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"We Cannot Be Color-Blind" Race, Antiracism, and the Subversion of Dominant Thinking

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INTRODUCTION

Let me begin by making clear that I see myself as fully complicit in the discussion that I undertake in this chapter. The "we" that I write about therefore includes all who read this and share in the ideas espoused. The emerging challenges of educating for diversity and difference requires that we all leave the confines of the gated-community mentality of education— the thinking that difficult issues and challenges facing education can be hidden from view in our classrooms, whether in academia or the local elementary or secondary school—to engage these issues. Silence on such critical issues as dealing with difference and diversity do not augur well for educating a community. Christine Sleeter, in her work with U.S. educators, observed how some in trying to appear not to be racist would often claim not to see color in their classrooms.[1] The view is that by seeing color one necessarily acts in ways that would privilege some and disadvantage others. Yet the issue of differential negative treatment must be distinguished from the salient recognition of racial differences as important sites of strengths with contributions to societies as communities of differences. To deny color and profess color blindness is very problematic, especially when this approach is pursued to deny one's racial privilege or the attempt to assert one's dominance. As many others have argued, the categories of "Black," "White," "Brown," and so on—no matter how imperfect—are not the problem in themselves. Working with

these categories does not mean one is reproducing race or racism. It basically means becoming realistic that these categories organize our society. Omi and Winant astutely comment that race being a fundamental principle of social organization and identity formation in society cannot be dismissed.[2] Therefore, rather than deny them, we must challenge the interpretations put on them.

In this chapter I take the intellectual and political position that those who speak about race do not create a problem that is nonexistent in the first place. Antiracists speak, write, and discuss race as a problem that already exists. What is important is to subvert the interpretation we put on these categories. Refusing to speak race does not enable any resistance to the negative interpretation of racial differences. To argue that we should be color-blind misses the point. In fact, it is an insult to human intelligence to enthuse that "we should not see color." Color is not the problem; it is the interpretation that we put on color that makes the problem. Those who feel threatened when their race privilege is questioned would quite often rationalize their stance by charging that so-called antiracists have an obsession with race. But as Jewel Smith long ago noted, it is "exceedingly misguided for anyone to simply overlook, or de-emphasize, the destructive and ubiquitous presence of race.... Rather than an emphasis on race, what is truly excessive, it seems, is the amount of time spent avoiding a direct hit on the issue."[3]

In not speaking of race, what are we truly afraid of? Can we meaningfully have a discussion of antiracism without engaging race? Who are we kidding when we deny race with its political, material, and emotional currencies? This chapter is about bringing race to the foreground of any critical antiracist academic and political engagement. My focus is looking at the significance of race and difference for schooling and education. In articulating antiracist education, we cannot skirt around the key questions of race and difference. We must be bold to speak about the cultural injury done to racialized bodies in our classrooms, the social exclusions of their knowledges and experiences from official school curriculum and texts, the commodification of their cultures (as seen particularly in case of the presentation of Black male masculinities and Black sexuality for consumption), and the complicities of White privilege in enacting violence of Othered bodies. My point is that the racist moments—racist muggings and the egregious display of race privilege (e.g., White dominance) that certain bodies experience in our school systems (and in fact in the wider society)—are all enacted and played on race signifiers using racial tropes and imageries.

The power of race talk resides in the making and experiencing of the "Other" and the creation of othered subjects. Anticolonial thinker Albert

Memmi long ago informed us about the process of othering as initiated in the dominant's construction of imaginary differences.[4] These differences are seen as real and are assigned important social values. Through time these differences provided a justification for conferring rewards and benefits to some while subjecting the racialized "Other" to differential and unequal treatment. In the same vein the Martinique anticolonial theorist Aime Cesaire spoke of the equation of colonization with "thingification."[5] We continue to see this even today when some racialized bodies (e.g., Blacks, Aboriginals, and other racial minority groups) are objectified through the continual denial of their basic humanity. We are constantly blamed and pathologized for our perceived lack of certain basic qualities, neither understanding our own problems nor having the ability to think through solutions to these problems. Increasingly such discursive stances have become convenient grounds and excuses for failing to critically look at how systems marginalize and inferiorize groups and individuals. It is important to note that not everyone in society necessarily has to agree to these mischaracterizations to make them stick on groups and communities. The propensity to blame the victim is generally unquestioned. A blaming-the-victim mentality is cultivated and rewarded to avoid implicating larger systemic and structural forces of society. So we fail to look at structures and how institutions function to create marginality for racialized subjects. Of course it could be argued that racialized bodies resist and challenge these perceptions. But it is beside the point. We must ask: Resistance at what costs? What do we do with the emotional and spiritual consequences and the damage of everyday resistance?

