teaching philosophy that was integrated and based on a history of marginalization. This history of marginalization became central for these teachers as their own credibility was repeatedly questioned by students and colleagues. These experiences had a strong impact on their classroom interactions and teaching strategies.

Anti-Racism and Equity

As the western world has opened its doors to immigrants from non-western countries, multicultural societies have formed. Canada, the United States, and Australia are former colonies with indigenous populations and have never been as monocultural as the nations of Europe. Western countries profess to be liberal democracies where all members of society are granted equal opportunity. The reality, as outlined in the previous section, is that access to services, housing, education, and adequate employment and income are distributed in an unequal manner and stratified according to race. Critical response to these inequalities advocates for work toward “anti-racism” and “equity”.

Multiculturalism

Canada formulated the concept of ‘multiculturalism’ and implemented a national multiculturalism policy in 1971. This became legislation in 1988. The intent of the policy was to move from racial stratification toward racial equality. A series of changes were made to federal legislation after World War II watched Nazi Germany kill six million Jewish people in Europe. The newly formed United Nations took immediate steps to protect the world from a recurrence of this kind of abomination by drafting the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948). Before World War II, Canada had legislation, policies, and practices that were discriminatory against Aboriginal people and visible minorities. Several changes were made to the Immigration Act, changes that attempted to remove racial bias. The country was not universally segregated at that time, but there were pockets of segregation in living areas, schooling, rights to vote, and admission to certain professions, for example. These changes were necessary but were not enough to erase the legacy of four centuries of racism in Canada. Governments, with civil society, continue to work toward creating equal rights and equal opportunities for all Canadians; the process is ongoing and will require many more decades of searching for answers.

Evident in the name, the primary goal of multicultural education is to develop understanding of and respect for different cultures. Schools were encouraged to teach students about many cultures: their differences and their similarities. It assumed that the increased understanding would counter prejudice and promote inter-group harmony. Activities tended to focus on cultural celebrations and often remained at the superficial level of food, dance, and music (the sari, samosa syndrome). There was not an inherent understanding of the systemic nature of racism in this perspective and there was even a reluctance to discuss racism of any kind (Dei:183; Ontario Ministry of Education, 1992). Multicultural education was therefore limited in its possibilities (Solomon, 2001:3).

Anti-Racism

Multicultural education was prominent during the 1970s and 1980s. It was in Britain and the United States that “anti-racism” was formulated, arriving in Canada in the late 1980s (Henry, 1995:188). This perspective speaks of the causes of racism and its manifestations in contemporary society. It aims to increase cross-cultural understanding and an appreciation for cultural diversity, and works to eliminate discrimination.

Anti-racism recognizes the dominance of white people and euro-centric knowledge over people of colour and non-European values and knowledge. It addresses the imbalance of power and the inequality of opportunity (Dei, 2000; Henry, 1995; Kivel, 1996; Ontario Ministry of Education, 1992; Saskatchewan Education, 1997:27; Solomon, 2001).

Anti-racist education strives to identify and change educational practices, policies, and procedures that promote racism, as well as the racist attitudes and behaviour that underlie and reinforce such policies and practices. Anti-racist education provides knowledge, skills, and strategies for educators to examine racism critically in order to understand its origin and to recognize and challenge it (Vancouver Policy, in Thomas, 1984:22)

For the teacher, this means several things: creating a climate in the classroom where stereotypes and racist ideas can be exposed and argued out; where sources of information can be examined; where children can be equipped to critically examine the accuracy of the information they receive; where alternative and missing information can be provided and where the historical and current reasons for the continued unequal social status of different groupings can be explored (Thomas, 1984:22).

Equity

Equity encompasses anti-racism and aims to also address disadvantages of gender, class, sexuality, ability, language, culture, and religion. Dei describes equity as the “qualitative value of justice” (Dei, 2000:24). “Equity in education is the fair and equal treatment of all members of our society who are entitled to participate in and enjoy the benefits of an education. All students and adults have the opportunity to participate fully and to experience success and human dignity while developing the skills, knowledge and attitudes necessary to contribute meaningfully to society” (Saskatchewan Education, 1997:4,6,7). But equity is more than treating all students equally, because “equity does not always mean equal treatment, since equal treatment presupposes that everyone is starting from the same place” (Endicott & Mukherjee, 1992). Equitable education takes action to ameliorate disadvantages in order to bring students onto a more level playing field.

