The Role of Afrocentricity in the Inclusive Curriculum in Canadian Schools*

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Developing an "inclusive curriculum" that highlights Afrocentric knowledge will be a difficult task in Canadian schools. Nevertheless, the educational stories and experiences of Black/African-Canadian high school students demonstrate the need for a very different approach to both curricular offerings and pedagogic practices. Afrocentric knowledge not only is important for the intellectual and social growth of such students, but plays a part in the multi-centric education of all students. A curriculum which is inclusive in this broad sense will entail transformation of educational structures in Canada.

L'élaboration d'une "pédagogie de l'inclusion" qui met en lumière les connaissances afrocentriques s'avérera une tâche difficile pour les écoles canadiennes. Quoi qu'il en soit, les propos et les expériences des élèves noirs canadiens du secondaire démontrent la nécessité d'une approche très différente dans les programmes et les méthodes pédagogiques. Les connaissances afrocentriques sont importantes pour le développement intellectuel et social de ces élèves, en plus de jouer un rôle dans l'éducation multicentrique de tous les élèves. Un programme faisant ainsi appel à une pédagogie de l'inclusion nécessitera la transformation des structures de l'éducation au Canada.

Current practices in Canadian schools do not address satisfactorily the problem of students' disengagement and dropping out. This problem may be alleviated by the development of an inclusive curriculum that promotes alternative, non-hegemonic ways of knowing and understanding our world. As an African-Canadian educator, I consider a non-hegemonic Afrocentric education (curriculum and pedagogy) as one means to address the educational needs of specifically (but not exclusively) Black/African-Canadian students.[1] Following Asante (1991), I interpret "Afrocentricity" as the study of phenomena grounded in the perspectives and epistemological constructs of peoples of African descent.

In this context, I recall those educational experiences that informed and influenced my own thoughts about an inclusive curriculum. My frustrations with the schooling I received in my youth in Ghana were less the result of what the colonial curriculum taught me than of what it did *not* teach me. Learning about Niagara Falls in Canada was considered more important than being taught about

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the local rivers in my village — the rivers in which I swam, bathed, and caught fish, and from which I fetched water for household use. To this day, despite my current position of privilege, teaching in a Canadian institution of higher learning, I remain part of the "other" that has been misrepresented (or rendered "exotic") in Euro-American academic discourses and texts. I share with many others common historical experiences of the subjugation of our existence through the devaluing and de-privileging of our histories and ancestral knowledge in Euro-American academic scholarship and thought. I also struggle with the fact that in discussing issues of inclusivity and representation of the "other," I must use the language of those who historically and currently hold positions of dominance in society. However, I find it gratifying that some of my practical experiences may enable me to engage in a critical dialogue about what "inclusive curriculum" means.

I am not alone, of course. Many students and parents are challenging educators to be more inclusive in their academic practices. At a panel session during a 1992 conference on "African Studies in Canada: Problems and Prospects in the Coming Decades," one student of African descent proposed the following title for his presentation: "We Would Rather Be Reading Wole Soyinka." This title not only highlighted current overemphasis on the work of White, male, heterosexual literary scholars, but also indicated a yearning to study non-European literary scholars. Similarly, at a meeting of the Organization of Parents of Black Children during the same year, when one parent expressed some doubts about what Black history could do for those youths failing mathematics and science in school, another responded by contending that minority children are more likely to learn if they can relate to the material being taught. At the end of the meeting, parents were unanimous on one point: educators should teach about Black achievement in mathematics and science and use this information to centre their students' learning. These types of experiences illustrate the importance of race, identity, and representation in education.

Unfortunately, there is a dearth of critical educational research specifically about the inclusive curriculum in Canadian schools (although some important work has been done in other jurisdictions). Researchers in this country have not systematically examined how minority students define or articulate issues linked to inclusivity, nor have they identified the curricular and pedagogic practices on which an inclusive curriculum depends.

LISTENING TO THE VOICES OF STUDENTS

As part of a series of investigations into the nature of an inclusive curriculum, in 1992 a group of graduate students in the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education and I examined some experiences of Black/African-Canadian students in the Ontario public school system. The researchers solicited individual and group responses from 150 Black students from four Toronto high schools.