Today the concept of racialization is frequently referred to in discussions on race and racism. Robert Miles and others have alluded to this as the process(es) through which groups come to be designated as different and, on that basis, subjected to differential and unequal treatment.[6] Earlier reference to racialization was to political and economic processes that ensured labor supply for the social formation and, specifically, how immigrant workers were scripted and racialized for work. Today we can speak of this process in relation to the evocation of ethnicity, language, economics, religion, culture, and politics. It is important to acknowledge that racialization entails the notion of biological determinism, that is to say, the concept of particular human traits as biologically determined and thus consistent both for individuals and for the group they belong to. For example, the idea that the working class are dirty, lazy, violent, of inferior intelligence, have low standards of morality, and so forth is one that has been deployed as biologically determined. Of course these same discursive practices have fixed people of color in exactly the same settled, "natural" position.

The most important point here is that racialization is a historical construction, one that allows for White supremacist systems of power to suppress racial minority resistance. By way of understanding the project of racialization, we look to those historical processes and trajectories that allowed dominant groups to call on culture, gender, ethnicity, language, religion, sexuality, and race (as skin color) as a way of distinguishing groups for differential and unequal treatment. As a historical construction, the process of racialization allows for White supremacist systems of power to suppress racial minorities as unequal and different to justify their suppression and domination.

Closely aligned with the processes of racialization is the making of racialized subjects. As Lawson notes, we must take racialized as a verb, that is, the act of doing something to the body based on its phenotypical features.[7] In the broader sense, the making of racialized subjects points to how bodies are read according to skin color and other phenotypical features as an epidemically correct casting. Black skin is associated with deviance and dishonesty, brown is associated with terrorism, and so on, and the subject becomes racialized through such casting. In framing the issue as racialized subjects, the gaze is placed more appropriately on the one racializing the subject as such. In other words, we uphold and counter the view that the subject remains embodied and therefore is not intrinsically bad because of her or his race. Therefore it is the process of racializing the subject that is at fault and must be dealt with. So the process of racializing is external, strategic, and not the responsibility of the person who is targeted. Again, this distinction is crucial because of the tendency for some to argue that those who do anti-racist work by working with race actually create the problem. As already noted, antiracist workers speak of race not to create it but to gesture to what already exists.

In looking at racialization processes and the making of racialized subjects, we see how these same biologically determined and thus racist ideas of behavior, values, beliefs, cultural practices, and so on are grafted onto particular social relations and issues, such as immigration, education, and crime in our communities. Dominant systems of racialized power construct ideas of criminality through particular bodies. We begin to see how crime and gang violence are viewed largely through (and in terms of) black and brown bodies and communities because it is they who have been invested with a biological propensity to commit violence and crime. Discussions about terrorism and today's terrorists are a case in point. We know particular bodies are now invested with terrorism, they are viewed as a group to be possessed of certain biological traits that lead to the nurturing of suicide bombers, fanatical

hatred of the West, sexist oppression, and so forth. Consequently, it can be argued that the whole process of racialization and the making of racialized subjects is indicative of larger cultural and social forces. Certain bodies are not encoded with such negative images and messages. Hence, we need to ask, for example, why it is that Canadian families of European ancestry largely constitute themselves as White? What does this practice tell us about race and racism in Canadian history and contemporary politics and culture?

Antiracism challenges White power and its rationality for dominance. It is about resisting colonial and neocolonial privileges. As argued elsewhere, I see "colonial" as anything imposed and dominating, and not simply foreign or alien.[8] The academic and political project of antiracism is to uncover how Western civilization scripts communities through the fabrication of Whiteness and the racial boundary policing that comes with it. In fact, White racial supremacy is itself anchored in a fabrication of Whiteness. Historically, this fabrication has required an immense psychological, physical, and intellectual energies to keep up the alleged purity of Europe and the West. One can only point to the so-called enlightened European scholars' attempts to deny Egyptian and Nubian influence on European history or Western (Greek) civilization. Today, this fabrication continues exacting a heavy material, physical, psychological, and emotional toll on racialized subjects (e.g., spirit injury, the emotional harm of racism).

