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School Reforms in Ontario:
The "Marketization of Education" and the
Resulting Silence on Equity

Market dynamics have begun to entrench themselves in educational systems around the world. Although this phenomenon has been addressed in several recent writings (Ball, 1993; Dehli, 1996; Gerwitz, Ball, & Bowe, 1995; Kenway, 1993; Robertson, 1995), few have incorporated a critical antiracist framework. As noted by Dehli (1996) the encroachment of market forms, relations, and concepts into educational sites usually results in the marginalization and muting of other dimensions of schooling. Using an integrative antiracist perspective that is informed by the findings of an ongoing study of inclusive schooling in Ontario (Dei et al., 1996), this article critically examines these ongoing reforms in a Canadian context, specifically in relation to the recent reforms in Ontario's educational system. We draw on knowledge about race and difference to argue for serious questioning of these reforms and their impact on socially disadvantaged groups. In doing so, the article asserts that current trends are leading toward the "Marketisation of education" (Ball, 1993; Gerwitz et al., 1995; Kenway, 1993) in Ontario, and that the harmful consequences of this shift will be felt most severely in relation to issues of equity and access in education. Through the rhetoric of cost-effectiveness and bureaucratic efficiency, the "official" agenda for educational change shifts focus away from equity considerations in schooling to those of capital, market forces, and big business. The article interrogates the rhetoric of reform and calls for equity to be placed at the centre of educational change. In conclusion we suggest new ways of examining and addressing genuine educational options in Canadian contexts.

La dynamique de marché a commencé à s'inscrire dans les systèmes d'éducation de par le monde. Alors qu'on a beaucoup écrit sur ce phénomène récemment (Ball, 1993; Dehli, 1996; Gerwitz, Ball, & Bowe, 1995; Kenway, 1993; Robertson, 1995), peu d'auteurs ont incorporé un cadre de travail antiraciste dans leur analyse. Comme Dehli (1996) l'a noté, l'empiétement des formes, des relations et des concepts du marché sur les sites éducationnels entraîne habituellement la marginalisation et la mise à l'écart d'autres dimensions de la scolarité. Adoptant une perspective antiraciste intégrative reposant sur les résultats d'une étude continue de l'école inclusive en Ontario (Dei et al., 1996), cet article étudie d'un oeil critique les réformes en cours dans un contexte canadien, plus particulièrement par rapport aux réformes récentes dans le système d'éducation en Ontario. Nous puisons dans des connaissances sur la race et les différences pour appuyer nos arguments qui proposent une sérieuse remise en question de ces réformes et leur impact sur les groupes socialement défavorisés. Nous affirmons ainsi que les tendances actuelles mènent à la "Commercialisation de l'éducation" (Ball, 1993; Gerwitz et al., 1995; Kenway, 1993) en Ontario, et que les conséquences

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néfastes de ce changement se feront surtout sentir dans les questions d'équité et d'accès en matière d'éducation. Par le biais du discours sur la rentabilisation et l'efficacité administrative, les projets "officiels"/l'agenda officiel visant aux changements pédagogiques se distancient des considérations d'équité pour se rapprocher de celles gouvernées par le capital, les forces du marché et les grandes entreprises. Cet article remet en question le discours des réformes et propose que l'équité constitue la base sur laquelle les changements pédagogiques seront formulés. La conclusion présente de nouvelles façons d'aborder et d'étudier les options réelles en matière d'éducation dans divers contextes canadiens.

Introduction

In Canada the belief in principles of fairness, justice, and equity conflict but coexist with attitudes that reflect racism and discrimination against minority groups. One of the consequences of these conflicting value sets is the perceived lack of official support for policies that might ameliorate the low status of racial minorities. These policies and practices require changes to the existing sociopolitical and economic order, usually through state intervention. However, this type of state intervention is often in conflict with the ideals of a liberal democracy: the belief that people are rewarded solely on the basis of merit and that no individual or group is singled out for discriminatory or preferential treatment (Henry & Tator, 1994). Although appearing consistent with liberal democratic values, the deeply ingrained ideology of *meritocracy* belies the truth of oppression and social advantage. Within this conceptual frame, skin color is seen as irrelevant in determining status, and those who experience racism, and suffer the material or nonmaterial consequences of those encounters, are somehow responsible for their state of being. In pathologizing minority youth and their families, these discourses function as one of the bases of merit-based models of education reform.

The educational system reinforces social differences through the implementation and use of dominant Eurocentric notions of what is valid and invalid knowledge. In a multiethnic society it is both legitimate and important that we question the appropriateness of promoting and maintaining an educational system that is geared to the needs of the majority. Educational reforms carry the potential to reshape how resources are shared and/or redistributed so as to work toward the optimum use of human talents and skills. How can we move beyond a Euro-Canadian cultural, economic, and political grid truly to engage multiethnic student populations? How can we ensure that efforts at positive, solution-oriented reform truly work to benefit and advance the state of education today and in the future?

As noted by Fine (1991), and Fullan and Hannay (1998), good intentions are not enough, and we cannot ensure that such efforts will result in any specifically desired effect. However, we can assess the relative merit and potential of these strategies in relation to those successful practices that have been employed in the past. Schorr (1997) sought to establish such a framework through a large-scale review of existing educational policy programs that had met with a certain degree of success. By focusing on those attributes that stood consistently throughout successful programs, Schorr developed seven guidelines for successful educational reform. He asserts that successful programs: (a) are comprehensive, flexible, responsive, and persevering; (b) view children not as single entities, but in relation to their families; (c) engage

families as members of a neighborhood or larger community; (d) have a clear mission and a long-term, preventive orientation that does not hamper its ability to evolve over time; (e) are managed in an exemplary manner by competent and committed individuals with identifiable skills; (f) are staffed by trained individuals who can provide a high-quality, supportive, and responsive service; and (g) function in a cooperative environment built on trust, mutual respect, and strong interpersonal relationships (Fullan & Hannay, 1998). The current educational system is not designed along these lines, and in turn it is not designed to meet the needs of all students. However, in recognizing the importance of including all students in the processes and experience of schooling, it is crucial that we extend Schorr's framework to include equity issues as integral to a successful educational program. It has been painfully obvious for a long time that equality of access does not result in equality of outcome. This 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. As students, teachers, and parents engage schools with their raced, classed, gendered, and sexualized bodies, it is essential that we augment Schorr's frame with an integrative antiracist guideline that links identity to schooling; stressing that race, class, gender, sexuality, and other forms of difference are crucial variables in education.