Students were selected randomly to provide a representation of male and female students from general- and advanced-level programs, and to include Grade 10 and 12 students.[2] The Grade 10 students selected were those considered at "high risk" of dropping out of school, as indicated by such criteria as below-average marks, poor attendance, and inadequate accumulation of credits (Waterhouse, 1990; Ziegler, 1989). The Grade 12 students were selected to provide information on their reasons for staying in school, and their attitudes towards the school system.[3] The researchers also interviewed two dozen students, as well as 21 actual "dropouts" and youth designated "at risk" of dropping out, randomly chosen from other Toronto schools.

During interviews, the researchers asked such questions as "What do you like/dislike about school?," "Why do you think some students drop out?," and "Why do others stay on to complete their education?" Students were asked how the dynamics of social difference (race or ethnicity, class, and gender) affected their schooling experiences, and what changes they desired in the school system. The themes emerging from these interviews centred on race, identity, and representation (Dei, Holmes, Mazzuca, McIsaac, & Campbell, 1995).

Three primary concerns were expressed in the students' narratives about school experiences: differential treatment according to race, the absence of Black teachers, and the absence of Black and African-Canadian history in the classroom. These concerns arose even in response to seemingly unrelated questions or descriptions. Students described encounters with authority and power structures they perceived not to work in their interest. They also discussed difficulties in constructing personal and group cultural identities in a school environment that did not adequately highlight their cultural presence, heritage, and history. They also talked of attempts to excel in the face of unflattering teacher expectations. Although students were interestingly split in terms of a desire for intensified parental involvement in schooling, many acknowledged their parents' assistance and sacrifices on their behalf. A number of students said they persevered because they wanted to be like their parent(s) (and noted the absence of role models in the school environment).

In subsequent phases of the project, in part to cross-reference some of the students' narratives, the researchers talked to 41 teachers (including some administrators and guidance counsellors), 59 non-Black students, and 55 Black/African-Canadian parents. School staff and non-Black students were selected from the four schools that were the focus of the research project. Interviews with Black parents and community workers solicited concerns about, and solutions to, the problems of public schooling in Canada. Interesting parallels, convergences, and divergences arose between Black/African-Canadian parents' and teachers' narrative discourses and those of the youth. In sum, the project gathered a wide range of voices.

The sample of students, however, was not statistically representative. The narratives should be read as interpretations from the standpoint of the informants

and not from the standpoint of statistical significance. Nevertheless, the "random" selection of informants to cross-reference the students' narratives mitigated some of the effects of self-selection. The evidence from this research seeks not to answer how it is "representative of" the school experiences of all Black youth, but rather *to represent* those experiences. It seeks to display a multiplicity of voices as it leaves open the possibility for other voices to be heard. It is both a narration of social realities and a challenge to other researchers. There is no mistaking the final message: in school, Black youth experience exclusion and racism on many levels.

A few student voices in the study highlight the three interrelated concerns of differential treatment according to race, the absence of Black teachers, and the inadequacy of school curricular content. Jane[4] is a school "dropout" who later enrolled in a community college and now works as a receptionist with an industrial firm in Toronto. Jane and I discussed the absence of Black scholars in academic texts and the absence of representation of Black peoples in important aspects and segments of the school curriculum. I was made acutely aware of her worry that "all those who have done something worth mentioning in the school books are White men."