Antiracism also challenges the problem of fixed social categories and designations because, paraphrasing Edward Said, none of us has even been just one thing. We cannot discuss our identities in fragments, stripped of their complexities and specificities. Although antiracist practice requires the recognition of the saliency of race, it is also imperative for us to work with the intersections of difference (race, gender, class, disability, sexuality) if we are to address the myriad forms of oppressions we encounter in daily lived experiences. Given that the collective quest for solidarity in antioppression work can mask some underlying tensions and ambivalences, a critical antiracist practice must broach questions of power and privilege. Often the separation of the politics of difference from the politics of race allows dominant bodies to deny and refuse to interrogate White privilege and power.

Intersectional analysis always maintains blind spots. Primarily because of the reluctance to speak race, the complexities of difference must neither obscure nor deny the saliency of race in antiracist work. Antiracism highlights Whiteness because it guarantees racial privilege irrespective of gender, sexuality, or class. Whiteness must be viewed foremost as a system of dominance. However, it is how we use our individual and collective identities (e.g., White identities) that matter most in the way we pursue antiracist practice. For

example, for dominant groups there must be a critical understanding of the connections between Whiteness and White racial identity. Howard argues that Whites cannot escape their implication and complicity in Whiteness in a White supremacist society.[9] To claim otherwise negates or compromises the ability of Whites to do serious antiracist work because "it exposes a gross misunderstanding of the structural and embedded nature of racism." Antiracist Whites must clearly acknowledge and demonstrate the tensions and difficulties of their grappling with racism to gain credibility and solidify the grounds for antiracist coalition politics. By the same token, for racial minorities we must recognize when we are working with dominant tropes and lenses.

Kincheloe and Steinberg's observation that Whiteness has become the tacit norm everyone references resonates powerfully with me.[10] Eurocentric knowledge masquerades as universal knowledge. In schools and other social settings, White power and privilege masquerade as excellence, and we often know and claim excellence if it looks like us. But it does not mean it is only those with White identities that usually work with and through such dominant tropes. Racial minorities at times encounter the easy and seductive slippage into the form, logic, and implicit assumptions of the very things we are contesting, in part, because of the ways we have been schooled and our comfort level working with and through the dominant's gaze. Sometimes we internalize our own racism and revisit it others. It is important, however, for a critical antiracist reading to understand how these things play out, the source of these oppressions, and the history and contexts from which the myriad forms of oppression in society emerge.

RACE AND ANTIRACISM

There is no doubt that in today's society, education is a force to be reckoned with. Either it does something *for* you or *to* you. This is why there is the ongoing contestation about what exactly constitutes education and how the different knowledges, experiences, and histories are situated in the struggle. Schools cannot write their students out of history. In education the question of difference is central if we are to respond to the diversity of the school population. To this end, I offer that perhaps difference is more appropriate than sheer sameness. It is always important for us as educators to bring openness and humility to the work we do and, particularly, to the pursuit of education and knowledge. I would like to think that nothing

discussed and written about today has never been said before. If we do not know this, it is more because of our ignorance and a refusal to know. This is the gist of bringing humility to the process of seeking knowledge.

Some form of education is still mired in a missionary view of the world. Students are taught to believe that if one learns about other people's cultural ways, then the learner will know how to help the other. Our schools are still mired in the missionary view of the world because we work more with diversity and not the pointed notion of difference. Difference gets us to acknowledge and deal with power issues and the question of social identities. The way educators impart knowledge to the students has some effect on schooling outcomes. Schools do not always consider the level of damage done when dominant knowledges and practices are reproduced. To take just one example, it should be of little wonder when a social worker is hired by a children's aid society, he or she encounters families where the children have been placed in foster care. No consideration is given to the social and racist pressures on that family, so it becomes pathologized and detrimental decisions are made on behalf of that family.

