# Access, Inclusion, Climate, Empowerment (AICE): A Framework for Gender Equity in Market-Driven Education

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We present a framework for conceptualizing gender equity, designed around four equity components: Access, Inclusion, Climate, and Empowerment (AICE). Our examination of these components in the current market schooling climate, with particular reference to the situation in Ontario, identifies some significant equity costs of market-driven education, including invisibility of systemic discrimination, co-option of gender equity initiatives to serve market objectives, failure to consider diversity and relations of power in educational practices, increased risks of sexual harassment, and increased barriers to social change. AICE equips educators with an analytical tool to conceptualize gender equity in a market-driven schooling climate.

Les auteures proposent de conceptualiser le traitement équitable des sexes à l'aide d'un schéma formé de quatre éléments : accès, inclusion, climat et habilation. L'analyse de ces éléments dans le contexte scolaire actuel, en particulier en Ontario, dévoile d'importants coûts inhérents à l'enseignement axé sur le marché, dont l'invisibililité de la discrimination systémique, l'assimilation aux objectifs du marché des initiatives en matière d'équité entre les sexes, l'occultation de la diversité et des relations de pouvoir dans les pratiques pédagogiques, les risques accrus de harcèlement sexuel et la multiplication des obstacles au changement social. Le schéma donne aux enseignants un outil analytique leur permettant de conceptualiser le traitement équitable des sexes dans un contexte éducatif axé sur le marché.

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In the current neo-conservative political climate, the gender equity movement in education is rapidly losing ground. Budget cuts and changing policy priorities by many provincial governments have meant reduced funding for equity initiatives and a shift to corporate interests. We first noticed this trend in 1996/97 when the Ontario Ministry of Education and Training (MOET) focused its research funding priorities on benchmarks, standardized testing, school business collaboration, and school councils. In contrast to previous years, the government allotted no funds to issues of equity and diversity.

As the interests of big business and market forces take priority in shaping

the educational agenda (Dei & Karumanchery, 1999), the task of doing gender equity work is more difficult than ever. As teachers' work is increasingly focused on student assessment and implementation of rapidly changing market-driven curriculum, even the most equity-minded teachers have little space to address issues related to social justice.

For more than a decade we have worked with Canadian educators on issues related to gender equity and schooling (Larkin, 1994; Larkin & Staton, 1998; Light, Staton & Bourne, 1989; Scane & Staton, 1995; Staton & Larkin, 1993). Over this time we have developed a framework for conceptualizing gender equity designed around four equity components:

- *Access*. Ensuring equal access to educational resources and opportunities. Encouraging students to consider non-traditional areas of study.
- *Inclusion*. Looking at bias in teaching and learning materials in terms of inclusive language, content, and pedagogical practices.
- *Climate*. Creating an educational atmosphere that is safe and supports equity. Dealing with harassment and violence.
- *Empowerment*. Involving students in the process of social change. Taking a social action approach to education.

In this article we examine the state of these four equity components in the current market-schooling climate, using the framework to identify the equity costs of market-driven education. We suggest ways for adapting the AICE components in the culture of corporate schooling and we show how AICE can continue to equip educators with a tool for conceptualizing gender equity.

We situate our discussion in the larger context of pressures to redefine education as the development of marketable skills for a competitive global economy (Axelrod, 2001; Henry, 2001). For economic globalization to work, education must service the interests of transnational corporations: to stay competitive, companies rely on education to produce technically skilled graduates (Barlow, 2000; Hyslop-Margison, 2000; Kuehn, 1998, 1999). Educators and social activists Maude Barlow and Heather-Jane Robertson (1994) predicted this trend almost a decade ago. In their important book, *Class Warfare*, they warned that the American corporate perspective on education was heading north.

Historically, Canadian educators have held that our schools should not operate as if they were corporations, because their mandate is to educate all children, not a selective few. . . . However, Canada's social structure is less different from that of the United States with every passing day. Deficit-fighting governments are cutting deeply into social spending, and Canada is producing an entrenched underclass. The transnationals are

blurring or erasing national sovereignty lines, and the rhetoric calling for business to rescue a failing education system is remarkably similar. If it succeeds our education system will inevitably come to mirror that of our southern neighbour. (p. 60)

In fact, there is evidence that Canada is now taking the lead in the corporate education movement. In May 2000, Vancouver hosted the first World Education Market, a meeting devoted to promoting education as a growing global industry for international investors (Kuehn, 2001; Nelles, 2001). Central to this expanding culture of market schooling is increased pressure to privatize the delivery of educational services and reduce the level of funding to education (Calvert & Kuehen, 1993; Nelles, 2001). What has this meant for equity?