Jane's concerns are shared by other Black students. For example, Michael, a 19-year-old general-level student, came to Canada from Jamaica nearly nine years ago. His frustrations and the emotions with which he speaks about the de-privileging of Black peoples' history and contributions to society throughout his public schooling cannot be missed by listeners:

> I only know about Canadian history, which is White history. I did not learn anything about Black people. And then, probably in the past two years, I would say we have improved in our geography, but we don't really learn about the cultural background. We just learned about the . . . not even the people, but just the city or the country. Basics, nothing deep. Is it tough? I mean, I would like to know more about my history, yes. A lot more. I think I need to know a lot more than I know. (15/11/92)

Marlo, 21, was participating in a summer jobs-training program when he was interviewed. From him I learned how the official school curriculum can be very disempowering to the minority student, to the point where the student is disengaged from the classroom:

> When I was going to school the teachers focused on European history. . . . Alexander Graham Bell discovered this and when you sit in a classroom full of 12 White people and all you hear is White this, White that, you think, 'So what am I here for?' Right! A lot of times you think it's a lot of shit, you know, a lot of bullshit. So you don't find that interesting. . . . But at the same time the teacher could always say, well, this came from the Caribbean and this came from Africa and just, or this came from Germany and kind of add everyone's input . . . [the] school system that I know . . . focused on just White European and that's it, nothing more, and they don't tell you about great African stuff or

. . . Indian or East Indian, there's nothing like that. So a lot of the students that are minorities . . . don't feel interested or are left out. . . . It's just you in a corner of the room. (08/08/92)

It is no exaggeration to say that minority students are generally critical of the fact that not all world experiences are represented in classroom discourses and texts — the fact of being Black, a Black woman, poor, or any form of a minority living in Canadian society is rarely discussed.

When Mary was interviewed, she had dropped out of school the previous year but was planning to go back. She knows many dropouts "from Montreal, Toronto, New York City. They're all smart. . . . They all have something. Nobody's stupid, I think. Everybody knows something." Mary reasoned that having just one Black teacher in the school was not enough to make an impact:

I grew up with White teachers. . . . I had a Black teacher. She didn't do nothing. You know, she didn't do, she didn't do nothing. She was just sitting there because she was the only Black teacher, maybe, I guess. If there was a lot of Black teachers, now, like, my mother, like, I know nobody would be messing around. They [students] wouldn't joke around, they'd take it seriously. (30/07/92)

Mary implied that the teacher would have to communicate to students an unspecified quality, "like, my mother," that would be perceived as "caring." She contended that the teacher's qualities would directly influence student behaviour and attitude. In later discussions, Mary pointed to the importance of Black teachers and Black school counsellors having a perspective on matters to which she could relate.

Jean-Brenda, a Grade 12 student-activist in an advanced program, commented on the difference it made to her if there were a Black teacher on staff. She talked of understanding perspectives, sharing experiences, developing relationships, and seeing the Black teacher as a source of inspiration and motivation:

Like, a lot of White teachers I don't think would be able to share more personal things. . . . I have a tendency of developing good relationships with my teachers or at least a few of them anyway and so if I were able to develop a relationship like that with a Black teacher, I mean, myself, wanting to become a teacher, I think it would be wonderful for me to do well. You know, I'd be able to learn how hard or how easy it was for that person to become a teacher and the experiences that they went through, maybe, in terms of racism they had. (05/02/93)

Jean-Brenda also linked students' disengagement to the lack of Black role models and authority figures in the schools and the students' sense of isolation in the institution. Her narrative illustrated how schools contribute to the reproduction of power relations and maintain social inequality:

> There are no Black teachers there; our administration is all White. . . . If you look at that and you say, well . . . you can see that the people in power are all White . . . you might start thinking that, well, there's no place for a Black person there. You aren't seeing any role models. You aren't seeing, you know, anyone who looks like you in a position of power and you might say, well, you know Blacks can't do that. Blacks can't make it that far so why am I bothering. (05/02/93)

In general, then, these students' narratives spoke to omissions and negations of Black culture in school texts and academic discourse. When students talked about wanting to "bring the school to the community," they were asking that their home cultures and out-of-school experiences be included in school discussions. Students were also making a political reference to being empowered by a learning process that uses their cultural knowledge to question society. When students talked about the possibility of a Black teacher having a perspective that they can identify with, they were making communicative and pedagogic reference to the teacher's sharing in their personal and cultural knowledge, and the possibility of challenging dominant viewpoints at school. Students' narratives thus moved beyond questions of culture to questions of power. Students saw Black staff representation as cardinal to the integration of their lived experiences, culture, and heritage in the school curriculum. (A few of them were quick to add that having Black teachers would not necessarily make a major difference. In fact, these few talked about "Black teachers who are not really Black." These students were engaged in reflecting on the very essence of what it means to be "really Black.")

