“Racism is the use of institutional power to deny or grant people and groups of people rights, respect, representation and resources based on their skin color. Racism in action makes Whiteness a preferred way of being human. By whiteness I am referring to the civilization, language, culture and the skin color associated most often with European-ness. Racism is reflected in a hierarchy in which beauty, intelligence, worth and things associated with Whiteness are at the top.”


Racism in Our Schools...
An Overview

The face of the Canadian school has undergone a significant transformation over the past decades. The 1996 Statistics Canada Census reports that the visible minority population has reached a 3.2 million which is 11.2% of the Canadian population. This figure, does not include more than 1.1 million people of First Nations descent. The number of children of ethno-cultural and racial minority origin or Native ancestry and culture is substantial and growing. As parents, teachers, school administrators, community members, taxpayers, we are all aware of the school’s role as an essential agent of knowledge, socialization and acceptance in society. In fact, our collective standing as a country, as well as our individual ability to adapt, communicate, relate to, compete and succeed in today’s global world economy, depend very much on the tools we were provided with in our formative school years. So do our perception of ourselves and of others, as well as our values and behaviors.

It isn’t the quality of the education provided to our children that is at stake here, but its equitableness. Racism remains an imposing barrier to the equal access of racial-minority and Aboriginal students to educational achievement.

A leader in educative standards...only to a certain point.

Canada is regarded as one of the world’s leaders in education standards and resources. While we acknowledge and appreciate the efforts of many teachers who dedicate their lives to empowering children with the gift of education, it must be recognized that there are inherent problems in Canada’s educational system. Despite the fact that we demonstrate excellence in many areas of education, there is insufficient development in the areas of inclusiveness and empowerment of all children. As the diversity of the Canadian student population increases, so too does the school’s need to reflect on its attitude towards change, its true understanding of anti-racism issues and its recognition of difference as a “catalyst for each and every student’s sense of affirmation, solidarity and critique.”

(Continued, p. 7)


Working Together at Eradicating Racism in Our Schools

To be on track as a parent...
A checklist

- Examine your own prejudices and reluctance: remember your verbal comments and non-verbal messages will have a great influence on your children’s behavior.

- Provide your children with a history that fosters pride and recognition for all involved;

- Help broaden your child’s social circle…while working at yours too!

- Don’t avoid the question or pretend discrimination doesn’t exist: be ready to discuss feelings, emotions, prejudices, and uncertainties honestly.

- Learn as much as you can about the functioning of the education system.

- Become an active participant in your children’s education: Aside from helping them with their homework and providing supplementary educational help when needed, participate in, and/or sensitize Parent/Teacher Associations, school council, parent-teacher Interviews, in-class and extra-curricular activities.

- Teach your child responsibility; nurture his or her self-esteem; insist on respect.

- Make a zero-tolerance policy of racism a rule in your home, compelling your children to understand the choices they are making and the consequences of choosing unacceptable behaviors.

- Don’t use racism as a crutch! Racism is not the source of all problems!

- Alert school authorities (and teach your child to do the same) of any tension or abuse transpiring from racism. Go to the highest levels if you have to!

For a complete source, see B. Mathias and M. A. French, 40 Ways to Raise a Nonracist Child, 1996.
Racism in Our Schools...
Canadian Children Speaking Out!

“I heard a racist joke that someone had told me… I am Mulatto; there was a guy who called me by that name when I was visiting another school… He told me that since I was not white or black, I was not a human being. I am mixed blood and I am not stupid”.
Simon, a young mulatto boy, from the video Couleur Coeur, Segment: The insults.
Produced by TVO, in collaboration with the Canadian Race Relations Foundation, 1999

“I think that when children use racist words towards other children, it sounds like it is not coming from them, but from their parents…”
Bruneau*, a young boy from Lebanese descent, from the video Couleur Coeur, Segment: The Parents’ Racism.
Produced by TVO, in collaboration with the Canadian Race Relations Foundation, 1999

“I am muslim, and I have decided to cover my head. I abide by my traditions. There are people who laugh at me because I cover my head.
The other day, when I was in the classroom, everybody was eating pepperoni, except me. In my religion, we do no eat pork. The pepperoni is made from pork and I cannot eat it. They (my classmates) wanted me to eat it. At some other time, they told me: “You have no hair!” because I was covering my hair and they pulled the veil. I did not like it because it did hurt my feelings. And I was feeling lonely.”
Saadia, a young muslim, from Couleur Coeur, Segment: The differences.
Produced by TVO, in collaboration with the Canadian Race Relations Foundation, 1999

“Once, I was at school and was walking with my friend. A girl came to me and said: “Darn Indian, you have got a flat nose. Go back to your country.” I was terribly hurt…”
Michel, a young boy of Indian origin, from the video Couleur Coeur, Segment: The insults.
Produced by TVO, in collaboration with the Canadian Race Relations Foundation, 1999
As A School Staff Member:
Applying Anti-Racist Education in Your School:

Does your school pass the test?