Our Children, Our Communities, and Our Future is a document that was produced in Saskatchewan jointly by the provincial department of education, the provincial school boards’ association, the teachers’ association, and the teacher training institution. This document explains equity very well (from p.5):

WHAT EQUITY IS	WHAT EQUITY IS NOT
Ensuring equitable opportunity and benefit, recognizing that to be treated equitably some people may need more of different supports	Treating everyone the same
Broad in scope to include all differences	Limited in scope or to a single target population
Employment practices that ensure equity and fairness	Hiring token representatives
Curriculum, instructional, and evaluation materials and practices, as well as learning	An instructional unit on equity or a particular target group
Recognizing the value of different ways of learning and views of knowledge	A single approach to learning and imparting knowledge
Everyone having the opportunity to achieve	Lowering standards

For the purposes of this research, we will focus on the anti-racism aspect of equity, acknowledging that racism often intersects with class and gender discrimination.

Creating Equitable Education

Suggestions, taken from the literature, will be presented in a format used for business and organizations other than education. This format is used in a document entitled *AMSSA, 2000: Gaining a Competitive Advantage* produced by the Affiliation of Multicultural Societies and Service Agencies of British Columbia (2000). The format, while guiding this discussion, will also demonstrate that all organizations will need to take steps to become more equitable and not just because it is morally correct, but because organizations that operate for profit must become equitable to maintain that profit. Integrated into this format will be discussion of the role of education in enhancing equity by taking steps to overcome all of the barriers outlined above in the *Racism and the Education System* section. Finally, the legal argument for equity will be presented.

The globalization of trade and the increasing ethnocultural diversity of Canadian markets requires the tapping of diverse skills in a diverse workplace. Diverse people have greater cultural competency than the traditional workforce. “Leaders who fail to value diversity now will cease being leaders in the future. What’s more, organizations that refuse to accept this change will also be at great risk.” (Affiliation of Multicultural Societies and Service Agencies of BC, 2000:3). “To move from a monocultural to a multicultural organization requires a paradigm shift. It is not a straight linear process that involves adding a few minority staff and translating some materials. It requires creating a culture that values diversity. Furthermore, organizations will not value and manage cultural diversity unless top management fully support and engage in the change process” (Affiliation of Multicultural Societies and Service Agencies of BC, 2000:6). The Alberta government has recognized the importance of businesses moving in this direction (Alberta Human Resources, 2002).

The Canadian School Boards' Association has put together a document entitled *Employment Equity for Racially Visible and Aboriginal Peoples: An Antiracist Framework and An Antiracist Manual for School Boards* (1992). This document states that boards must acknowledge systemic racism and change policies and practices that perpetuate it (p.6). "In dealing with a sensitive community issue like racism, policy direction must visibly and forcibly come from the board, and the board must oversee its implementation" (p. 8). "A board member who becomes an advocate for anti-racist change moves from a limited view of constituents as including only those familiar to him or her, to a larger view which includes the racially visible and aboriginal peoples . . ." (p.7,8). The document acknowledges that the process of change will produce conflict: in the board, with some administrators and teachers, and with some parents, especially if they assume they are being called racist.

Researchers have recommended several interventionist strategies for empowering minority students, including the implementation of an inclusive curriculum that incorporates the diverse student's knowledge, cross-cultural training for teachers, and vibrant recruitment strategies of visible minority teachers in order to enrich racial minority students and produce better learning outcomes for all students (Calliste, et.al., 1995; Cummins, 1986; Khalema, 2001b; Perez, 1998; Saskatchewan Human Rights Commission, 1997).