There have been some successes in the school system that we should be proud of. As already noted, there are also good intentions on the part of many hard-working educators and school administrators. But the fact remains that we all need to do more. Complacency is a recipe for disaster. In fact, despite successes, we have students at school having serious concerns. What I am getting at here is that I would like to see a situation where educators are able to take credit for their students' success and be prepared to accept responsibility for educational failures as well. We know from existing educational research that some students have difficulties in negotiating power and authority structures of schools.[11] The saliency and visibility of race in the schooling experiences of African Canadian youth is a case in point.[12] Power can, at times, be employed in racist ways to alienate or disengage minority students. The fact of differential (negative) treatment by race coupled with the lack of curricular and pedagogic sophistication in schools mean some students are bound to feel out of place in the educational system. When students complain about the lack of diverse staff representation they are also making a reference to the importance of being able to situate identity and schooling to knowledge production. Of course, the home is implicated in the search for educational excellence. All students see parents and local communities as sites and sources for political and social action for educational change. There is the need for communities and parents to act as sounding boards. The complex dynamics of the culture, environment, and organizational lives of mainstream schools and

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their intersections with societal and family forces make schooling a socially, politically, and culturally mediated experience for most students.[13]

SCHOOLING IN THE CONTEXT OF SOCIAL DIFFERENCE: THE CHALLENGE FOR THE RACIALIZED SUBJECTS

Using the Ontario context, I want to highlight some issues in the public domain of everyday conversations that have implications for how we engage difference and diversity within our communities and specifically within school settings. To set the tone, some figures from one school board are revealing if nothing else. In the Toronto District School Board (TDSB), Canada's largest school board, we learn that approximately 41 percent of students have a first language other than English; over 70 different languages are spoken at home by students. TDSB elementary schools (grades one through eight) receive 8,000 newcomers each year, representing more than 170 countries, and 12 percent of secondary students have been in Canada for three years or less. Overall, TDSB secondary schools receive approximately 4,000 newcomers every year. In effect, our schools are not simply multilingual and multiracial, they are *truly* diverse.[14]

Diversity should be operationalized in terms of the bodies, curriculum and text, knowledge and instruction, and the representation of identities in schools. The different bodies we have in our schools only confirm that we are dealing with heterogeneous communities. So how do schools, and particularly educators and administrators, ensure that the needs and concerns of a diverse body politic are addressed? Some of these concerns stem from the feeling, making, and othering of bodies as different. Embedded in such interpretations are encounters with racial, class, gender, and sexual hostilities for many students and learners in the educational system. For particular groups the issues are further compounded by the broader questions of history and politics. For example, there are integration challenges for newcomers in our schools. Some of these students feel alienated, trying to fit in with a socially devalued identity. Many youths face problems of racialized and gendered poverty. The problem is acute among Somali and Afghani students. The chronic social problems of homelessness, nonstatus refugees, posttraumatic stress (among those coming from war zones), and discrimination in housing and social service sectors all implicate their schooling and educational success. And as schools are having to confront these challenges, we see the devastation of education through reductions in English as a second language (ESL) programs, elimination of entire equity departments, and the

reduction of curriculum specialists in school boards in the province. As the state continues to shirk its responsibilities to a larger citizenry, we are beginning to see the creation of a two-tiered school system, one for the poor and the other for the wealthy and privileged citizens.

Among the six issues of public conversations, I want first mention the problematic misrepresentation of immigrant and racial minority cultures as something that fundamentally impinge on students' self-esteem. For example, on the question of violence, the pejorative term *Black-on-Black violence* stereotypes a whole community as violent. Of course we must be concerned with youth violence, but not at the expense of stereotyping a whole community. Tamil and other South Asian youth are continually stigmatized with youth gangs and crime. The messages conveyed in official school texts and curricular and instructional practices, when coupled with the negative media portrayals of racialized groups and the failure to look at history and contexts, all help cultivate and nurture a low sense of self-worth and self-esteem in some students. Similarly the overemphasis on the failures of racialized communities have tended to create a situation where communities are stigmatized. Through official school discourse (as conveyed in texts, curriculum, and everyday conversations) the critical eye can gauge how the vibrancy of the culture and histories of racialized groups are subsumed in discussions about crime and youth violence.