From an integrative antiracist perspective (Dei, 1996), it is recognized that all social oppressions intersect with each other and that a discussion of one such oppression—racism—necessarily entails a discussion of class, gender, and sexual inequality in schooling as well. Race and gender in particular provide a context for power and domination in society. Some educators have come to recognize the connection between equity, identity and academic success (Alladin, 1996; Brathwaite & James, 1996). However, although this knowledge has seen the birth of more than a few initiatives designed to change the landscape of schooling, global trends would suggest that equity issues are in jeopardy of being cut back or stopped all together.

Hatcher (1998) argues that New Labour government's modernist policies of "School Improvement" in the United Kingdom promote approaches to schooling reform that do not take the unequal effects of race, class, and gender into consideration. These types of reforms display four main characteristics: an abstract universalism that downplays the specificities of local school situations; a decontextualization that devalues the importance of students' experiences, histories, cultures, and identities as they relate to the learning process; a consensualism that avoids dealing with conflict and controversy; and a managerialism that privileges a top-down approach to the administration of schooling. In the failure to address the structural, political, and historical dimensions of change and the promotion of a deracialized approach to schooling, these features of market-based reform illustrate some of the problems inherent in "corporate managerialist models of education" (p. 268).

Today fiscally conservative governments have forced many communities to face reforms that effectively undermine public schooling. In Africa, Asia, and the Caribbean, national governments faced with budget deficits, economic recessions, and other monetary woes are abandoning equity commitments.

They are "favouring privitization, reduced government expenditures, user charges and difficult choices between sub-sectors in education" (Jones, 1997, p. 373). Literature from the United States and the UK demonstrates that the intrusion of market forms and relations into schooling is not a uniquely "Southern" phenomenon and that these market discourses are reshaping educational systems across international boarders. Hatcher (1998) writes on events in Britain where the current discourse and practice of "school effectiveness and improvement" has sidelined equality and social justice concerns. In these contexts, race and equity issues remain peripheral to educational policy developments despite continuing "profound inequities ... affecting students from ethnic minority backgrounds" (p. 287).

Whether one interrogates educational reforms in the developing world, or in European, Asian, and North American contexts, the supreme reign of the global marketplace is evident, and the enormity of the related reforms cannot be overlooked. The focus on market-driven reform policies has serious consequences for teaching, learning, and the administration of education as we move into the next millennium. There are implications for how we come to understand social justice and the role or relation of antiracist education for equity in schooling. Although it is important to stress that equity cuts have become a central feature of schooling reform around the globe, this article focuses on a local view: a Canadian perspective. Recent events in Ontario education provide clear examples of the problems inherent when school reforms are conceived and undertaken without a proper, well-informed consideration for the centering of equity issues. In this article, we[1] adopt an antiracist analysis of Ontario's educational reform initiatives, pointing to the consequences for equity and access in education. We highlight contrasting reforms that might be undertaken under the banner of an antiracist, inclusive framework that establishes the need to address questions of equity, representation, and difference as cornerstones of educational change (Dei, 1996).

In this article we are left with no choice but to move beyond the safe and seductive zone of "innocent discourse" and adopt a tone of advocacy (as an alternative). We begin by arguing that there are several paths to equity in education, and that these paths may connect at some points. Yet in the zeal to connect equity in its broad sense, it is important to separate discourse from policy. For example, there is a problem in creating a single undifferentiated category of *other* when devising specific policy measures to address educational inequities and social oppression. We need to highlight the specific needs of various communities as we discursively draw the connections between oppressions and social equity issues. Politically we have chosen to address the issue of equity in education through the lens of race and how it intersects with other forms of difference. In looking at equity and reform we pinpoint race as a major (not the sole) focus. Antiracism has long provided the theoretical framework for our critical work on equity and social oppression, and this article articulates our current thinking in that frame.

We wish to present this article as a theoretical discussion informed by field research. Between 1992 and 1995 Dei, working with other students, completed a three-year study on the experiences of Black or African-Canadian students in Ontario public schools, with a particular focus on the issues of disengagement

and dropping out (Dei, Mazzuca, McIsaac, & Zine, 1997). This researcher is now in the final phase of another multiyear effort to identify exemplary practices of inclusive schooling in the same education system (Dei et al., 1996). Findings in these extensive empirical investigations (working with graduate students) have strengthened our conviction regarding the urgent need for positive educational change.

In doing this work there is always a danger that theory will be vilified while practice is privileged or that theory will be completely dissociated from practice. This problem demands a refinement and restatement of the philosophical basis for the specific pedagogical, curricular, and instructional changes that we are seeking to promote in schools (Dei, in press-b). Our previous and ongoing research allows us to offer a grounded critique of school reforms in Ontario. Specifically, we use existing knowledge to identify the themes around which to look at equity and its place in current school reforms. Toward the end of our discussion we draw on specific research knowledge to suggest possible paths of action in order to bring equity issues to the forefront of educational change in Ontario.

School Reforms Ontario Style

In the summer of 1995 Ontarians elected a Progressive Conservative government. Under the banner of a "common sense revolution," these provincial Tories unveiled an agenda that spoke to a specific economic plan or vision for Ontario. Couched in a language of democracy, self-reliance, and family values, the new government's restructuring campaign began with the cancellation and/or weakening of several laws and policies that endeavored to improve the social condition of society (Dehli, 1996). In systematic fashion, with their majority government, the Tories moved directly in observance with the set guidelines for marketization and attempted to push several far-reaching and controversial Bills through parliament. They pushed against the public sector with Bill 136, a measure intended to expand management rights while curtailing those of unions. With Bill 142, which among other things would redefine disability criteria and set the stage for profit-minded companies to administer welfare, they moved against what they deemed to be special interest groups (i.e., welfare recipients, unemployed, sick, disabled, and elderly people). In addition to these revisions, the Tories also began an all-out assault on antiracist education and inclusive practice. With Bill 104, the provincial Tories proposed the amalgamation of existing school boards from 167 to 66, a cost-cutting measure that would allow for a drastic reduction in democratically elected trustees. Further, Bill 104 would see the establishment of an Education Improvement Commission, a nondemocratically appointed government authority with sweeping powers over school boards and accountability only to the Minister of Education.