Step One: Tie Equity to Organizational Mission

In order to create equitable education, the school board must restate its priorities, incorporating equity into the mission statement or mandate. The mission must be accompanied by targets and timetables to ensure the goals are met. Organizations and businesses that set a priority for equity without integrating it into the central mandate or key business strategy, will be liable to cutting the initiative at some point in the future. Equity will never succeed if it is seen as 'nice' but not important. Many examples of this have occurred across the country as programs of multiculturalism, diversity, and English as a second language programs have been subject to severe cuts or total elimination during the past decade (Affiliation of Multicultural Societies and Service Agencies of BC, 2000; Canadian Council on Social Development; Endicott & Mukhuerjee, 1992).

Step Two: Implement Equitable Policies, Procedures, and Practices

Organizations show commitment to equity with a strong client focus, where all can access services. The organizational culture becomes welcoming of diversity. Affiliation of Multicultural Societies and Service Agencies of BC, 2000 notes that "(e)mployees rarely produce their best work when they have to fit into someone else's mold".

Policies

Appropriate policies need to be developed to clearly outline the ways in which the organization will work toward becoming equitable. Policies should encompass the following procedures and practices.² For example, to ensure that all racial incidents are dealt with appropriately, policy should clearly outline what would qualify an incident as a racial incident and then proscribe methods for teachers, counselors,

² Map of Policies in Canadian School Systems attached as Appendix III.

and administrators to react. These policies need to be developed at a system-wide level and not left to individual schools.

Advocates of feminist teaching, critical pedagogy, and critical multicultural education have recognized a need to amplify and validate marginalized educational experiences by increasing sensitivity to the needs and experiences of diverse communities to foster inclusive learning opportunities. These critical studies have stressed the need to examine ways to create “substantive structural and social transformation” within the education system in order to meet the needs of all learners (Dei, et.al., 2000).

Practices

Pedagogy

Movement toward equitable education acknowledges the current barriers to success and takes steps to slowly break the barriers down with the goal of eliminating them entirely. We acknowledge that this process takes serious commitment and will require many years. Gossetti and Rusch (1995) have found that the writings, and the professional activities that construct our understanding of teaching comes from a privileged perspective that has largely ignored issues of status, ethnicity, race, and gender.

Developing the ability of educational systems and individual teachers to offer equity will require quality in-service training of all teachers on an ongoing basis (Endicott & Mukherjee, 1992). Cooperation of teacher training institutions will be essential, as these discussions must become an integral part of all teacher education. School systems cannot be expected to hold sole responsibility for resolving issues of racism in society, but there is a “moral and legal expectation that they will act as a model for other public and private institutions” (Endicott & Mukherjee, 1992:3). When all teachers have the opportunity to ponder the sources of racism and its current realities, and when they have access to resources to help them integrate anti-racism into their teaching, equity will become possible. The training opportunities for teachers will be essential, acknowledging that “(t)eaching is a demanding profession and each year teachers are asked to take on additional responsibilities previously the providence of the home. Adding to these demands without adequate support systems will only frustrate an already exhausted profession (Blades, et.al., 2000:47). The extra resources needed to work effectively toward more equitable education will certainly require allocation of funding to this area.

Resistance to anti-racism training can be expected from some teachers. The Affiliation of Multicultural Societies and Service Agencies of BC identifies denial of the problem as common and that initial steps are often ineffective, as has been the experience with multicultural education. A study done by Solomon (2001) found three reasons that education students were resistant to studying racism. They had difficulty acknowledging their own prejudices, were uncomfortable discussing a “taboo” subject, and they believed that equality of opportunity existed in education (p.3,4). The same study found that less than 10% of teacher candidates had substantial knowledge about diverse backgrounds and cultures and that 1/3 of them had problems interacting with people who were “different” from them (p.15).

Pedagogy: Culture

Intercultural communication is one important facet of anti-racism and equity. It must be emphasized, however, that equitable race relations involve much more than understanding of different cultures. Inequities in Canadian society include disadvantages for people of colour whose families have lived in

Canada for generations and who have adopted the values and lifestyles of the mainstream. Many of these people are not different in culture, they are only different in colour.

In our multicultural society, all Canadians need to develop awareness of cultural differences and build their skills at cross-cultural communication. The following is a useful framework to describe cultural differences.