In Ontario, the dismantling of equity policies and programs swiftly followed the election of the Tory government in 1995 and their adoption of neo-conservative policies that reflected the global trend of market education. With the amalgamation of school boards from 167 to 66 through Bill 104, the number of democratically elected trustees was drastically reduced (Dei & Karumanchery, 1999). The passing of Bill 160, the Education Quality Improvement Act, was a major setback for education equity. A product of Premier Harris's "Common Sense Revolution," Bill 160 placed the power over education in the hands of the provincial government and paved the way for the removal of billions of dollars from the education budget (Dehli, 1998; McAdie, 1998b). Equity educators at the Toronto Board of Education have outlined the consequences of these Tory initiatives for their work in schools.

The Ontario government . . . seized control of funding for education. School boards are now huge conglomerates, and trustees' positions are but part-time jobs. Local control of education has all but disappeared. As thousands of jobs are cut, social programs dismantled and public education itself jeopardized, a wave of despair is washing over students. Where it used to be relatively easy to organize students around equity, it is now much harder. (McCaskell & Russell, 2000, p. 29)

All areas of equity have been hard hit. The positions of equity consultants and co-ordinators were first on the chopping block as school boards were forced to tighten their economic belts (Coulter, 1998). The Ministry of Education has removed references to equity from new and revised curriculum documents (Coulter, 1998; Harrison, 1999; O'Sullivan, 1999). A growing emphasis on measured outcomes through standardized testing has championed competitive individualism and sidelined equity and diversity as relevant educational goals (Barlow, 2000; Meaghan, 1997). With the elimination of professional development on equity-related

issues, many educators have little or no training on the meaning and value of equity. Our overall goal in this paper is to show how AICE's multi-faceted approach to gender equity can help to address this gap. In the following sections, we demonstrate the analytic and strategic potential of the framework by examining the state of the four equity components in the current corporate schooling climate, with particular reference to the situation in Ontario.

EQUITY, ACCESS, AND MARKET-DRIVEN EDUCATION

Following the Second World War and the development of a social safety net for all Canadian citizens, the notion of educational equality shifted away from the equal opportunity principle of equal treatment for all, toward the more qualitatively textured concept of substantive equality (McAdie, 1998a, 1998b). Substantive equality considers "the impact of distinctions within the broader social and economic context" (L'Heureux-Dubé, 1999, p. 32). From an educational perspective, a substantive approach to equality is based on an understanding that academic performance and outcomes should be the same across groups of students, but it recognizes that variables such as sex, class, socioeconomic status, race, and ethnicity will determine what students need to achieve these goals (American Association of University Women, 1998). In short, equity does not mean treating everyone the same.

The growing shift to a concept of equality in which educators consider difference fits a postmodern world where the movement away from centralization is opening up space for diverse voices to be raised in messages to policy makers and governments. Market-driven education is reversing this trend.

Another effect of all of this is to project a respect for bland sameness onto the social world, rather than a respect for the actual diversity that the social world contains. . . . "One size fits all" is becoming the rule, not the exception. . . . So while human diversity is being recognized at last, people's diverse identities have little value in the marketplace of that new world. As a result, wherever the values and interests of schools are linked tightly into that marketplace, students and teachers from diverse backgrounds find that their interests are still missing from education. (Corson, 2001, pp. 67–68)

One consequence of the current neo-conservative sweep in education, then, is the resurgence of "sameness" (Corson, 2001, p. 67) to form the ethos of equity programs and policies. The concept of substantive equality and systemic discrimination is being replaced by the more limited "one-size-fits-all" focus of equal opportunity (Coulter, 1998).