Early in their mandate the provincial Tories pledged to work with the business community and corporate capital interests to restructure and downsize the education system to ensure school improvement. The intent of these initiatives was to insert Ontario into the global marketplace, thereby ensuring that schools would be able to produce a cheap and compliant labor force. However, in order for these reforms to be pushed through without a serious

public backlash, it was necessary to create a "crisis in schooling." By undermining the reputation of public education, the Conservatives manufactured a province wide concern over "the declining quality of Ontario education." Once their rhetoric was in place, the Tories were able to move ahead with their restructuring agenda. Within months of the Conservative accession, schools across the province found that many of the programs that had worked toward equity and social justice (i.e., employment equity legislation, affirmative action, ESL, etc.) were either cut back severely or terminated altogether (Dehli, 1996).

These cuts were an enormous blow to the future of antiracist and equity education in Ontario, as they directly opposed initiatives that worked toward ameliorating the problems of representation in schooling. As the undeclared targets of the conservative agenda, racial, gender, and cultural minorities have found themselves taking the brunt of the government's material and ideological attack (Dehli, 1996). As a whole, these bottom-line moves against what the new government considered to be special interests did not go unnoticed. However, despite the scope and radical nature of these initiatives, no move garnered as much attention in the media, in parliament, and in the social consciousness as did the Education Improvement Act, Bill 160, a direct attack on teachers' unions and a consolidated move toward the marketization of education in Ontario.

Bill 160

As a measure designed primarily to decentralize state responsibility to schools while centralizing power under the auspices of government control, Bill 160 covers various aspects of educational policy and practice in Ontario. As documented in the minutes of the Ontario English Catholic Teachers' Association 1996 annual general meeting, the provincial Ministry of Education and Training was charged to implement a series of far-reaching reforms. Such an approach would work against school dynamics and power structures that seek to discourage and/or inhibit collaborative environments in schooling. The revisions affect bureaucratic powers over taxation; financial cuts to kindergarten, summer school, upgrading, adult education, continuing education, and special education programs; school councils; school boards; the authority of the Minister of Education and Training to sanction the employment of noncertificated teachers, and the ability to control teacher prep time and class size; and in relation to the infusing of schooling with market models, it calls for the replacement of up to 90 hours of classroom learning time with work experience.

Framed in the discourse of market and choice, Bill 160 is an example of the massive grasp for centralized power by the state as it concentrates its authority over public education in the hands of a few cabinet ministers and government advisers. It is also an example of the state's attempt to cut millions of dollars from the education budget. As Bill 160 moves Ontario education into the global marketplace and resources become linked to enrollment and quantitative performance, public education in Ontario is quickly becoming an endangered or obsolete concept. As many critics have argued, if left unchecked, Bill 160 will eventually lead to a privatized educational system. The Bill talks about quality and improvement, but has no grounded discussions on equity questions. Following the restructuring agenda, the extensive reforms include restricting the

rights of teachers to strike, reducing the number of professional activity days, and reducing the powers of teacher federations. Further, as the reforms push a "more bang for your buck" mentality, Bill 160 moves to quantify educational quality and improvement by: implementing standardized testing; establishing an Education Quality Accountability Office; reducing the number of elected trustees; and amalgamating the provincial school boards.

With such a large number of extensive changes to the system, the constitutionality of the Bill is being taken to task on numerous fronts, and with the passing of the Bill several challenges were undertaken in the Ontario courts. Recently, Justice Peter Cumming ruled that in at least one key respect the Bill is unconstitutional: Section 93 of the Constitution states that the government cannot take away the right of separate school boards to levy their own taxes. This landmark decision forced the provincial government to take a step back and reassess their restructuring timetable. However, as a backlash to the ruling, Cumming's assertion that "the majority does not need protection from the majority" prompted cries of "interest group politics," and it sparked much debate as to whether denominational boards should be afforded separate rights from those of the public boards. In reality a critical analysis of this apparent dichotomy would reveal the interdependent nature of both terms: equality does not preclude difference, and difference does not negate equality. Further confrontations arose in September 1998 when a number of Ontario's publicly funded schools were closed by strikes and/or lockouts. Toronto's Catholic Board locked out all its high school teachers on the first day of the new school year, and during that same period thousands of Toronto District high school teachers staged rotating walkouts.

Amid the countermoves and appeals that will probably keep these questions in the air and unanswered for some time, the Tory government marches onward with their restructuring agenda. Bill 160 itself is both extensive and comprehensive, and it is not our intent to review it here. Rather, we are specifically interested in using an antiracist perspective to address the theoretical and practical functions of the Bill as it relates to the marketization of Ontario education. Regarding these trends, two central issues are of utmost concern as we explore some of the implications of ongoing educational reforms in the province of Ontario. First is the tendency toward the marketization of education, and second is the continued rhetoric of "excellence" that sees antiracism and equity initiatives as an affront to "quality education."

The Rhetoric of Reform

When the new Tory plan for education reform was implemented, banking theories of education[2] in an economic reductionist[3] framework were used to characterize schooling as a business: a functioning enterprise where parents and employers are seen as consumers and students as clients. A critical analysis of this market mentality reveals a complex that contributes more to the fetishizing[4] and commodification of education than it does to the improvement of it, but the conceptual stance established by the government set the stage for a political and ideological battle with Ontario teachers that used rhetoric to portray the market as necessary and natural while exploiting the public's already existing dissatisfaction with government institutions to paint teachers

and their unions as self-serving, inefficient, and bloated (Dehli, 1996). The Conservative media machine hides these realities so neatly in a language of reformation and progress that noncritical analysts failed to see the "forest for the trees."

It is important to note that it is unrealistic and more than a little conspiracy-minded to suggest that these political moves are part of some type of class plot. As suggested by Fullan and Hannay (1998), it would seem more feasible that political perspectives become hampered by "built-in blinders." That is to say, that the overarching desire to be reelected will often encourage actions that produce short-term or material reforms that the voting public can see and experience. Further, as noted by Micklethwait and Wooldridge (1996), local contexts are too often lost in the political attempt to produce magical solutions to social problems, which also act as magical reelection strategies. The problem here is that such reforms are usually based on commonsense understandings of the world and poorly informed research (Fullan & Hannay, 1998). Painting the Harris government as evil and sinister serves little purpose. As governments become more preoccupied with deficits, debt, and the mobility of educational capital, however, they become less interested in the experiences of students.