Second, we witness how in everyday discourse and practice racialized immigrant identities can be paired with punishment and repulsion. Current discussions regarding racial profiling and testimonies presented to the Ontario Human Rights Commission,[15] the rise in Islamophobia, and the hysteria around terrorism and what it means to be a brown body, Asian, or Muslim are clear cases of racial hostility and punishment.[16] Within the school system we see the constant struggles over identity and identifications as learners try to rid themselves of negative portrayals of their identities. Such portrayals carry huge personal, social, spiritual, and psychological costs to students.

Third, there is the economics of everyday living or material economics. The rising unemployment among racialized groups, many with highly qualified credentials (e.g., professionals driving taxis in Toronto due to the lack of accreditation of their foreign expertise and qualifications) implicate our schools. The issue is how do and can our schools prepare bodies for social participation and citizenship responsibility? There is a connection between the deterioration of racialized neighborhoods and these spaces becoming sites for violence and crime. In effect, crime is not inherent in these bodies. The connection of these bodies with crime speaks more about how structures and institutional forces function to foster social, spiritual,

material, and psychological violence. These social problems are not innate in racialized subjects. Race and poverty intersect in powerful ways primarily because as a society we fail to address the challenges of difference and diversity. For our schools what this means is that we cannot divorce the difficulties such racialized subjects encounter in the school system from the wider social environments in which they live.

Fourth, on the issue of power sharing, whereby there is the absence of diverse physical representation to deal with institutional access for all peoples, there is a grave concern for racialized communities. We must seriously link identity, schooling, and knowledge production. Collins writes of how, for racial minorities, our absence in the academy itself becomes the norm. The knowledge that circulates in our institutions are often said to be "neutral."[17] Schools, colleges, and universities may claim to hire bodies on merit and excellence and that somehow these bodies, when hired, come into these institutions as disembodied persons with no race, ethnicity, class, gender, or sexuality. Nothing is further from the truth. Decisions and determinations about who gets in can be framed in dominant discourses of excellence and merit whereby Whiteness becomes the tacit norm that is continually referenced.[18] The harm that is perpetuated is that learners are not presented with difference in ways that can enrich the learning process. Students do not get the learning opportunities to benefit from the diversity that can be reflected in the teaching staff.

Fifth, on the broader question of the intersections of race, difference, and education we require a critical interrogation of our institutions and structures for educational delivery. As already alluded to, we are having to deal with the sidelining of race and equity work as "special interest."[19] In Ontario, the repeated cutbacks in education to frontline services—such as school community advisors; equity departments; and programs like ESL, African heritage, and adult education—all serve to disadvantage learners. In fact, in most cases what these cuts have meant is that community organizations have had to step in and fill the gap to make sure that the needs of children from racialized communities are met. This has not always been easy on these communities. Meanwhile, the wealthy and powerful have found ways to address these concerns more so that others.

Racism in schools has been a contested terrain afflicted with denials and defensive postures.[20] But there exists a tremendous amount of educational research attesting to how racism manifests itself in everyday student–student relations, student–teacher–administrator interactions, how school curriculum and classroom pedagogies are incomplete, and how school policies and regulations end up marginalizing different bodies.[21] Stereotyping and labeling

of South Asian youth and Tamil youth with the *gang* label and *Paki* as racist name-calling may be the most blatant forms of racism. But the familiar cries of a lack of curricular sophistication; absence of Black, First Nations, and other minority teachers; and the differential treatment of school subject are all laced with racial undertones.

Zine clearly points to the importance of our schools dealing with the sacred and secular split in the educational system, as well as the daily tensions between religion and sexuality.[22] There are also concerns of racism and Islamophobia and the misrepresentation of Islam in school curricula (e.g., world religion classes). Furthermore, the pervasiveness of gendered Islamophobia and the politics of veiling point to how negative stereotypes constitute violence to bodies in the post–September 11, 2001, context.[23] South and Southeast Asian students have to navigate around the split personality or double-culture syndrome while conforming to the competing demands of home and school. The resulting tension is that youths develop a double persona. An Anglicized name at school, taking off of the hijab, and being the good culturally and religiously observant kid at home reflect this tension.[24] There is also the ongoing difficulty in maintaining a religious lifestyle in secular schools where there is dating, alcohol, and drugs.