- different communication styles – eg. nonverbal, acceptable assertiveness
- different attitudes toward conflict – face-to-face or quiet and behind the scenes
- different approaches to completing tasks – others develop relationship first, we get to the task first
- different decision making styles – delegating, deciding oneself, majority, consensus
- different attitudes toward disclosure – openness about feelings very different

Without the ability to communicate in different styles, incorrect assumptions occur frequently. An increase in cross-cultural communication skills will enhance teaching, learning, and working with parents. These skills are beneficial in general, as there is great diversity of communication styles within our own culture (Thomas, 1984).

People easily form judgments of others who are different, and often 'different' is seen as 'less than'. One does not need to cross cultures to find this kind of judgment, and young people frequently label others as 'abnormal' or 'weird'. Students need to be able to see others as different but not less than themselves (Study Circles Resource Center, 1998).

School systems also need to "(e)xtend support systems and special programmes to students who are learning English as a Second Language." These students need extra assistance, flexible programs, longer exam writing times, and more one-on-one tutoring (Blades, et.al., 2000: 47,48).

Teachers need "suitable teaching resources that incorporate a diversity of ethnocultural perspectives" (Blades, et.al., 2000: 49). Most existing texts are eurocentric. Parents and other ethnocultural community members are an excellent source of cultural information.

Pedagogy: Identity and Expectations

When teachers are able to see that racism penetrates our society, has grown out of our history, and that we all have developed prejudices by living in this society, they will become more able to teach all students with equity. And because equity is not the same as equality, they will be able to assist students who come to school with a set of disadvantages. Teaching the whole child allows teachers to look for signs of low self-worth that children may have developed. Many children of colour will need extra encouragement to develop a strong belief in their own abilities, particularly those students who do not come from a strongly supportive environment. Acknowledgement of the cycle of racism in families of colour and all of the possible ways of dealing with this racism will help teachers look beyond behaviour to search for the motivation. When children are given the message that they are valued and capable, they will achieve much better in school (Lee, E., 8).

Students need to develop skills to stand up for themselves and others in the face of injustice, part of being responsible citizens. White students need help developing a positive identity without ethnocentrism and superiority (Derman-Sparks, 1989:ix).

Curriculum

Curriculum consists of content, texts and supporting materials, and methods of delivery. In Alberta, the content of curricula is set by the provincial Ministry of Learning. School districts do not have direct control over these documents. They do have the ability to develop supporting materials and encourage particular modes of curriculum delivery. Curriculum content remains mainly eurocentric, although there have been steps taken to incorporate more diversity. "Canada and many other countries have deep links with 19th century Europe, and, consequently, reflect the world-view of that time and place in our social, cultural, and political structures. Educators committed to the goals of equity and equality must recognize that history and deal with it, without guilt or defensiveness" (Endicott & Mukhuerjee, 1992:11). For the most part, North American students are taught that white heroes, government, literature, and science are above all the rest. Kivel suggests that students can not respect other cultures if they believe their culture is superior (Kivel:208). When teachers develop the ability to provide a balance in their classrooms by doing things like using literature from other cultures, discussing important people who are people of colour, and giving credit to Islamic culture for early advancements in math and science, students will learn that each culture has contributed to knowledge (Dei, 176; Khalema, 2000b). If the curriculum leaves out the ways that colonialism has oppressed peoples of colour in the world, teachers must introduce these topics.

Classrooms need to try to counteract the racial biases that exist in the media by helping students think and read critically. The colours of faces on posters and pictures in the classroom must be diverse. Books and audio-visual resources should represent people of all cultures and colours. School districts can help by providing resources. Many excellent resources have been produced and are available for use. It is necessary, also, to delve into different types of knowledge. In western societies, cognitive knowledge has the most recognition, while other cultures place more value in knowledge acquired by experience, for example. "Education in North American contexts has always proceeded with a perspective that privileges Western ways of knowing as neutral and / or legitimate (Dei, 2000:83).

"(A)ssessment materials that consider the diversity of students' ethnocultural backgrounds" need to be developed (Blades, et.al., 2000:50). When this is the responsibility of the provincial government, as it is in Alberta, discussions on this matter need to be held with the appropriate authorities.