OTHER EVIDENCE

Our research findings are echoed in other studies. For example, concerns over the absence of Black teachers and top school administrators are expressed in studies by the Toronto Board of Education (1988), and the Black Educators Working Group (1993). Other studies by Brathwaite (1989), James (1990, 1994), the Canadian Alliance of Black Educators (1992), the Government/African Canadian Community Working Group (1992), Henry (1992, 1994), and Solomon (1995) have also touched on the Eurocentric school curriculum.

Evidence for Black students' criticism of schooling is not new. Over the years many so-called immigrant parents have complained that Canadian schools do not provide a complete understanding of what it is to live in a pluralistic society (Toronto Board of Education, 1988). For example, in Ontario, so-called immigrant parents and community workers have organized and demanded changes to resolve concerns about discrimination and prejudice in the schools, and about policy and curriculum in the school boards (Brand & Bhaggiyadatta, 1986; Dehli, Restakis, & Sharpe, 1988). Such local community initiatives were instrumental in establishing race-relations policies and heritage-language programs during the

regular school day in the early 1980s (see Dehli, 1994). A few school boards have also set up committees to examine the school curriculum for any bias.

Outside Ontario, parents, community workers, teachers, care-givers, and students have exercised similar leadership in Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, and British Columbia (D'Oyley, 1994). In Nova Scotia, local groups' historic struggles for school inclusivity policies inspired not only the Parent-Student Association at Preston after the Cole Harbour conflict in the 1980s (Calliste, 1994b) but the African-Canadian Educational Project, in developing an Afrocentric curriculum for its Saturday school. The Black Learners' Advisory Committee has also pioneered multicultural and antiracism education in schools, colleges, and universities to promote Black learning (Calliste, 1994a).

Some recognition of the need for inclusive schooling has been achieved at the provincial level. Nova Scotia's government is funding the development of a new curriculum that will include courses on Black history, culture, and traditions. New Brunswick's Ministry of Education has announced a new policy on race relations that will encompass curriculum and teacher-training (Lewington, 1995). In Ontario, in recent years several policy initiatives have responded to minority education issues (Wright & Allingham, 1994). Such policy documents as *The Common Curriculum, Grades 1–9* (Ontario Ministry of Education and Training, 1993b), *Antiracism and Ethnocultural Equity in School Boards: Guidelines for Policy Development and Implementation* (Ontario Ministry of Education and Training, 1993a), and *Changing Perspectives: A Resource Guide for Antiracist and Ethnocultural-Equity Education* (Ontario Ministry of Education, 1992) are intended, directly or indirectly, to encourage inclusivity. Although laudable, these policies are not easily translated into specific plans for action. Such implementation is often left to the discretion of either individual school boards or school principals, who often complain about the lack of resources to effect government policies. As a result, strategies for increased staff representation and curriculum diversity have still not been fully implemented, and the goal of inclusive schooling is far from being achieved.

THE NATURE OF "INCLUSIVITY"

Within the school system, inclusivity means dealing foremost with *equity*: the qualitative value of justice. It also means ensuring *representation*: a multiplicity of perspectives in academic discourse, knowledge, and texts. Furthermore, inclusivity requires pedagogies that respond to the social construction of difference in the school system, and also in society at large (issues of race, class, gender, sexual orientation, age, and ability). Inclusivity requires spaces for alternative, and sometimes oppositional, paradigms to flourish in the schools. It demands the development of a broad-based curriculum, the institution of diverse teaching strategies, and the establishment of educational support systems that enhance conditions conducive to success for all students. It also requires an

understanding of the connection between physical bodies (representation) and how people know and come to know things (i.e., the connection between self/group identity and knowledge production).