Regardless of the intentions behind these reforms, education in Ontario today is spoken about in the language of market economy. The usual application of banking analogies in the use of such terminology as *consumers, beneficiaries, products, productivity, motivation,* and *investments* all have powerful affinities in the discourse of the marketplace. Although this type of talk has an intent focus on the administrative and organizational effectiveness of an efficient school system, there is hardly an in-depth interrogation of the institutional structures and processes that deliver education (e.g., teaching, learning, curricular development, and the representation of bodies), particularly with respect to equity concerns. The government heralds standardized curriculum and a regimented educational process in relation to the cost-effectiveness of public schooling. As the discourse of the marketplace gains prominence in educational contexts, students will see themselves categorized and their progress or outcomes monitored and measured in ever-increasing degrees. Some hard questions remain unanswered, however. For example, what does it mean to have a standardized curriculum in a schooling context that universalizes the dominant group's frame of reference and world views? How does the discourse of efficiency and cost-effectiveness efface concerns about difference and equity? How is the focus on teachers' professional competence and the academic proficiencies of students helping to assign educational failures to physical bodies, rather than to the systemic and organizational structures that deliver education? How is the measurement of school effectiveness in purely educational outcomes part of a political discourse intended to rationalize a shift to private schooling?

Interrogating the Rhetoric of Reform

As noted by Fullan and Hannay (1998), Bill 160 may be interpreted as a prime example of the political search for a magical reelection initiative: a wrong-headed reform that sacrifices the possibility of true educational improvement in favor of short-term goals that might impress voters. On the other hand, the

Conservative gaze may be set beyond election politics and toward the economic possibilities that arise parallel to a market-based educational system. Regardless of the motives, one thing is clear: in their adoption of an educational agenda that is constituted in a market mentality, the Ontario Conservatives signal that Bill 160 and related educational reforms are not about the improvement of education. Rather, these reforms must be seen as part of an agenda designed to increase political power and economic gain. With the passing of the Bill, a series of events have been set in motion that will work toward the marketization of education in Ontario. These developments signal a direct threat to the very ideals of public schooling in Ontario.

As Dehli (1998) asks, with the passage of Bill 160, what is the government planning to do with its new powers? What are we to expect from market-driven forms of schooling in Ontario? What happens when the desire for school choice is pitted against concerns for educational access and equity in public education? How do we improve student learning and promote educational innovation in the sociopolitical contexts of divided groups and communities competing for access to limited resources and reduced educational funding? As observed elsewhere (Dei & James, in press), the success of public education must extend beyond the ability of schools to meet the needs of those students able to take advantage of the system. An excellent school should be defined by its ability to meet the needs of those students least able to take advantage of available educational opportunities. Although we must all be proud of the successes of schools, society must also be willing to accept responsibility for educational failures; they cannot be attributed to schools alone. Too often in public discourse we hear of the need for schools, students, parents, and communities to take responsibility, but what about state and governmental responsibility?

The popular refrain of the Conservative government's "common sense revolution" is that "the system does not work, and it needs fixing," or "the government is broke, and it alone cannot do everything." Much of the "common sense" rhetoric about accountability and the tightening of government purse-strings has focused on the need for parents, teachers, and communities to take responsibility for the education of their youth. Conversely, this discourse creates a false dichotomy between the public and the private spheres by inferring that the government should be able to abandon or seriously curtail its own responsibilities to public education. It is important to note here that the Harris government's seeming preoccupation with money management and the bottom line hides an agenda that is more concerned with the restructuring of education, a move or series of moves that should be seen as a significant product of the "restructuring process of planned decentralization" (Kenway, 1995, p. 2).

Kenway (1995) asserts that as state policy begins to reflect these commercial interests, four main movements will develop as fundamental to the process of restructuring: *devolution, deregulation, dezoning,* and *dissagregation*. Devolution refers to reductions in state funding as well as other efforts overtly to decentralize government responsibility for schools while centralizing curriculum and assessment procedures under the auspices of government control. Deregulation suggests that policy will move to eradicate or weaken existing constraints

on the market (i.e., moving systemic control away from elected officials and toward government appointees, opening teaching responsibilities to unqualified staff, "union-busting" of teachers' unions in an attempt to shift from collective bargaining to individual settlements, forcing schools to look for alternative resources through cuts in state funding, etc.). Dezoning removes major structural barriers that constrain the market; with this transition students become free to move between schools, and quality of education becomes a matter of affordability. Disaggregation incorporates market ideals of competition into schooling in lieu of collectivity and cooperation, concepts that are deemed outmoded.

In line with Kenway's (1995) formula, while alluding to a crisis in education the provincial government has consistently underfunded schools and sidestepped state responsibility to implement programs and initiatives that sustain and improve public education. Admittedly certain changes are called for in the current school system in Ontario. From the perspective of disadvantaged racial minorities the need for change arises because schools continue to disappoint a good number of our youth in spite of all the good intentions. Although change is inevitable, however, the provincial government has shown that not all change is good, positive, or solution-oriented. Ongoing changes in Ontario's education speak to the power of "big money." So far the rhetoric and practice of the government show that we cannot simply trust it to enact those fundamental changes of utmost concern to minority students and parents. These concerns relate to how schools deal with race, antiracism, equity, power, and social difference in their organizational, curricular, and instructional practices. If there is a rigidity and ineffectiveness in the current school system, it is in part due to the failure of administrators to use their power to address issues that could enhance learning opportunities and educational outcomes for all youth.

What good is it to spend our energies on dismissing the terminology of antiracism and difference when the problem of engaging race, class, gender, and sexuality remains? The rhetoric of school improvement should translate to concrete action. Educational change must ensure that the pursuit of accountability and transparency replaces the bland talk of market logic and cost-effective education. A consequence of the government's educational plan, if left unchecked, will be the creation of a two-tier school system where the privatization of profitable state institutions will reign supreme. Those who can afford to will maintain quality education, while the poor and the disadvantaged will be left with an underfunded public school system. Governments cannot believe that educational systems can simply be down-sized to success, and they cannot hope that a shift to a market-driven school system will address the structural problems of delivering education. Rather than parents, students, and local communities being seen as consumers in the educational marketplace, they must be seen as equal partners and stakeholders who can work diligently with educators, school administrators, and policy-makers in a collective endeavor.