Step Three: Equitable Hiring Practices

Policy and procedure changes must include an examination of current hiring practices for all school system staff and implementation of a process that will eventually have the racial composition of the staff reflect the racial composition of the population. School systems, like all other employers, have inherited a system that has been part of a society that excluded non-white people. Less than 50 years ago, there were racially segregated schools in this country. The last residential school for Aboriginal people in Edmonton closed in the 1970s. There does not need to be intentional discrimination happening in human resources offices for inequitable hiring to be the end result. We must look at the reality, however, that the vast majority of teachers in both Edmonton school systems are white. The Aboriginal student population is predicted to be 20% within the next ten years and the visible minority population is already 20%. We therefore will be looking at a situation where approximately 2/5 of the student population will be white and nearly all of the teachers are white.

Policies, practices and curriculum changes must be accompanied by recruitment and hiring of teachers of colour. They will "...not only provide role models for minority youth, but bring diverse teaching styles,

modes of communication and knowledge into schools for the benefit of all students" (Dei, 2000:176). "A representative staff can, provide role-models for students, contribute a variety of worldviews to the school culture, and validate difference for students." If teaching and administrative staff are totally or primarily white every student infers that colour is inferior (Endicott & Mukhuerjee, 1992).

The Canadian School Boards Association lists four studies indicating that currently, access to employment is not equitable within school divisions in Canada (Endicott & Mukhuerjee, 1992:13). Discussion groups in Edmonton have recommended that there should be more hiring based on diversity (*Canada's Regional Consultations*, 2000: Northern Alberta Alliance on Race Relations, 2002b). Businesses and organizations throughout the western world are taking action to open up their workplaces to all racial groups. The government of Canada has been working with "employment equity" since 1986 when legislation was passed that all federal civil service and any large company contracted to the federal government must take positive steps to ensure their hiring is equitable. Many provincial governments and school districts across the country have taken the same steps, as have many corporations on their own initiative. Discrimination in hiring violates human rights legislation and, it is bad for business. With Alberta's growing economy and predicted labour shortages in the near future, hiring within non-traditional groups will become a necessity (Alberta Human Resources, 2002).

In (Endicott & Mukhuerjee, 1992), employment equity is defined as a process which takes a systematic approach to changing practices which have adversely affected racially visible and aboriginal people" (p.4). School systems are large employers and there is a "moral and legal expectation that they will act as a model for other public and private institutions." (Endicott & Mukhuerjee, 1992:3). "Employment Equity is defined as: Racially visible and aboriginal peoples have historically been denied equal access to employment opportunities, school boards must go further than treating people 'in the same way', and actively institute special measures. These may include numerical goals, targets, mentoring, and any other special measures that the school board deems necessary to achieve its objective." (Endicott & Mukhuerjee, 1992:46). "(P)roactive personnel policies are absolutely essential. Potential biases inherent in job applications and screening tests need to be carefully analyzed and dealt with (Affiliation of Multicultural Societies and Service Agencies of BC, 2000: 9). The process will involve outreach recruitment and ideally working with teacher training institutions to encourage people of colour and Aboriginal people to enter the teaching profession. After they are hired, the system needs to ensure there is a working environment that is welcoming. This will be demonstrated by successful retention of these teachers.

Conventions, Legislation, and Existing Policies

"In a democracy, all people have a right to equality. The education system is central to Canada's democratic process, and the Canadian school boards are responsible for delivering this education to the public" (Endicott & Mukhuerjee, 1992:10). There are international conventions, federal and provincial legislation, and policies within the ATA and the two Edmonton school districts that make the obligation to provide equitable education a legal responsibility and a moral one. Litigation suits are a real possibility for Edmonton school districts without adequate policy and procedural guidelines to meet legislative requirements.

International Conventions

Internationally, Canada has signed and ratified several international treaties that speak to equality in education. Ratifying an international treaty means that we have agreed to be bound by that treaty. The

Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) is the foundation for all other international human rights treaties. The Declaration says:

- Everyone has the right to education. ...
- Education shall be directed to the full development of the human personality and to the strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. It shall promote understanding, tolerance and friendship among all nations, racial or religious groups...