A lot has been written on South Asian students and the model minority syndrome.[25] There are the parental and community expectations to do well in the hard sciences as opposed to social science. Youths may be encouraged at home to be medical doctors or go into physical sciences as opposed to the arts and social sciences. This places tremendous pressure on the Asian youth for the fear of not meeting such expectations. Consequently, South Asian youth facing problems may be reluctant to ask for help at school. Among Somali and other African youth, language and accent discrimination is a significant issue. ESL labeling is common sometimes just because of differences in accents, that is, not speaking English according to the "proper" standards.[26]

Sixth, I will be remiss if no mention is made of the zero tolerance policy and the Safe School Act that are leading to suspensions and expulsions of minoritized bodies from school. For these youth the policy raises the question of fairness and educational access. We know that a number of immigrant youth in Ontario are unable to attend school, even though the Education Act says they are entitled to do so, because their parents lack the proper immigration documentation. However, the most contentious issue for many of these communities is the zero tolerance policy and the suspension and expulsion of students deemed to engage in violent behavior. Local communities and parent groups are calling on schools to revisit these policies and practices

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and also look at the root causes of school violence while bringing a comprehensive understanding to "violence."[27] It is not difficult to understand why some parents are asking: What is the school's responsibility? Is it to act as the police or to educate young people? Many of the students who are expelled or suspended are students of color, especially Black and Aboriginal youth and males, and are left to languish during their suspension. Personally it is an eye opener to see the school boards spending precious limited funds to hire lawyers in a bid to expel students. Minority parents are at an extreme disadvantage when having to mount legal challenges to such expulsions. We need to question these types of legal action against students and their families and the misuse of financial resources.[28]

WHAT CAN BE DONE?

The foregoing highlights significant challenges that must be addressed to create healthy sustainable schooling environments for all learners. It requires the different stakeholders in our school system to come together to search for effective ways to address ensuing problems. In this endeavor the learner's responsibilities are paramount. The right to an education comes with responsibilities. Education means cultivating respect for the knowledge and the experiences of one's peers, parents, elders, and community. Education for collective empowerment means we allow learning to impact daily lives. It also means providing a service to the wider community. Academic success can only be enriched by such appreciation of community work and service.

But how do schools prepare students to take on these responsibilities? I believe that the idea of having a critical inquisitive mind means that a learner must be prepared to challenge the teacher and ask critical questions about schooling. For example, in the context of this chapter, I am speaking of the why, how, and when of the exclusions or omissions, negations, and devaluations of experiences and histories in the curriculum, texts, instruction, and classroom pedagogies. Learning for diversity means that we insist that teaching be about the complete history of ideas and events that have shaped and continue to shape human growth and development. A school curriculum must reflect every learner's experience, history, culture, and social reality.

In truth, teachers and school administrators have a special obligation in recognizing and responding to diversity in schools; however, there are two crucial points of which I believe we must be mindful. The first relates to the necessity of making a distinction between the concept of schooling and that of education. Schooling should not be considered education in and of itself.

In point of fact, formal institutionalized schooling structures and practices have created a split with education. If we view education as a process that entails varied options, strategies, and multiple ways of knowing through which students come to know, engage with, and understand their world, then we can see how institutionalized discursive and material schooling practices that insist on a formalized monocultural and homogenized understanding of the world can inscribe and reproduce in students a sense of disengagement and alienation through the process of negating and devaluing the embodied knowledges of difference that all students bring to their learning environment. As a consequence, such formal schooling practices run the risk of despiritualizing our youth through the enforcement of normalizing routines that effectively coerce students into amputating their differences. Thus the conceptualization and measure of success in the increasing marketization of education that constructs student bodies as mere commodities for the so-called global economy becomes predicated on the degree to which students are willing—or able—to physically, emotionally, and psychologically negate their differences to pass for what is, in effect, an enforced culturally explicit construction of normalcy.[29] What we have then, given that all students represent myriad differences, and therefore all students are thus wounded to varying degrees, is in fact the imposition of systemic and institutionalized miseducation.