Here are some manifestations of subtle or blatant racism in our schools. Have you ever encountered the following?

- Assumption that all people associated by their skin-color with a so-called “third world” country have the same religion, language, culture, customs, physical appearance, experiences, attitudes and socio-economic background;

- Minimizing the racist experiences of culturally/racially different students or parents with the pretense that “It’s all in their imagination”;

- Presentation of Aboriginal cultures as having been discovered and civilized by Whites.

- Projection of a Them/Us dichotomy: e.g. these students… those parents… you people…

- Absence or under-representation of permanent Aboriginal and ethnic/racial minority teaching staff in schools;

- Disregard for or outright change of a child’s or parent’s name because it “sounds too complicated”…

- Name calling, jokes, graffiti, pictures that put people down because of their skin color, race, ancestry, place of origin, ethnic and national origin, citizenship, creed or faith;

- Misrepresentation and under-representation of racial minorities and Aboriginal peoples in the curriculum or pedagogical materials;

- Practice of punishing and/or frequently suspending youths from minority backgrounds disproportionately, even for minor infractions;

- “The concern about, if not the outright prohibition against students of colour gathering to socialize at lunch or other informal places;”

- Assumption that immigrant/visible minority and Aboriginal parents don’t care about their children’s education because of a so-called devaluation of education in certain cultures;

- Assumption that immigrant, visible minority and Aboriginal parents aren’t intelligent, or are of lower status because they don’t speak English or French, or because of their accent or income level;

- Streaming of racial minority and Aboriginal students towards more technical or sporting fields, or students dropping out of school.

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If you are a School Administrator:
Ensuring a safe and caring school environment for your students...

The Alberta Teacher’s Association has prepared the following definitions for the safe and caring school:
“A safe and caring school is physically, emotionally and psychologically safe for students and staff. It is an environment wherein everyone is accorded respect and dignity, and their safety and well being are paramount considerations.
Safe: untouched or not exposed to danger, secure from damage, harm, or loss.
Caring: watchful attention, concern, custody, diligence, or direction; to be concerned with and attend to the needs of others.
Secure: protected from unauthorized access.
Violence: actual or threatened use of physical, verbal, sexual or emotional power, intimidation, or harassment, by or against individuals or groups, which results in physical and/or psychological harm, or is harmful to social well-being of an individual or group. (Dr. I MacDonald, ATA Safe and Caring School Project, 1997.)”

Is your school PRO-ACTIVE, or RE-ACTIVE?
Have you ensured that...

- Your school has a safe and caring environment where all students are treated with care and treat each other with respect;
- Your students are aware of the school’s code of conduct and that in case of misbehaviour, all students involved receive a fair hearing and are treated fairly and equitably;
- All your students can identify with the curriculum, are expected to succeed and are given the support to develop their individual academic competencies;
- You make all your students feel respected and dignified by dealing with incidents such as name-calling, racial slurs and jokes and graffiti seriously;
- Your personnel have been trained to identify and a proportion of funds has been allocated towards purchasing non-discriminatory supplementary materials;
- You have encouraged extracurricular activities where students can explore their cultural heritage and backgrounds and individual differences;
- Your supervisors and curriculum developers have been directed to develop resources and materials for assisting classroom teachers in reducing the impact of biased materials;
- Your students have been taught positive social skills such as responsibility, problem-solving skills and respect;
- In your school, students, community members, parents and staff are involved in the writing, implementation and reviewing of your policies and guidelines;
- Your teachers have received appropriate support and in-service training to implement these policies and guidelines;
- Your school feels welcoming, inviting, and secure to all.

Advice from an expert in the area

During a community meeting organized by the Canadian Race Relations Foundation on December 1st, 1999 in Toronto, Harold Brathwaite, Director of the Peel District School Board, offered suggestions for implementing an inclusive, safe, and caring school environment. Here are the practical and tangible strategies he identified as useful to making our schools and workplaces more equitable:

Ten Do’s and Don’ts for Teachers

**One:** Don’t expect equity to come naturally to you or anyone else. All of us grew up with ideas, values, biases, prejudices, and idiosyncrasies. Do spend time figuring out what your own biases and preferences are.