Questions of power and the construction of social difference play an important part in both the official and the hidden aspects of school curricula — the so-called "deep curriculum" (L. Holmes, personal communication, April 1995). The "deep curriculum" includes not only stipulated and hidden school rules but also regulations that influence student and staff activities, behaviours, attitudes, perceptions, expectations, and outcomes. Such elements as school calendars, celebrations, food services, assemblies, concerts, athletics, bulletins, and hallway displays constitute the school's personality or character, and present students with the "acceptable" values and standards of the school (Mukherjee & Thomas, n.d., p. 7; see also Bhyat, 1993).

Nevertheless, "inclusion" may not be enough. Current definitions and practices of inclusion still leave students on the margins, even when these students are "included." Despite administrators' very best intentions, "included" students may still underachieve or even drop out; others continue at the bottom of the scale of academic achievement.[5] Minority students, then, should be moved from the margins to the centre; they should not just be grafted onto the existing order (hooks, 1984). It is insufficient, for example, to include a few sessions dealing with minority themes in a course syllabus and label that action as "inclusive schooling."

What we need is a "multi-centric" approach to curricular knowledge. "Centricity" locates students within their own cultural frame of reference so that they can connect socially, politically, ideologically, spiritually, and emotionally to the learning process (Asante, 1991, p. 171). "Centric" education consequently refutes hegemonic education. Ending the current dominance of Eurocentricity requires introducing other forms of "centric knowledge" that emphasize the contributions of other peoples to knowledge production and world history. Minority youth in particular will then be able to counter Euro-Canadian/American school systems' deep-rooted tendency to consider them inferior. A "multi-centric" education can create spaces in the classroom for all participants.

AFROCENTRIC KNOWLEDGE

A focus on Afrocentricity is designed not to exclude other "centric" knowledge but to contribute to a plurality of perspectives and knowledge about schooling in the Euro-Canadian context. Curriculum in Canadian schools is diversified when programming is culture-specific without marginalizing other cultures. Questions surrounding Afrocentric education could equally be asked about First Nations, Asiacentric, and other forms of education. First Nations peoples can and do generate knowledge about their own societies that could be tapped by an initiative for inclusive schooling. Asiacentric, Eurocentric, and Afrocentric world-

views all contain some ideas that can help solve educational problems. At this point, although I recognize the multiple and collective origins of knowledge and the need for a synthesis of different world-views in Canadian education, I consider only the case of Afrocentric knowledge.

How, then, can non-hegemonic Afrocentric knowledge be incorporated into school teachings for the benefit of everyone, and particularly for African-Canadian students? I suggest that Euro-Canadian/American schools need a new form of education that will assist Black youth particularly to re-invent their Africanness within a Diasporic context, and to create a way of being and thinking congruent with positive African traditions and values. The rationale for this, as Lee-Ferdinand (1994) has contended, is that "Eurocentrism has been insidious in its universality, creating a common alienation among [most students of African descent]" (p. 12).

Because the Black student population is not homogeneous, all students may not have exactly the same need for African-centred education. The concerns of students born in Continental Africa, Caribbean-born students, and Canadian-born students of African-descent vary (Dei et al., 1995). Nevertheless, concerns about differential treatment; the lack of representation of Black/African perspectives, histories, and experiences; the absence of Black teachers; and the dominance of White, Eurocentric culture in the mainstream school system are shared by all Black youth.

It is true that questions have been raised about whether Canadian- or Caribbean-born students of African descent identify with Africa at all. I believe that if, in fact, these students do not identify with Africa, it is because of the negativity about Africa that schools and the popular media present to unsuspecting youth and the wider Canadian audience. The Caribbean, for example, cannot be understood outside a critical review of the history of Africa and African peoples and political economic developments of the Americas. Similarly, to understand the history of Africans in North America requires knowledge about Africa and the Caribbean. Making these linkages between African peoples' histories, cultures, and contemporary political development is important. To do so is not to deny Caribbean and African-Canadian histories and cultures in their own right. On the contrary, it is to enrich the histories of all African peoples as survivors, resisters, and agents of change.