Since 1976, Canada has been bound by the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. Canada has also signed the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination.

Federal Legislation

In addition to international statutes and legal obligations, the Constitution of Canada guarantees equality to all Canadians. Section 15(1) of the *Charter of Rights and Freedoms* guarantees equality and states that:

“Every individual is equal before and under the law and has the right to equal protection and equal benefit of the law without discrimination and, in particular, without discrimination based on race, national or ethnic origin, color, religion, ...”.

Section 3(1) of the *Multiculturalism Act* (1988), recognizes:

- The existence of communities whose members share a common origin and their historic contribution to Canadian society, and enhance their development;
- The social, cultural, economic and political institutions of Canada to be both respectful and inclusive of Canada’s multicultural character;
- All individuals receive equal treatment and equal protection under the law, while respecting and valuing their diversity; and
- The full and equitable participation of individuals and communities of all origins in the continuing evolution and shaping of all aspects of Canadian society and assist them in the elimination of any barrier to that participation.

Before the constitution was patriated in 1982, there was no explicit prohibition of racial discrimination. The Bill of Rights, in effect before this time, did prohibit racism, but it had no constitutional status.

In 1986, the Canadian government adopted the *Employment Equity Act* as an attempt to change structures and procedures that reproduce and reinforce discrimination, in federal civil service and within all large federal contractors. The Employment Equity Act ruled that visible minorities, women, Aboriginal peoples, and persons with disabilities are to be represented in the workplace in numbers proportionate to their presence in the local population and are not to be denied employment opportunities for reasons unrelated to ability or merit. This legislation goes further “...than treating persons in the same way but also requires special measures and the accommodation of differences.”

Provincial Legislation

In Alberta, several policies and laws have been adopted as a way to enhance diversity and equity in the province. The *Alberta Human Rights, Citizenship and Multiculturalism Act* of 1980, for instance, promotes the protection of Albertans from discrimination in employment, exclusion from organizations, and education. Alberta's *Individual's Rights Protection Act* also prohibits discrimination in employment.

The *Alberta School Act*, stipulates that the Alberta education system has an obligation to meet the needs of all students.

In general, these laws recognize the "mosaic" of multiculturalism in Canada, and focus on protecting individuals from racial discrimination in many spheres of life including employment and education.

Alberta Teachers' Association (2002) *Code of Professional Conduct* states that "the teacher must teach in a manner that respects the dignity and rights of all persons without prejudice as to race, ...".

Equity Initiatives in Alberta's Education

As a result of changing demographics much of Alberta's initiatives towards equity has focused on ESL programs, interpretation services, and integration assistance to newly immigrated families. In 1984 Alberta Education adopted specific *Guidelines for Tolerance and Understanding* to ensure that programs and educational material foster tolerance, understanding of, and respect for all.

In addition, in 1988, the Alberta government adopted a *Language Education Policy* that recognizes the cultural and linguistic diversity of Albertans.

Edmonton Public School Board

In addition to government and the ATA, the Edmonton Public School Board has shown some interest in dealing with diversity issues. For instance, Edmonton Public Schools (2001) *Multiculturalism Policy Statement* states that "the board believes in the promotion of individual and group relations in which ethnic, racial, religious and linguistic similarities and differences are valued, respected and exchanged".

In addition, the Edmonton Public Schools (2001) *Discrimination and Harassment* statement recognizes discrimination as an "adverse treatment based on race, ..." [Section, C(1)]. In this statement, discrimination between employees is prohibited at all times [Section E(1)]. The district priorities for Edmonton Public School Board (EPSB) for 2002-2005 state that they are committed to "... providing an appropriate learning experience for each student in a caring & safe environment"

The *Student Behaviour & Conduct Policy* for (EPSB) indicates a "Zero tolerance approach to inappropriate behaviour or conduct".