The task of transforming Ontario schools rests on conscious and sincere attempts to match the pursuit of academic excellence and quality education with considerations of equity and social justice. The promotion of excellence is inextricably linked with addressing access, equity, and power issues in education. Change that exacerbates educational inequity is neither desired nor posi-

tive. Unfortunately, the government's market-based educational reforms do not place the struggles of marginalized youth high on the political agenda. Many in society may not have any discomfort in seeing a predominantly white teaching body deliver education to minority and working-class student populations (Dehli, 1994; Dei et al., 1997; Solomon & Levine-Rasky, 1994). The discomfort can be found in the eyes of the marginalized who do not see themselves reflected in school settings (e.g., teaching and administrative staff, curriculum, texts).

An effective approach to curricular and institutional reform must take into account the question of bodies and local environments. However, a significant aspect of ongoing Tory reforms is the development of a common curriculum for secondary and elementary school levels. For marginalized groups there are nagging questions as to who is writing these new curricula? How do the new curricula address questions of equity and social difference? Whose values, ideas, and knowledge are being represented? In the framework of outcome-based schooling, one must ask how outcomes are to be achieved by all when the playing field is not level. The government's original idea to dezone schooling and contract out instructional programs and curriculum development to private firms in the US is indeed problematic . This move raises questions of how local contexts, sensitivities, histories, and social politics are to be taken up in the design and structure of curricular and instructional materials for schools. Perhaps more important, the development of curriculum and instructional materials in a market-driven educational system can only ensure that classroom teachers stay close to the prescribed curriculum and tailor teaching and pedagogical practices more closely to test-taking (Whitty, Edwards, & Gewirtz, 1993). Parents' input into curriculum design (if any) and teaching matters will be measured by the cost-effectiveness of reform initiatives and how well students could perform on Province-mandated standardized tests.

Recently Dehli (1998) has argued that the idea of choice in public and private education is not new and that choice has been part of the Ontario public school system for years. For example, the existence of separate and public schools, however limited, French-language schools, gifted programs, and alternative schools has allowed parents to exercise some degree of choice in the education of their youth. These were not choices propelled by a purely market or profit-making incentive and/or cost-effective ideology, however. With the influence of market forces on the value of knowledge, in time "nonexchange value" disciplines such as the arts, social sciences, and the humanities could well become residualized as well (Kenway, 1995).

Market-driven choice and competition serve the whims of the wealthy and most powerful in society, those who would benefit by having access to Ontario schools determined by income, family status, race, and social power. "Local contexts matter a great deal to how choice programs work, who is able to take advantage of them, and how effective they are" (Dehli, 1998, p. 5). Historically, in every market-driven school choice program, equity considerations are hardly paramount and central. The material consequences of dezoning and free choice in the public sector will become evident as the dichotomy between the haves and the have-nots is magnified in educational sites. As noted by Kenway (1995), in selecting students based on money and prestige, schools that cater to

the wealthy will enjoy ever-increasing access to resources and opportunities, whereas lower-income schools will find it increasingly difficult to provide the basics of a quality education for their students.

One could argue that Bill 160 might open space for students and parents to opt for choice in schools in the long run. An example is charter schools as part of the right-wing political agenda for vouchers and privatization of education in the US. Admittedly the implementation and establishment of charter schools are not direct features of Bill 160, but as noted by Kenway (1995), a definite progression toward dezoning and disaggregation is to be expected here. Minority parents need to be aware that discussions about choice do not provide the space and context for focus schools that address minority youth disengagement from schooling. For example, some African-Canadian parents call for African-centered schools as an alternative form of schooling inside (and not outside) the public school system. Having these schools is not a matter of choice so much as the school constitutes a radical approach to make the public school system respond to the needs of African-Canadian students. As Dei et al. (1997) argue, an African-centered school is a strategic move to address the problem of poverty, race, difference, and its consequences on schooling and education for disadvantaged youth. African-centered schools should offer real and accessible options in a publicly funded educational system for African and other minority families whose children are disengaged from the conventional school system.

Another equity consideration is the impact of educational reforms on redundancies and layoffs of teachers. It is possible that schools can use parents and local educators to teach students about cultures, histories, and indigenous knowledge. The experience of these community educators can be integrated into official school language and discourse such that classroom teaching would be supplemented and schools could deliver a more "complete" education. In the case of a government intent on cost-cutting, "common sense" dictates that the use of replacement teachers would be approached as an opportunity to save. Like many others we are concerned about the use of replacement teachers when there are qualified, unemployed teachers from disadvantaged and minority backgrounds. Furthermore, under present initiatives "redundant" teachers will be laid off, and the principle of "last hired, first let go" will rid the schools of the younger (and for the most part recently hired) progressive teachers, who are disproportionately racial minorities and women.[5]

Similarly, the political rhetoric of average class size must be scrutinized for its equity dimensions. The government has co-opted parents and local communities' genuine concern about class size and its impact on effective teaching to satisfy its political and ideological interests. For example, the official rhetoric is that by September 1998 the average pupil-teacher ratio will be 25:1 at the elementary level and a maximum of 22:1 for high schools. Conventional knowledge asserts that the government has legislated smaller class sizes and that extra teachers will be hired to relieve overcrowded classrooms. Unfortunately this is not the reality. As Tozer (1998) points out, the government "has not placed a maximum on the number of students in any class in Ontario. There is not even a cap on the average class size in each school." In fact, it is the average of each amalgamated school board that the government has capped. In

other words, class size will not be uniform throughout the province, in specific schools, or school boards. There is some inconsistency in the official logic: How can class sizes be reduced while teachers are being laid off? A genuine commitment to reducing class sizes would require both funding and material-physical resources, but the government has not made a commitment to reinvest any educational savings to achieve this goal. There should be some concern that the Minister of Education will use the power to set class sizes as a way of bypassing workload issues and addressing staffing situations in schools without necessarily hiring new teachers. At the heart of this concern is the discretionary use of power, which may or may not be informed with knowledge of the practicalities of teaching in schools and classroom settings.