In the North American context, Henry's (1992) and Ladson-Billings' (1994) studies of Black teachers and classroom pedagogy show how curriculum inclusivity can be instituted at diverse practical levels, using the cultural knowledge of parents, students, and teachers. Educators may tap the "cultural capital" (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1970) that students bring from their communities. Henry (1992, pp. 175–183) cites the work of Ladson-Billings (1989) and many others to show how the educator may connect students' school and home cultures and cultural knowledge. According to Banks (1993, p. 7), "home culture" refers to

the concepts, explanations, and interpretations of society that students derive from personal experiences in their homes, families, and out-of-school communities. Developing a "pedagogy of the home" encourages the inclusion of specific cultural values, norms, social mores, and conduct in the delivery of education.

"Culturally-relevant teaching" (Ladson-Billings & Henry, 1990) allows students to use their home culture as a basis from which to interrogate "school knowledge" (p. 82). It also locates the school as a site of social and political struggle (Henry, 1992, p. 183), and may empower students and teachers as they engage in social criticisms and destabilization of the status quo. Students may question not only what is passed on to them as valid knowledge, but also the contradictions inherent in receiving an education not appropriately grounded in students' lived experiences and cultural knowledge. Erickson (1987), in pointing out that cultural differences between students and teachers affect students' educational achievement, emphasizes the political significance of understanding students' oppositional cultures. He considers "culturally-responsive pedagogy" one means of engaging in transformative teaching and learning that will equip students with the educational capital to deal with the contradictions between the norms and values privileged in the school on the one hand, and the harsh realities of students' home/out-of-school experiences on the other (p. 342).

A pedagogy sensitive to cultural differences and to varied cultural patterns and forms cannot be based on a superficial definition of culture that focuses on "saris, samosas, and steel bands" (Donald & Rattansi, 1992, p. 2) or on folk dances, foods, and festive costumes. Culture is multi-faceted, a dynamic force shaped and reshaped "through experiences generated in political and social struggles and through group interaction" (Benn, 1995, p. 12).

An educator's awareness of her or his cultural heritage, coupled with an involvement in community activism, may also be a powerful source of knowledge, shaping classroom pedagogy and instruction. Some African-American/Canadian teachers have generated unique perspectives, derived from their historical and cultural backgrounds and lived experiences, to improve their classroom pedagogies and relationships with their students (Casey, 1993; Foster, 1990; Henry, 1992; Ladson-Billings, 1994; Stanford, 1995). As Canadian educators develop pedagogical practices that celebrate and validate students' diverse cultures and ancestral heritages, they are simultaneously involved in a transformative educational project that destabilizes and breaks down oppressive structures of schooling.

Afrocentric discourse offers alternative "ways of knowing," informed by the histories and cultural experiences of all peoples of African descent. As a pedagogic and communicative tool, Afrocentric education grounds analysis and investigations of African and Black issues in this perspective. The task, as Asante (1991) puts it, is to "move" or "bring" all peoples of African descent from the

margins to the centre of postmodern history. For the educator, the challenge is to allow the African child to see and interpret the world through her or his own eyes, rather than through those of the "other." Afrocentric education also calls for the educator to be aware of the social context of public schooling. This means that schooling has to be adapted to fit the differences which minorities, for example, youth of African descent, bring to the school environment. More importantly, the Afrocentric paradigm critiques a "liberal" ideology that fails to effect social change, disrupting current power relations in the school setting. In effect, Afrocentric education seeks to empower students and educators to question the *dominance* of the Eurocentric paradigm.

Following Wiredu (1980), Mbiti (1982), Gyekye (1987), Mudimbe (1988), Oladipo (1992), and Tedla (1995) on African systems of thought, elsewhere I have outlined *ten* basic teachings/principles of Afrocentric knowledge (Dei, 1995).[6] Among the principles I emphasize is the idea that experience is the contextual basis of knowledge. All knowledge, from this perspective, is based on observing and experiencing the social and natural worlds. Social learning, therefore, must be personalized if it is to develop the intuitive and analytical aspects of the human mind. African systems of thought presume that all knowledge is socially and collectively created through interactions among individuals, groups, and the natural world. Knowledge acquisition, too, is not attributed simply to individual talent or to the capacities of one's own senses: it comes from individual, family, and communal interactions, as well as from the interaction with nature. Such a world-view can be contrasted with those that privilege the individual over the community, rights over responsibilities, and objective over subjective ways of knowing.