Historically, access-oriented initiatives have been the operating principle of equal opportunity. The limitations of this approach for equity have been well documented. For example, Dei and Karumanchery (1999) have noted that

It has been painfully obvious for a long time that equality of access does not result in equality of outcome. The problem arises because access alone does not mean that students who occupy the margins of society will mysteriously find their culture, race, and ethnicity reflected in the center of their school experience. (p. 113)

We agree. Moreover, we are also aware that the very concept of access has taken on different meanings in a climate of market schooling (Barlow & Robertson, 1994; Kenway & Willis, 1998; Stronquist, 1997). What are the implications of this changing concept for gender?

In current educational reform, priority is given to mathematics, science, and technology, areas that develop marketable skills in a global economy (Kuehn, 1999; O'Sullivan, 1999). Barlow and Robertson (1994) argue that the current push to get girls into these fields may be based more on economic motives than concerns for equity and fairness.

Certain patterns of student choice receive a great deal of political attention. Girls' long-standing disinclination to study the sciences has been identified as a threat to our collective economic well-being. (Evidently, choice matters only as an issue of competitiveness.) . . . In response to this peril, education ministers across Canada put girls-math-and-science at the top of their agendas with a vigour that other equity topics rarely enjoy. (pp. 127–128)

Here, the long-standing concern about girls' access to the more lucrative technical areas has been co-opted by a government that sees value in using female workers for competitive and profit ends (Daun, 2002). These motives are not limited to technical areas. Driven by globalization, the rise of the lower-paid retail and service sector has increased the need for the skills, flexibility, and social competency more typical of female workers (Kenway & Kelly, 2000; McDowell, 2002). While this trend may seem to advantage female workers, Kenway and Kelly (2000) point out that the poorly paid, part-time, and non-unionized character of this work can hardly be characterized "as a major swing in the labor market in favour of women" (p. 178). A more accurate interpretation is that the current gender restructuring of the labour market meets the goals of the corporate sector at the expense of *both* female and male workers.

Despite the limitations of equal opportunity and access versions of equality, we are resistant to abandoning this approach completely. We agree

with Yates (1998) that

this conception of [equality] was widely understood and politically powerful and should not be given away . . . if there are skills and attributes which are powerfully and socially valuable, then it is an ongoing and legitimate issue if there are structured differences to the extent to which different groups get access to these. (p. 163)

We continue to promote access initiatives as part of our AICE framework under very specific conditions. First, we argue that the political motivation underlying the initiatives must be heavily scrutinized. The government's strategy of cloaking economic motives in equality rhetoric diverts attention from the myriad factors that work against equitable education. It is important, then, to ensure that systemic inequities are addressed in access-oriented initiatives. At the same time, a single focus on access as an equity strategy has the potential to seriously reduce the possibilities for achieving gender equity. Access initiatives must be considered as one component of the equity plan. The incorporation of strategies related to inclusion, climate, and empowerment will provide a more solid and comprehensive approach to equity, one that is less likely to be appropriated by the corporate schooling agenda.

INCLUSION, GENDERED IDENTITIES, AND THE MARKETPLACE

The concept of inclusive schooling recognizes diversity and relations of power. From an institutional perspective this means a commitment to equity through the eradication of sexism, racism, classism, and homophobia in curriculum, hiring, and other educational practices (Dei & James, 2002). However, as education is increasingly shaped by a corporate agenda, the imperative to prepare students to serve the needs of the marketplace determines the design of teaching and learning activities (Corson, 2001). In the business and global language of schooling, equity and excellence are positioned as mutually exclusive terms (Barlow & Robertson, 1994). When they solicited discussion papers for the new Ontario secondary school curriculum, the Ministry of Education advised authors "not to mention words and phrases like 'anti-racist,' 'multicultural,' 'equity,' 'culture,' or anything else that might suggest a school system at all troubled by the systemic racism it contains" (Corson, 2001, p. 62). In regards to gender, as Coulter (1998) warned, the focus on gender equity in curriculum documents has now been removed.