Equity means sharing power. Under current government policy, Bill 160 affirms parental voice in the administration of school. Alongside other government policies, the bill officially wrests power from school boards into the hands of trustees, and it makes school councils mandatory. School councils can *advise* school principals on matters such as curriculum changes, setting budget priorities, responding to province-wide testing results, and establishing the code of student conduct. Bearing this in mind, important questions remain unanswered. What are the rules governing the operation of school councils? Whose interests are being served? Are all parents duly informed about these councils? Are there variations of parental involvement that must take into account local demographics and the dynamics of social difference (e.g., class, race, ethnicity, gender)? Does volunteering for school councils make for the effective participation of diverse social groups? What are the limits to the work of school councils? Whose interests or agendas are served by the current transfer of power to school councils? As already pointed out, the current discourse of parental voice in schools is skewed to protect certain interests, the status quo. Local communities will need to be vigilant if they are to ensure that school councils do not set the stage for US-style charter schools that receive public money but are run privately (Chamberlain, 1998).

In addition to the government initiatives on school councils, moves have also been made to develop policy around school, family, and community partnerships. As noted by Kenway (1995), these initiatives are developed on the premise that restructuring and marketization will help to place parents and community as important new stakeholders in education. At first glance this would seem to integrate community knowledge and experience into schools. Furthermore, the advisory role of parents would appear to present them with new responsibilities or abilities to monitor and influence schooling with respect to greater accountability. Some concerns with these initiatives remain, however. First, the decision-making potential of these positions has not been clearly set out, and second, as noted by Dehli (1996) and Martell (1995), parental advisors will probably be less accountable than democratically elected trustees.

However, of greatest concern in relation to family and community partnerships is the direction that these initiatives will take without the added influence of antiracist, inclusive practices. At the heart of this concern is the "privileged paralysis" displayed by the public as human rights and other social justice initiatives were cut under the banner of "freeing market conditions." There is a

consistent refrain in public discourse that suggests that too much time has already been spent on "marginal" matters such as heritage language courses and race relations. In the present atmosphere, market-based initiatives that encourage parental choice, power-sharing, and coalitions between pro-market progressives will probably continue to oppress and suppress voices that exist on the margins while asserting that it is again time for the majority to gain more power in schooling (Dehli, 1996).

Noting the problems associated with the encroachment of market forces into schooling, a critical analysis reveals that a dangerous or damaging reality exists alongside every possible benefit. In these times when the marketization of education seems almost to be a foregone conclusion, it is crucial that all models of school reform take equity issues into consideration. If the market is to become the new model on which schools are organized, steps must be taken to ensure that marginalized and minority students do not continue to fall through the cracks of the system and that they are afforded a real chance in the structure of the new regime. Of course, in regard to the political and economic motivations behind these reforms, a case could certainly be made to suggest that inclusive measures would be cost-effective in the long run (e.g., keeping students in school will promote the development of an educated work force, etc.), but this is not our project. Inclusive schooling must be seen as an indispensable voice to be developed alongside all educational reforms, not just those based on the market.

As educational reforms carry the potential to reshape definitions of Canadian identity, we must make efforts to ensure that this identity is based on a model that works toward equity and social justice for all. We believe that educational reform policy is best informed through a critical reading of actual classroom practices (e.g., questions of curricula, pedagogy, and instruction). We are interested in how schooling might be moved beyond its present Euro-Canadian cultural, economic, and political grid. To these ends, we begin from an understanding that actual classroom practices must be a starting point for developing policy. Rather than relying on policy and theory to inform our reading of school improvement, we develop our theoretical framework from within a working study of actual schooling practice. This work asserts that if we are truly to engage all our youth and not only those best able to take advantage of the system, we must ensure that all students are centered in their schooling experience. Crucial to that vision is a commitment to ensure that the environment, culture, and organizational life of schooling reflects the complex and diverse make-up of student populations. Inclusivity is fundamental to positive and effective school reform, as it not only enhances the learning process, but it also helps students to develop a sense both of self and of community. This is our argument and rationale for inclusivity at a time when market models of education would seek to reduce education to issues of money management and the bottom line.

Discussion

In a democratic society, individual choice may be lauded, but having choice in educational options can mean many things and be implemented in multiple ways. One way is to insist on a form of choice that satisfies narrow, parochial,

and self-centered interests. This is the kind of choice that allows only a segment of society to meet its wishes without due regard for the wider public good. Choice in the marketplace is a question of power and resources. An educational agenda that heralds choice in a competitive marketplace has the possibility of ensuring that the most wealthy can meet their wants and desires while the least advantaged struggle with their needs. Often when people of privilege demand choice in schooling, they speak in the context of private schools. On the other hand, when the poor and disadvantaged call for alternative schooling to meet the needs of children, they do so in the context of concern about continuing differential schooling outcomes for youth and a desire for equity and justice.

Of similar interest are how right-leaning governments co-opt the progressive discursive critique of public schools by using racially disadvantaged groups to serve their conservative political interests. For example, when poor, racial minority parents, students, and educators criticize mainstream schools for their inability to meet the needs of all students, a Conservative government may easily identify with such criticism to further its own political agenda. The government may use the opportunity to further its agenda of moving from public to private schooling. In other words, although voices may appear to share similar concerns, political agendas may be radically different. The Harris government is interested in wresting power from schools and school boards in order to define the direction, form, and content of schooling for the population. The question is how do we build a common view of educational justice and help transform the school system?

We affirm the position that race, gender, class, and sexuality are consequential in the schooling experiences of all youth. Race and other forms of difference implicate schooling in powerful ways. Further, race, class, gender, and sexuality are not absolute concepts of difference. These concepts or categories are not separate, bounded identities, mutually exclusive of one another. They are not deterministic of character, behavior, and fixed identity. In rethinking schooling and education in Euro-American contexts, educators may work with these categories in an integrative approach. This may help promote community cohesion and advance the cause of destabilizing or disrupting the real interest-group politics promoted by those who defend the current status quo (E. Price, personal communication, 1998). This is the essence of an integrative, inclusive, and antiracist approach to schooling. Definite political interests have historically shaped and continue to sustain the status quo. Rupturing the system requires a fundamental structural change that can be made through an antiracist and equity agenda.