Afrocentric knowledge bases an understanding of social reality on a holistic view of society. In other words, the social, political, economic, and religious structures of society are connected to one another — political affairs cannot be separated from economics, culture, religion, cosmology, family, and kinship. Futher, because the social and natural worlds are full of uncertainties, there is no certainty in any knowledge. Because an individual is defined only in relation to a community, every individual right in society is matched with social responsibility.

The task for Canadian educators is to integrate Afrocentric teachings with other systems of thought, particularly in the education of Black youth. Afrocentric values and ideas can form the cornerstone of classroom pedagogy. Teachers and administrators can recognize their mutual interdependence with other social learners. For the Afrocentric educator, an awareness of personal location, authority, experience, and history is the foundation of successful teaching practice. Rather than claiming authority of text, knowledge, or experience, a teacher can share power in the classroom, knowing when to step outside the role of "authority" to engage students collectively in the cause of social change.

THE AFROCENTRIC CURRICULUM

In Afrocentric teachings, education is organized around communitarian principles and non-hierarchical structures. A holistic, integrated view of schooling and education is adopted in curricula development and classroom instructional practice. Students' cultures, histories, and personal knowledge are at the centre of the learning process (Asante, 1992; Harris, 1992). Classroom instructional practices extol the virtues of community bonding, individual sharing, group mutuality, and the matching of individual rights with social responsibility. The use of students' home language and dialect are effective pedagogical tools.

The Afrocentric curriculum and pedagogy encourage student-student, student-teacher, and student-teacher-parent interactions that lead to mutual learning. Students teach about their out-of-school cultures, and parents, care-givers, community workers, and elders come to school to teach about respect, authority, and communal responsibility. Student success is evaluated in social terms (e.g., performance of civic duty) as well as academic terms. Students and parents also become part of a team running the school; they sit on school committees that make major decisions affecting students' school lives, staff hirings, retention and promotion, library acquisitions, curriculum changes, and school budgets. They review teachers' academic work (and students are periodically encouraged to offer peer evaluations of themselves and their schools). In effect, Afrocentric education (curriculum and pedagogy) proceeds from an understanding that each individual stakeholder has something to offer and that diverse viewpoints, experiences, and perspectives strengthen the collective bonds of the school.

The Afrocentric curriculum promotes students' social and emotional growth. Emphasis on the spiritual aspect of teaching creates in schools a safe environment in which all students may make connections between their material existence and a spiritual order of their choice. Historically, through its privileging of Christianity, North American schooling has emphasized exclusive moral principles that discriminate against a multiplicity of religious and spiritual beliefs. In the United States, for example, historic tensions have resurfaced today around what is perceived by some as the New Right's imposition of Christian values and prayer in the schools. The contention that public schools are not authorized to "teach religion" enters into these tensions. However, these tensions can be distinguished from the debate over inclusion of African spiritual values that teach about unity between the individual and the group or community, harmony with nature and society, and the connection between rights and social responsibility. These spiritual values may enter everyday school discourse not as "religious tenets" but as issues of everyday human life.

Although Afrocentricity is a world-view embraced in opposition to the subjugation of non-White peoples by Eurocentrism, it is not an attempt to replace one form of hegemony with another. Knowledge of indigenous African cultural values is important for the personal development and schooling of all students.

A critical reading of the history of colonialism and neo-colonialism in Africa, and an acknowledgement of the achievements of peoples of African descent, both in their own right and in broader human development, will be helpful to the progressive politics of educational and social change.

Afrocentric ideas have relevance for the wider Canadian society. The idea of community membership and social responsibility should be important to all: although individual rights are significant, the maintenance and performance of social responsibility is vital. The notion of responsibility calls not only for making the necessary interconnections between groups and individuals, but also for subordinating our individual interests and wishes in favour of a collectively defined common good.