Where the current programme of studies for secondary schools calls for the philosophy of sex equity to permeate all aspects of the school's curriculum, policies, teaching methods

and materials, and assessment procedures, as well as the attitudes and expectations of its staff (Ontario MOET, 1989, p. 11), the new programme to take effect in 1998 contains an anti-discrimination clause that makes no mention of gender at all (Ontario, MOET, 1996, p. 41). Instead, vague wording about equal access and full participation for all individuals is the order of the day. (Coulter, 1998, pp. 112–113)

In Ontario, the outsourcing of the curriculum on the basis of competitive bids from the private sector will further entrench a corporate education agenda (O'Sullivan, 1999). The way Shaker (1998) sees it, "one can assume that the needed expertise for advancing curricula will come from the sector with the most corporate backing and the most financial security" (p. 23). This does not bode well for the future of equity.

Inclusive schooling also involves approaches to learning. Instructional biases can play a big role in balancing or entrenching inequities. There is strong evidence that a focus on competitive behaviour and individual achievement can work against female students and students from non-dominant groups (AAUW, 1998; Dei, 1996; Foster, 1998). In the current corporate schooling climate, the focus on outcomes, ranking, measurement, and competition can exacerbate inequities. Girls are disadvantaged if their school values a competitive ethos and they have internalized the idea that demonstrating competitive or aggressive behaviour is anti-feminine. On the other hand, girls who exhibit competitive and aggressive behaviour can be chastised for violating feminine norms.

The testing movement has done much to fuel the backlash to the gains made in girls' education. The lower literacy scores of boys in standardized tests appear to provide evidence that boys are the newly disadvantaged group (see, for example, Gambell & Hunter, 1999; Hoff Sommers, 2000). As Kenway and Willis (1998) point out, inappropriate comparisons between low-achieving boys and high-achieving girls result in claims that the gender equality movement has been costly for boys. Absent from this discourse is a discussion of the ways race, class, and ethnicity influence gender difference (Arnot, David & Weiner, 1999; Blackmore, 2001). In other words, the best response to concerns about boys' failure relative to girls' success is: "which girls and which boys?" (Blackmore, 2001, p. 126).

The problem here is that quantitative indicators of performance, favoured in market education, reveal little about the reasons for performance patterns. The lower literacy scores of boys may have more to do with versions of masculinity that devalue reading and writing than an overemphasis on the educational barriers facing girls (Henry, 2001). Kimmel (2000) argues that a critique of masculinity is a crucial ingredient missing in much of the discussion about underachieving boys.

Introducing masculinities into the discussion alleviates several of the problems with the "what about the boys?" debate. It enables us to explore the ways in which class and race complicate the picture of boys' achievement and behaviors. It also reveals that boys and girls are on the same side of the struggle, not pitted against each other. (p. 5)

In a globalizing economy, "girls' disadvantage" and "boys' disadvantage" are rooted in different social and cultural conditions (Eveline, 1998, p. 8). Weiner, Arnot, and David (1998) argue that the loss of industrial work, growing unemployment, crime, and alienation now affecting boys has much to do with the disruption of traditional masculinity as a consequence of free trade and the rapid pace of globalization: "The forms of masculinity adopted by boys and young men which, in many cases, are proving so resistant to schooling, have been framed not by schools but largely by the economic restructuring of the 1980s and 1990s" (p. 104).

The reasons for boys' underachievement, then, "should not be laid at the school gate" (Weiner, Arnot, & David, 1998, p. 104) but considered in the larger context of changing labour patterns that are creating a crisis of identity for many males.

For working-class masculinities in particular, the crisis is signalled by the closure of the traditional blue-collar trade jobs and the disappearance of apprenticeships — the main avenue for early school leavers since the 19th century . . . with the hollowing out of the middle-class, even middle-class boys can no longer expect to be the full-time wage earner. (Blackmore, 2001, p. 126)

At this historical moment, theories of gendered education must consider the effects of global economic forces on the changing situations and identities of students. Attention to the inclusion component of AICE has the potential to interrupt the tendency of market-driven education to suppress diversity and to produce new forms of gender inequities.

## CLIMATE, MARKET FORCES, AND GENDER

Foster (1998) argues that the neo-liberal discourse of equal opportunity and access conflicts with the discourse of male entitlement, which "constructs women as transgressors on male territory" (p. 82). As she sees it,

The conflict of these two discourses makes the space-between a site of both desire and threat for women: the desire evoked by the promise of equal opportunities in a man's world, and the threat of punishment and violation which inevitably accompanies women's attempts to make that promise reality, to *live* the discourse of equality. (p. 82)

The space-between describes the relationship between women's attempts to gain equal entry to male-dominated disciplines and the resistance exercised against these efforts.