**Two:** Don’t think you have to do it alone. There are many people here tonight all interested in issues of equity. Find an equity mentor, team up with an interested colleague, or create a support group.

**Three:** Don’t think in terms of tolerance when you think of equity. Instead I suggest we think in terms of making our workplaces more welcoming, comfortable, and a place where all people are valued.

**Four:** Don’t just think of race when you think of equity. To create a truly welcoming environment we must try to be aware of all the different categories of discrimination that exists.

**Five:** Don’t be too hasty to make judgements. Rather than making judgements try to understand the people you work with and their families; what it feels like to be them and put yourself in their shoes.

**Six:** Do go to where people are and their families are. I often tell teachers to visit students in their homes or places of worship. Any activity such as this will help connect you to the everyday world of the people you are trying to get to know better.

**Seven:** Don’t feel like you have to be an expert before you can begin equity initiatives. Instead make use of the experts you have close at hand whether they be students, teachers, parents or community members.

**Eight:** Don’t expect people to fit into your school or workplace. Instead make your office or workplace fit the needs of all people.

**Nine:** Don’t be afraid to make mistakes especially with an issue as sensitive as equity. I encourage you to try various things. The point is that we all learn from the mistakes that we make, but chances are you will have far more successes than mistakes.

**Ten:** Don’t try and do it all. Choose the strategies and ideas you think will work for you in your particular environment. But the important thing over all is just to get started.
A Flashback on History…

We need to remind ourselves that racism is an intrinsic part of Canada’s history: the attempts to annihilate Aboriginal cultures, slavery, the racist immigration policies that have excluded Chinese, South Asian, Jewish and Black immigration, the internment of Japanese Canadians during WWII, represent only a few examples of the various manifestations of institutional racism in Canada’s past. Racism, once it becomes institutionalized, also becomes a part of a society’s psyche that cannot be easily removed and has an impact on all areas of its public spheres. The Canadian educational sphere has not escaped from this affliction, even though that part of history, too often, remains silenced in the school curriculum.

Perhaps the most prevalent example of racism within the Canadian school system, its manifestations and societal repercussions, is in its colonialist treatment of Aboriginal peoples. The establishment, all over the country, of residential schools for Aboriginal children from the late 1800s continuing through the 1970s, served as means to alienate thousands of native children from their families, language and culture and to assimilate them into the so-called “civilized” Christian preferred way of being. Many suffered sexual and physical abuses, not to mention the psychological traumas of minimization, acculturation, and dehumanization. This attempt at “eradicating the Indian” from these children has left the Aboriginal communities with century-deep wounds, from which they are still healing.

From the existence of these institutions transpired many of the socio-economic dilemmas affecting contemporary Aboriginal communities. Today, even though they are completely different from residential schools and much progress has been made, the provincial schools still do not respond to Aboriginal children’s intellectual, spiritual, emotional and physical need of a strong, grounded, positive and whole Aboriginal identity: “Current education policies fail to realize these goals. The majority of Aboriginal youth do not complete high school. They leave the school system without the requisite skills for employment, and without the language and cultural knowledge of their people. Rather than nurturing the individual, the schooling experience typically erodes identity and self-worth. Those who continue in Canada’s formal education systems told us of regular encounters with racism, racism expressed not only in interpersonal exchanges but also through the denial of Aboriginal values, perspectives and cultures in the curriculum and the life of the institution.”

Did You Know?

—“The BLAC (report) … obtained suspension data for Halifax City School Board for the academic years 1987-1992. The results on suspensions indicate that Black learners accounted for 16 percent to 21 percent of all suspensions in Halifax. This rate is more than double the 8 per cent share of the Black learners in the Halifax school system.”


(Racism in Our Schools…continued from page 1)
Skimming through issues...
The negative encounters of Aboriginal children with racism in our school system have been shared with many racial minority children. These encounters have been well documented in discussions throughout the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s in an effort to define, and possibly diminish the manifestations of racism. Yet, even as we enter this new Millennium, the following reports show that we have not moved far enough towards ameliorating the experiences of Aboriginal and racial minority children in the school system.