The ultimate question is how schools and well-intentioned educators can realistically accomplish educational change, given constraints on budgets and resource materials, as well as the dearth of teachers professionally trained in antiracism skills. North America has historically witnessed protracted political struggles over educational change and reform. The United States has seen unending battles over curriculum and textbooks (Cornbleth & Waugh, 1993). Frequently, the allocation of resources (financial, human, and curricular) to education has been hotly disputed. Given the social and economic costs of inequity, however, measures for inclusive schooling cannot justifiably be abandoned because of a lack of material resources. Some reorganization of priorities may be required in a climate of dwindling resources. As all stakeholders contribute to the cause of education, such involvement should be driven by a view of education as a public good.

It is not difficult to list steps that should be taken. School library collections can be improved and expanded to include critical material on these fields of study. Teachers can be retrained to be antiracist and inclusive. Faculties of education can institute measures to diversify their pool of candidates. Post-secondary educational institutions can introduce courses on the relationship of race, class, and gender to schooling, and create centres for the pursuit of indigenous forms of education and alternative knowledge. Institutions of higher learning could be at the forefront of promoting integrative antiracism studies that address the dynamics of social difference.

In espousing an Afrocentric pedagogy, I do not overlook the differences within Black communities that have to be taken into account. As Hunter (1983) noted, although Afrocentricity has a target audience, the Afrocentric discourse cannot have one, and only one, meaning for all peoples of African descent, irrespective of class, ethnic, and gender differences. Culture is not biologically determined, and discourse about African cultures cannot people rule out on the basis of perceived phenotypical differences. Muteshi (1996) cautioned against reifying the "African cultural past" as if it were frozen in time and space. Education rooted in the principles of Afrocentric knowledge cannot seek to recapture a fossilized

past. Finally, the Afrocentric discourse cannot be strictly self-referential (Wright, 1994). It can thrive only by cultivating alliance with other theories and pedagogies aimed at progressive forms of scholarship (e.g., radical feminism and critical antiracism).

NOTES

[1] I use the term "Black" synonymously with "African" to refer to peoples of African descent and all those who define themselves as such.

[2] Until late 1993, students entering Grade 9 in the Ontario public school system were placed in three different course levels, based on "academic ability": the basic or vocational level, the general four-year level, and the advanced level, which included courses leading to university entrance. This process is referred to as "streaming." Many Black/African-Canadian parents have complained about the practice because, it is argued, it limits many youths' opportunities for higher education. Studies have shown that Black youths and students from working-class backgrounds are disproportionately streamed into basic and general programs (Radwanski, 1987). Starting from September 1993, the Ontario Ministry of Education and Training abolished the practice and requested that all Grade 9 classes be destreamed.

[3] For the survey in high schools, students were selected primarily (but not exclusively) through teacher referrals. In a few cases, the difficulty of getting students from these two grades led the researchers to include students from other grades (i.e., Grades 9 and 11). Total credits accumulated was an important criterion in the grade selection of students.

[4] "Jane" and other students' names in this essay are pseudonyms.

[5] For example, in North America, it is generally conceded that the "dropout" problem is acute among some social groups (e.g., Blacks). A 1991 high-school survey by one Ontario board of education showed that African-Canadian youth were not achieving as well as other students in terms of credit accumulation. It found that 36% of Black students were "at risk" of dropping out because of failure to accumulate sufficient credits to graduate within six years. This compared with 26% for Whites and 18% for Asians (Cheng 1995; Yau, Cheng, & Ziegler, 1993). This survey also confirmed "that 45% of Black high-school students were enrolled in the Basic and General levels, as compared to 28% of the entire student body placed in those two lower streams" (Cheng, 1995, p. 2). In the most revealing statistics, the board of education's study of high-school students who enrolled in 1987 showed that by 1991, 42% of Black students (compared to 33% of the overall student population) had dropped out (Brown, 1993, p. 5). A similar disturbing picture was noted for Portuguese students.

[6] In developing these basic teachings, I recognize that these principles may be shared by other groups in different and varying forms.

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