There is evidence this resistance is being heightened with the restructuring of gender and work through globalizing labour processes. As Kenway and Kelly (2000) have found,

> Certain core, traditionally male, labour markets are shrinking. Masculinity is intensifying in such core labour markets, and women are thus finding it more difficult to be part of them. There is a generalized backlash against the advancement of women and against the "political correctness" of Equal Employment Policies (EEP). . . . Hence, gender differences and inequalities in some aspects of work are intensifying. (p. 178)

This backlash takes the form of hostile and harassing comments that can taint the school climate for girls and other marginalized students. The prevalence of racial and sexual harassment in schools and the damaging effects on girls' education has been well documented (Bourne, McCoy, & Smith, 1998; Larkin, 1994; Larkin & Rice, 2001; Ontario Secondary School Teachers' Federation, 1994). As girls move into more technical areas, harassment may increase. For example, there is evidence that girls' perceived avoidance of computers has much to do with the harassment and intimidation they experience when they attempt to gain access to traditionally male terrain.

> In many classrooms, all students are allowed to use the computers during their free time but the boys monopolize the machines — even lying to teachers that they have finished their work so they can get access to the computers before the girls have a chance to do so. (Bourne, McCoy & Smith, 1998, p. 60)

In market-driven education, the push to increase girls' participation in computer technology may increase the "space-between" (Foster, 1998, p. 83) the goals set out for girls and their ability to achieve them. Harassment may have much to do with the widening of this space.

In the early 1990s, we worked with educators across Canada on the development of sexual harassment prevention programs for teachers and students (Larkin, 1994; Staton & Larkin, 1993). As corporate interests have reshaped the educational agenda, school boards have eliminated the positions of equity consultants, resulting in the loss or diminishment of many of these programs. Sexual harassment policies may still be in place in some boards but they have little potency without the political will or human resources to enforce them. In addition, some policies are further compromised by an "individualistic thrust" that "obscur[es] the systemic

nature of the problem" (Osborne, 1992, p. 74) by failing to link sexually harassing behaviour to unequal gendered power relations (Larkin, 1994; Osborne, 1992).

As globalizing forces operate to restructure traditional notions of gendered labour, this concern may be magnified. In their work with vocational students in Australian schools, Kenway and Kelly (2000) noted "a generalized sense of tension and disquiet about boys' education and more subtly masculine identity" (p. 179), which they connect to the "strong historical identification between masculinity, potency, and paid work" (p. 179). As males lose power through changing patterns of employment, Kenway and Kelly speculate they may attempt to regain it in another sphere, most particularly in their relationships with females. With no space in education for the interrogation of institutional structures, resentment and hostility can be played out between students in ways that reproduce unequal gender relations. Attention to climate as an equity strategy holds open some space to recognize and address the ways in which the gender restructuring of labour creates new conditions for harassment in educational environments formed to serve market interests. A further concern is an educational system that produces citizens with little understanding of the forces that shape their gendered identities. In the empowerment component of AICE students explore the relationship between equity and power and the ways this connection is played out in their everyday lives.

EMPOWERMENT, SCHOOLING, AND SOCIAL COMPLIANCE

We acknowledge the concerns of feminists who have become critical of empowerment as an ideology. In *Community Research as Empowerment*, Janice Ristock and Joan Pennell (1996) note that these criticisms reflect

a reaction to the way politicians, bureaucrats, and professionals have taken empowerment to mean nothing more than individual self-assertion, ignoring the societal factors — including fiscal policies, legal processes, and employment practices — that disadvantage women and children. However, the criticism also reflects a rethinking of the direction and strategies of the women's movement. In particular, feminists have learned that efforts to work towards solidarity and sharing power do not always take adequate account of the differences among women (Yuval-Davis, 1994). Challenges to this homogenizing view of empowerment have come primarily from women at the margins, for whom age, race, sexuality, disability, or some other aspect of their identity makes for an uneasy fit with a fixed category that specifies the "essential" properties or characteristics of all women. (p. 3)

The charges of individualism and homogenization that have caused uneasiness with the notion of empowerment have sprung from concerns

that the concept does not address the complexity of myriad and shifting power relations in the large social context. Lather (1991) uses empowerment to mean a process of "analyzing ideas about the causes of powerlessness, recognizing systemic oppressive forces, and acting both individually and collectively to change the conditions of our lives" (p. 4). For us, this is the ultimate aim of any equity model: social change. Empowerment involves a process of politicization not apparent in the access, inclusion, and climate strategies outlined above. With market education painting "a rather disturbing undemocratic image of passive students being prepared as human capital for a global labour market" (Hyslop, 2001, p. 113), the empowerment component of AICE is more essential than ever.