In the article entitled “Improving the Educational and Life Chances of African Canadian Youth: Insights from Ontario’s Royal Commission on Learning,” Avis E. Glaze and Ouida M. Wright effectively summarize some of these barriers affecting minority children, and Black children in particular. They describe these specific students as often being “casualties of negative differential treatment, stereotyping, bias in testing and evaluation, streaming, a monocultural curriculum, unfair and unusual discipline, racism, and most damaging of all, the self-fulfilling prophecy of low expectations.”

In 1992, following the Rodney King trial and riots on Yonge Street by thousands of frustrated Canadians (many of whom were of African descent), the flag was raised on the prevalence of racism in the Canadian society. Subsequent to an extensive consultation process, Stephen Lewis reported on the bleak state of race relations in Ontario. Students and parents raised some all-encompassing comments about the Ontario school system, which Lewis poignantly reported: “Everywhere, the refrain of the Toronto students, however starkly amended by different schools and different locations, was essentially the refrain of all students. Where are the courses in Black History? Where are the visible minority teachers? Why are there so few role models? Why do our white guidance counselors know so little of different cultural backgrounds? Why are racist incidents and epithets tolerated? Why are there double standards of discipline? Why are minority students streamed? Why do they discourage us from university? Where are we going to find jobs? What’s the use of having an education if there’s no employment? How long does it take to change the curriculum so that we’re part of it?”

Ontario wasn’t the only province suffering from what could be called the chronic symptoms of racism. In 1994, in Nova Scotia, the Black Learners Advisory Committee on Education (BLAC) released the BLAC Report on Education, with the purpose of identifying not only the problems, but also the critical necessary steps for remedying the inequalities affecting Black Nova Scotians in comparison with other Nova Scotians.

As well, in 1996, the groundbreaking Final Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples described in length the impact of residential schools and acculturation in general on native communities all over the country.

A brief reality check...
The reports show that issues related to racism remain salient today, and although there have been steps in Education Ministries towards the development of anti-racism policies, implementation remains slow and erratic.

Too often, excellent anti-racism policies collect dust on policy-makers desks, until a new racial incident requires officials to brush off the policy in their attempt to hush an embarrassing situation (especially before it is “scooped” by the media). In many cases, anti-racism policies and programs seem to be initiated only when and if major...
catastrophes erupt and likewise, are re-shelved when things appear “resolved”.

Meanwhile, teachers are being faced, often with very little preparation, with the challenges of the increasing diversity in the schools and the acquisition of the new skills it requires. Such abilities include the development of open-mindedness, a will to learn and teach about other cultures, a profound respect for difference, a recognition of one’s own biases, a belief in individuality and human-ness for all. At a time of severe cutbacks, added responsibilities, and curriculum changes in some provinces, the learning and undertaking of these principles of so-called multicultural, anti-discrimination, inclusive, intercultural or anti-racist education may appear as an additional burden for some, or even a totally unnecessary assignment for others. Even when they want to and are committed to the issues, not all teachers have been provided with the necessary skills to examine issues of white privilege, social identity and dominance in the Canadian society10, or to discuss racial harassment openly in a classroom discussion.

Did You Know?
In Toronto’s new amalgamated school board, none of the…47 superintendents and less than two percent of the board’s executives belongs to visible minorities.

“...What about those minority kids...again?”
“What about those minority kids...again?” is a question often mumbled in teacher rooms. “In my classroom, there is no color. Every student is a student and all students are treated equally. That’s all.” “Why would they need anything more than any other kid?”

Regularly such comments are made in the schools, reflecting a certain refusal for some to acknowledge both the mere presence and the specific needs of Aboriginal and racial minority students in our school system11. By making the visible invisible, we can better ignore its needs, and our role in their causes and/or solutions. These type of comments can even come from teachers who mean well! The school system, as well as other Canadian institutions is still driven by an overwhelming belief that racism is not a Canadian problem.12

The reports that have been written demonstrate not only the ways in which the presence of racism in the education system has been failing minority children in our schools, but also how their needs could be better addressed. Nevertheless, programs and departments in school boards are being cut and more often than not, the Antiracism and ethnocultural equity departments (when these exist) are the first to go. Also disappearing is the support for English as a Second Language (ESL) and French as A Second Language (FSL) classes, the professional development for teachers, and the attention paid to these crucial issues. Aboriginal education principles are still not addressed appropriately in non-Aboriginal controlled schools and the need for better Aboriginal studies curriculum is urgent, considering the fact that 67% of Aboriginal children attend non-Aboriginal controlled schools.13

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11 This practice often derives from the denial of the existence of structural racism in the school system by teachers. The “colour-blindness” standpoint, or the “neutralization” of “race”-related issues is a symptom of many teachers’ lack of personal experience with racism, even when they have a good understanding of gender and class issues.
See Christine Sleeter, “Teaching Whites About Racism” in Beyond Heroes and Holidays, Ibid., p. 36-44.