Student Rights & Responsibilities for EPSB state that:

- Students shall be treated with dignity, respect, and fairness by other students and staff
- Students shall be provided with a learning environment that is free from physical, emotional, and social abuse

- Students shall show respect for ethnic, religious, and gender differences

Edmonton Catholic School Board

The Edmonton Catholic School Board has policies that ensure each student will be treated with respect. *Administrative Policy* 109 states that all schools will “provide a safe, nurturing learning environment that recognizes ... the goodness, dignity, and worth of all ...”. The same policy recognizes that learning environment must be “non threatening” and that “logical consequences” will be the outcome of any behaviour contrary to that stated in this policy.

Harassment is defined as any “unwelcome verbal or physical conduct because of race, ...” and further states that “(u)nwanted physical contact, attention, demands, jokes or insults are harassment when they negatively affect the learning environment.”.

The Need for Equity Policies in Edmonton School Systems

Canadian research and studies done in Alberta and Edmonton demonstrate that people of colour and Aboriginal people live in a disadvantaged position in every sphere of our society: housing, justice, employment, and education. Racism operates on both individual and institutional levels and as Dei (2000) indicates, institutional racism often occurs “without any particular malice. Edmonton, within the next few decades, will likely consist of 50% white and 50% people of colour, like the Toronto and Vancouver of today.

Schooling has a tremendous potential for working toward a more equitable society, and all systems must take steps to ensure their education becomes more equitable. When we are able to provide a good education for everyone, as is the goal of Alberta Learning and both Edmonton school boards, the quality of life of those who are disadvantaged by their skin colour, will increase. It is also the responsibility of school systems to prepare young people for the labour market that will need every young person. Young people of colour who have been respected as equals and young white students who are open to differences will provide needed skills for the world of work.

Racism does exist in Edmonton schools, a fact that each system must acknowledge (Edmonton Immigrant Services Association, 2001; Edmonton Social Planning Council, 1992; Kelly, 1998; Khalema, 2000a, 2001a, 2001b; The Mennonite Centre for Newcomers, 1994; Northern Alberta Alliance on Race Relations, 2001, 2002a, 2002b.) All school personnel need to develop the skills to deal with racial incidents in ways that recognize the injustice and take appropriate action. Students need to develop the responsibility to speak out against overt racism and will benefit by developing the appropriate skills.

Children are vulnerable and need to be assured of a “safe and caring” environment as indicated in the Alberta School Act. Behaviour of students of colour that exhibits withdrawal or aggression may indicate experiences of racism, as may a below average achievement level. A discussion and analysis of streaming and the potential bias in student assessment can bring these issues to the fore. The process of disengagement that may lead to students dropping out of school must be monitored. School personnel need the opportunity to discuss this dynamic, to enable them to develop skills to avoid it happening as much as is possible.

School systems must acknowledge the unique circumstances of Aboriginal people. Specific attention needs to be paid to English as a Second Language students and the particular situations that refugee

children have come from. Open communication must be developed with parents – some material will need to be translated into other languages and parent/teacher interviews may need translators to facilitate this. Parents can also be resources for learning about culture.

School personnel need to be aware of the eurocentric nature of many texts and resources and to provide a balanced discussion of the contribution of other cultures to history and ensure they are visually present in classroom materials on display. Teachers must be aware of the hate movement and develop the ability to equip young people with skills to deal with hate propaganda, especially on the internet. Teachers and students need to develop the ability to be highly critical of mass media as it demonstrates a high degree of racial bias.

Equitable hiring practices are necessary for teaching staff. This will likely need to include vibrant recruitment strategies and working closely with teacher training institutions. Teachers from visible minorities have a deep understanding of racism and often of other cultures, and types of knowledge, allowing them to help students and other teachers. Children of colour must have role models who are like them and white children must see people of colour in authority. There will be no reduction in qualifications involved in this process, as can be demonstrated by the federal civil service and many provinces and cities across the country in their experiences implementing employment equity.

To ensure that equity is eventually applied in all classrooms and in the entire school system, the procedures and practices must be driven by policy. School boards have the responsibility to ensure that these policies are created, and then provided with resources to allow their success. This is a moral issue and a legal issue. The process to equitable education will be a lengthy one and it is imperative that school boards in Edmonton take the first step.

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