To effect social change, students need to understand "how their choices came to be the way they are and to articulate the constraints — material and social, real and perceived — on their choices" (Kenway & Willis, 1998, p. 45), not as socially determined but as socially constrained. This requires that teachers understand and convey the ways that colonization, capitalist expansion, sexism, racism, and homophobia have shaped students' lives. Students also need to envision positive counter narratives to the status quo and alternate ways of being female and male. Most importantly, students need to learn strategies for affecting social change, particularly when the goals of market schooling are "more likely to generate social compliance" (Hyslop-Margison, 2000, p. 207) than social critique.

We concur with Rezai-Rashti (1995) that critical pedagogy holds the promise of student empowerment and that more concrete student practices need to be developed. The concept of critical pedagogy functions to encourage students to understand and question the nature of people's everyday lives and to challenge unequal forms of power (Freire, 1970). Focusing on the development of critical thinking skills may be the most effective way of realizing the potential of critical pedagogy. Mayer and Goodchild (1990) define critical thinking as "an active and systematic attempt to understand and evaluate arguments" (p. 4) and pose reasoned alternative explanations.

The partnerships between education and business may seem a dead end for the possibilities of developing critical thinking with students, particularly with an increasingly corporate designed curriculum. But Hyslop-Margison (2000) argues that the situation may not be quite so bleak. For example, the Conference Board of Canada (CBOC), "the central lobbying voice for private business in Canadian public education" (Hyslop-Margison, 2000, p. 206), produces the Employability Skills Profile (ESP), a one-page document that identifies the skills and qualities valued by employers. The impact of the ESP has been widespread, with many

provinces implementing major initiatives based on this CBOC publication. Although the emphasis is on preparing students for entering the market economy, the document does require that students learn to "think critically and act logically to evaluate situations, solve problems and make decisions" (CBOC, cited in Hyslop-Margison, 2000, p. 208). Hyslop-Margison (2000) sees subversive possibilities in this statement:

One assumes, of course, that thinking critically and acting logically are intended to be sharply circumscribed by the parameters of market economy discourse. But critical thinking runs the gamut from understanding the rudiments of formal and informal logic to questioning fundamental assumptions about all epistemic claims. The potential scope and depth of critical thinking is an important point to remember, a point that authors of ESP may have fortuitously overlooked. (p. 210)

In a market-schooling climate, there are still spaces for the development of a social critique. For educators looking for those spaces, our multi-faceted framework can function as a critical thinking tool for conceptualizing gender equity and for working against education for social compliance.

CONCLUSION

Since 1995, we have witnessed, first hand, the erosion of spaces to do equity-related work. In this article we have provided a framework to help educators think about gender equity in the context of a market-schooling climate. In considering the current state of the four equity components of AICE, we have shown how doing gender equity at this moment in time requires consideration of the impact of significant transformations in the realm of global capitalism.

AICE builds on the equity initiatives that were gaining ground before business got a strong hand in education. We take seriously Patricia McAdie's (1998b) point that

Until such time as the political pendulum swings back towards a more egalitarian society, and such time as economic prosperity is allowed to be shared by all citizens, it is incumbent upon all of us as teachers and parents, as activists for children's and women's rights to ensure that equity stays on our agenda. We can and must find ways of promoting these goals. (p. 13)

The culture of market-driven education enhances the need for AICE. Education governed by market imperatives exacts significant equity costs and works to make these costs inaccessible to critique and resistance. AICE takes a multi-faceted approach to gender equity with the overall goal of social critique and change. Our hope is that AICE will help to provide

educators with an antidote to an educational agenda that is sidelining equity in favour of market-driven schooling.

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