12 Constance Backhouse, in her recent novel entitled Colour-Coded: A Legal History of Racism in Canada, 1900-1950, describes what she calls Canada’s strong sense of constructed “racelessness”: “Despite remarkable evidence to the contrary, despite legislation that articulated racial distinctions and barriers, despite lawyers and judges who used racial constructs to assess legal rights and responsibilities, the Canadian legal system …contributed to the fostering of the ideology of Canada as a “raceless” nation.” See Constance Backhouse, Colour-Coded, Toronto: Osgoode Society for Legal History, 1999.

13 For more information on this issue, see the Coalition for Advancement of Aboriginal Studies, who is currently working a project known as the Aboriginal Curriculum Project.
For more information, please write to amphol@interlog.com.
Without proper policies, and programs, Aboriginal and racial minority students will still fail to identify with the curriculum or encounter role models within the school who would keep them from disengaging from school and/or limit their aspirations to sports and entertainment. They will fail to think of themselves as high-achieving individuals who feel accepted and included in their own school environment. Furthermore, they will not refrain from dropping out, or from accepting to be “pushed out” because of a lack of belief and hope in the system - and in themselves.

At this point, the issues and solutions have been identified and most school boards have drafted anti-racism policies. In order for these policies to be effective, though, there must be consistency in application, rather than dealing with volatile problems on a case to case basis. The onus is on governments and school boards to put these policies and their practical and everyday implementation on their agendas. And keep them there.


15 A research study conducted by Media Awareness Network with the funding of the Canadian Race Relations Foundation showed that in 1999, while most ministries of education included broad support for anti-racism education, multicultural education and media education, professional development and teaching resources to support new curricular learning outcomes were inadequate. “Whether, and to what extent these topics are actually covered in the classroom depends on the experience, abilities and inclinations of individual teachers.” See Media Awareness Network, Curricula and Special Programs Appropriate for the Study of Portrayal of Diversity in the Media, Toronto: Canadian Race Relations Foundation, 1998, p. 22.

16 Media Awareness Network’s Study also revealed that in the new Ontario curriculum documents for Grades 1 to 8, “…in stark contrast to the curriculum documents prepared by the western and eastern provinces, there are only eight references to different cultures within Canada …and no references to Canada’s multicultural fabric in the Grades 1-8 curriculum documents for the Arts, Health and Physical Education, and Language.” Ibid, p. 20. In the 1980s and early 1990s, the province was yet a leader in multicultural and anti-racist education.

Did You Know?

“The majority of Aboriginal children outside of the territories - First Nations, Métis and some Inuit - attend provincial schools. Métis children attend provincial and territorial schools almost exclusively....about 42 percent of First Nations people lived off-reserve in 1991, and in almost all instances, their children attended provincial schools. In the same year, 46 per cent of students residing on reserves attended provincial schools. Thus, 68.7 per cent of First Nations students were in provincial school systems.” in the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples - Final Report : http://www.indigenous.bc.ca/v3/vol3ch5s1tos1.5.asp

Did You Know?

Ups and downs in Québec

A study sponsored by the Canadian Race Relations Foundation 1998 revealed that until then, in Québec, multicultural education had no specific place in the curriculum and was left to the discretion of the individual teacher. Anti-racism education has officially been integrated in the curriculum from K-Secondary since 1999.

Before 1999, the only organization focusing specifically on multicultural education in Québec has been the Centre d’éducation interculturelle et de compréhension internationale (CEICI), providing teachers with resources, offering professional development and having created a network of over 70 activist-teachers across the province. The CEICI’s funding was recently terminated and the centre will be closing its doors on June 30th, 2000.

For an overview of board anti-racism board policies and programs across the country, see Media Awareness Network, Curricula and Special Programs Appropriate for the Study of Portrayal of Diversity in the Media, Toronto: Canadian Race Relations Foundation, 1998.
Suggested Resources


### Some Interesting Canadian Websites!

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<td>BC Teacher’s Federation</td>
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This report was developed for the Canadian Race Relations Foundation by Darlyn Mentor.
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For more resources and links to other sites, please consult the CRRF Website at http://www.crr.ca