As argued elsewhere (Dei, 1996; in press-a), an antiracist discursive framework interrogates how local communities (e.g., parents, families, students and educators) interact with and in the institutional structures of schooling. Although conventional examinations of these issues are conducted through the lens of power and hierarchy, the antiracist framework challenges the relegation of *other* knowledges, voices, experiences, and histories to unseen, undesirable, and discarded spaces. Moreover, antiracism moves beyond a simple acknowledgment of oppression to an open challenge of White privilege and its accompanying rationale for dominance. It also upholds the power of resistance and agency as embedded in all sites of social oppression. Furthermore, an an-

tiracism discursive framework acknowledges the role of the educational system in the production and reproduction of racial, class, and gender inequality in society. It acknowledges the need to address difference and diversity by developing a system that is responsive to the needs of all its members. It also decries the marginalization of certain voices in society, as well as the failure to incorporate the knowledge and experience of subordinate groups into the educational mainstream.

In contrast to present educational policy, an integrative antiracist agenda deals with disparities of power and long-term systemic or structural change rather than remedial patchwork efforts that seek to appreciate, celebrate, or tolerate difference and diversity. Further, an integrative approach sees social relations as a fundamentally antagonistic, unequal and contradictory associations between dominant and subordinate groups: an essentially inequitable competition in the sense that groups are positioned differently in terms of domination and subordination. Myriad histories and experiences, as well as social, cultural, and economic conditions produce social diversity. To address inequality and to deal with the dynamics of social difference (race, class, gender, and sexuality), efforts should be directed toward removing structural disadvantage.

Since 1995 we and a number of graduate students at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education of the University of Toronto (OISE/UT) have been examining methods through which exemplary inclusive practices can be employed to integrate antiracism in educational reform. Through the use of in-depth interviews, focus groups, and workshops, this three-year, SSHRC-funded investigation has obtained site-specific ethnographic information on a variety of initiatives and practices affecting student achievement, as they arose in schools, homes, families, and community-based educational sites. Our research focused on several key factors in student achievement: the ways community and home-based initiatives empower minority youth through the teaching of rights, responsibility, and advocacy; how nonhegemonic cultural capital is produced in the home, and how these elements might be brought into mainstream schooling; and the inclusion of community voices and concerns into the mainstream through school councils and other practices.

With these foci, Dei (with Broomfield et al., 1996) has highlighted certain areas that are highly relevant for attention in the task of inclusive schooling. We believe these are important areas for genuine reform to focus on as part of the search for meaningful educational change. In accordance with the findings of this research, we use five interactive criteria that measure the strength and overall efficacy of inclusive programs and initiatives of educational reform: (a) representation; (b) language integration; (c) school, family, and community partnerships; (d) cooperative education; and (e) equity, values, and access in education. In general, these domains reflect many of the guidelines used by Schorr (1997) to frame successful educational initiatives.

As critical educational researchers, we see these inclusive domains as directly oppositional to the themes of merit, individualism, and competition that are played out in the reforms presently sweeping education in Ontario. Unlike the framers of these reforms, we cannot afford to turn a blind eye to the realities of inequity and social difference as they relate to schooling. Schools are not

neutral; they have a crucial role to play in the task of addressing the challenges and opportunities posed and created by diversity and difference. The complexities of modern society call for progressive educational strategies that are multifaceted, complex, and yet interdependent. Schooling reform must be placed in this context because local communities are evolving fast, and traditional pedagogical, educational, and institutional measures are no longer appropriate. We conclude our critique of the present reforms by introducing these inclusive criteria. We use these domains to illustrate the structure and ways well-informed, practical change might develop.

The domain of *representation* both observes and moves beyond Schorr's (1997) call to view children in relation to their families. Entrenched in the domain of representation are several subsets—visual, knowledge, and staff representation—each working to promote a connection between the student and his or her environment; each working to see students not as single entities, devoid of culture and history, but as dynamic, multifaceted actors who are constituted through their experiences. As part of an initiative toward educational reform, these domains must be approached and implemented jointly so as not to deny or dilute their interactive and interrelated natures.

Visual representation refers to the need for students to see themselves represented and reflected in the physical structures of the school and classroom. Educational change that allows all students to promote their culture actively in their school environment strengthens ethnic identity and cohesion by offering a greater and sustained connection with school cultures. *Knowledge representation* promotes learning about other cultures, histories, and experiences through a deep exploration of their origins and a validation of differences. Compared with visual representation, this subdomain goes beyond commitment to, and valuing of, different knowledge and experience. Here diversity is seen as an invaluable asset to be investigated and embodied in the essential make-up of the system. Knowledge representation is one way the experience and cultural knowledge of oppressed people may be validated, either through content (i.e., promoting access to other forms of knowledge and experience) or through cultural form (i.e., the visual representation of diversity through art, culture, etc.). *Staff representation* includes those practices that encourage and actively strive to diversify the teaching and administrative staff in order to deal with power-sharing and employment equity. Educational change should promote equitable hiring practices by recruiting teachers from various ethno-racial backgrounds. The practice serves to validate, endorse, and establish the relationship between the diversity of world views, the multiplicity of school culture, and student success. Educational policy should mandate schools to reflect these myriad forms of representations in their practices. For example curriculum reform should promote multiple knowledge values, and the hiring practices of schools could seek out a diverse teaching staff that would help serve the needs of a wide student body.

With respect to *language integration*, educational research has shown language maintenance to be a fundamental indicator of ethnic identity, as well as an important resource through which learning outcomes can be enhanced. The domain of language integration functions in Schorr's (1997) assertion that successful strategies must have a long-term, preventive function capable of

evolving over time. At the heart of this domain is the motivation to see multiple languages brought into the center of curricula, a move that would establish language maintenance as a fundamental aspect of inclusive practice by acknowledging difference and diversity in student populations. Through the use of ESL programs and other language resources, the educational system needs to validate and promote first-language education along with English skills development. School reforms must promote language development as a starting point to change whereby both identity development and school success might be bolstered.

The integration of *school, family, and community partnerships* needs school structure to adapt a more cooperative and collaborative learning model. Integral to such a shift would be the creation of space for family and community involvement in schools. Such a partnership would allow members of the community to influence school practices and the delivery of education through the introduction of experiential knowledge and further alternative community-based resources. This domain occupies a dual perspective in which the family-community-school partnership manifests itself through educational collaboration and community initiative. Schools will benefit from proactive and creative community-based strategies, and community initiatives will be bolstered and supported in return. As suggested by Schorr (1997), acknowledging and engaging students and families as part of a greater community offers numerous advantages toward real inclusion and student success. Real parental and community involvement in decision-making and the incorporation of community-based knowledge in schooling are fundamental to a successful partnership and a move away from the reactive parent-community-school model. The success of reforms depends on how school administrators, teachers, students, parents, and other local community groups see themselves as part of the planning, initiation, implementation, and evaluation process.

Schorr (1997) asserts that it is crucial that a cooperative environment be developed between service providers and their students. By *cooperative education* we mean practices that promote collaborative learning between students themselves and the educational staff. This type of schooling style emphasizes communal work and deemphasizes individual achievement. Cooperative education necessitates a validation of student knowledge, giving them a sense of partnership in the school and encouragement to succeed. Past research (Gutmann, 1987; Lieberman, 1986) suggests that not only will a child's experience of schooling influence his or her development of self-esteem and sense of personal identity, but that the environment of schooling will also develop or impede his or her feelings about issues of social commitment and responsibility. Educational systems that promote notions of personal success or failure and competition foster an individualistic environment in schooling that develops a student's sense of personal goals and achievement while devaluing the importance of community and social awareness. Gutmann contends that students display an increased engagement in education when their teachers are committed to a cooperative and collaborative approach to schooling. Reforms must enhance cooperative approaches to schooling and education by valuing different knowledges as they arise from different bodies and experiences.

The practice of equity, access, and values in education includes all strategies and practices that address issues of equity and social justice as they enhance student success and community work. Educational change should seek to introduce programs that work with a comprehensive understanding of equity and the qualitative value of justice. Beyond a critical understanding of these issues, of paramount importance is the implementation of equity programs and practices that will directly affect student participation, access to school culture, and inclusion.

Aspects of these domains are found reflected in community-based, and alternative schooling initiatives all over North America. For example, Jewish day schools, African immersion schools, and antiracism educational practices all reflect aspects of these domains functioning in a specialized context. Furthermore, in the mainstream, initiatives that promote these necessary inclusive steps can be found in numerous school settings. Programs such as the Ambassador Program promote the integration of ESL students into regular school programs by pairing new students with peers in their class who are of the same racial or ethnocultural background and who speak the same language; by acquiring books in various languages, initiatives such as the Bilingual Book Project make it feasible for non-English-speaking parents to read to their children in their first language, thereby promoting parental involvement while supporting the philosophy that literacy is literacy in any language. Equity needs to be at the forefront of schooling reforms.

We may incorporate these domains into schooling so that all people, and in particular marginalized groups, are seen with respect to the totality of their experiences, histories, and cultures, not just with respect to their victimization and oppression. These domains may be used to challenge openly the status quo by advancing other knowledges and perceptions and moving toward critical and inclusive pedagogy and practice. The infusion of these inclusive domains into schooling will encourage the inclusion of previously neglected knowledges into curricula, pedagogy, and administration. It is important to note here that these methods assert that emphasis in schooling should no longer be placed on dominant views of oppression and power. Rather, White privilege is to be both acknowledged and critiqued, while oppressed voices from within communities that have hereto existed on the margins of culture are fully reflected in the system (Bellissimo, 1996).

Conclusion

With the radical educational shifts introduced by and through Bill 160, new challenges are being created for everyone involved in schooling: students, teachers, parents, community workers, administrators, and educators in preservice institutions. The challenge is in how we navigate the new political, social, and economic environment of education in Ontario to best serve the needs of a diverse student body. We propose that the province's new curriculum be used as a linchpin through which we may connect elements of proposed educational reform with an antiracist pedagogical approach.

The operational domains outlined here can be read as philosophies to guide educational transformation and should be incorporated into all phases of educational reform to ensure a meaningful transformation of the educational sys-

tem at all levels (curriculum, pedagogy, school environment, and organization). In addressing the implications associated with the Ministry of Education and Training's new curriculum for Ontario schools, we cannot and must not ignore the importance of integrating multiple pedagogical, communicative, and instructional practices into the work of schools. In using these inclusive domains to guide educational transformation, we move beyond simplistic notions of racism in the classroom toward real and positive change.

As we move into the next millennium, schooling in North America continues to face the challenge of enhancing educational outcomes for all youth. With respect to the poorly thought-out reforms recently initiated by the conservative government in Ontario, and particularly in the light of Mike Harris' recent reelection, we present our five inclusive domains as a feasible framework by which to reconceptualize the possibilities of school reform. In this regard it is imperative that new educational paradigms be based and constructed on a recognition of the diverse, complex, and multilayered nature of human experience.

We propose that the challenges facing school systems and the consequences or implications of pursuing a right-leaning educational agenda can be dealt with only through collective efforts. Communities of today are communities of differences, and the strength of a community lies in its ability to harness its differences and commonalties and work toward transformative action or change. Embarking on this collective struggle requires that as a community we begin to engage in dialogue across our differences and commonalties because political struggles organized along lines of division contain the seeds of their own demise. So as we advance in our quest for inclusive education, we must use not only a language of hope, but also a vision of hope. This vision clearly sees that meaningful educational change cannot relegate equity issues to the background. Equity must be front and center of the agenda to reform school systems to meet the needs of all youth. Dealing with diversity is not simply a challenge—it is an imperative.

Notes

1 Unless otherwise specified, *we* is used to refer to all who read this manuscript and share in the ideas being espoused.
2. Banking theories of education (Freire, 1990) assert that students learn in fairly linear and direct fashion. The teacher speaks, the student listens, and then uses the information provided by the teacher to move on to the next stage or concept. The student is seen as an empty vessel into which the teacher pours his or her knowledge. Within this frame, as Dei (1996) also opines, issues of social justice, power and oppression are left entirely out of the picture.
3. Economic reductionism is an intellectual strategy that seeks to reduce the diverse phenomena of human social and political life to wholly economic relations.
4. Fetishism of educational institutions or rather the imbuing of system with the human qualities of fairness, individuality, and equality that permeates the democratic market ideology.
5. The knowledge that recent retirement statistics suggest a major teacher shortage is not much comfort to minority educators who continue to face unemployment because they are deemed unqualified.

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