This leads me to the second critical point that I want to address, that of difference. Actually a great deal is spoken about difference in Euro-Canadian schooling contexts and yet either it is conceptualized in the mainstream multicultural discourse of saris, samosas, and steelbands that treats difference as an essence and an exotic add-on to the European norm, or it is viewed as a problematic in which sameness and the stress on commonality is the preferred solution. Both intersect with each other to sustain and reproduce dominating social relations of power. In the former, difference is conceptualized in authentic, essentialized, exoticized, culturalist terms and is positioned as independent of other social experiences, such as race, class, gender, disability, and sexuality;[30] thus it is presented and understood as a form of signification that is removed from political, social, and historical or contemporary struggles and constraints.[31] In the latter, where difference is viewed as a site of conflict and contestation, the discourse of sameness ignores (and denies) both the racialized asymmetrical power relations in which the politics of difference are inscribed and the implication of social materiality embedded within such relations.[32]

Difference is more than simply a site of individual contestation. In Western social systems and institutionalized contexts and arenas (such as

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education), difference—its conceptualization and the ways in which it is engaged in systemic binary oppositional hierarchical terms—mediates through knowledge production and hegemonic discursive and material practices the asymmetrical relations of power that determine to a great extent the (dis)engagement, alienation, well-being, spiritual health, and happiness of all our students, including the communities of difference from which they emerge. As Audre Lorde long ago observed, Western European history has indoctrinated us to perceive "human differences in simplistic opposition to each other: dominant/subordinate, good/bad, up/down, superior/inferior [valid/invalid, legitimate/illegitimate, civilized/uncivilized] with always the psychic impregnation of the most desired and valued coming first followed by the inferiorized."[33]

Some of the critical pedagogical questions that we must ask ourselves in our engagements with difference and diversity in the contexts of schooling and education revolve around the need for deeper conceptual clarity that is complex, multicentered, and liberating. We must ask ourselves, for example, who gets to define difference? Whose articulations are taken up and produced as legitimate and valid conceptualizations and enunciations? Whom do such articulations and knowledges serve? At the same time, even while we ask such questions, we must be mindful of the need to work through the lens of curriculum as cultural practice so as to acknowledge, engage, and (re)position difference and diversity as sources of embodied resistance, agency, and transformative knowledge—thereby challenging the epistemic violence of Western cultural knowledge as it relates to the material exigencies of racialized and marginalized subjects and communities. Teaching is not just about affecting knowledge. It is about a preparedness to learn and unlearn. A teacher must allow students, parents, families, and guardians to teach. As informal educators our students, parents, families, and guardians have knowledge to share with us. Many of our students speak to us from their lived experiences and the challenges they encounter in their daily lives. But do our classroom pedagogies always acknowledge this? For example, as I have suggested, it is important to openly and sincerely talk and teach about race and difference. Racism and social inequality must be acknowledged and dealt with. As educators we can begin a genuine dialogue for change by first admitting to the conceptual flaws of a color-blind approach to schooling.

By the same token we cannot downplay the role of parents, community workers, and elders in the struggle to recognize and respond to difference and diversity. Parents, guardians, community workers, and elders are equal and willing partners in the provision of education to youth because it is realized that education is too important to be left in the hands of schools

alone. By becoming sounding boards as youth deal with the pressures of schooling and social maturation, parents and community elders are playing their roles in enhancing learning. There are other ways to enrich learning outcomes. By developing the crucial ability to use the teachable moments in the homes, parents can assist in youth learning. As we begin to define parental involvement broadly to include parents, communities, and elders, these participants become sounding boards, creating conditions to assist youth learning and challenging schools to meet their responsibility to a diverse body politic. Education can make a profound impact in the lives of the learners.

CONCLUSION

Antiracism is about changing current processes of schooling and educational delivery. In concluding this discussion, I offer some directions to future educational practices for addressing difference and diversity in schooling. We need alternative educational outlets that create and nurture supportive environments for all students. For example, to deal with issues of racial minority youth disaffection and disengagement from the mainstream school system we need to promote alternative and healthy schools that provide an inclusive learning environments. Some of these may well be outside the mainstream school system. Schools and local communities can work in partnerships to create supportive environments for students who have faced problems with the school system. It is important for our educational institutions to support students' grassroots organizing and advocacy around equity in the curriculum. Specifically, educators can support students' organizing around race, diversity, and equity issues. Usually what is missing in progressive antiracist work is institutional support. We must always be searching for educational innovations, programs that seek the collaboration of educators, parents, communities, students, and other community groups and associations, programs that offer a popular education approach for students to be able to integrate issues of work, learning, and the labor force with diversity and equity concerns.

To win the confidence of local communities so that schools can truly contribute to addressing social inequities, there must be effective outreach targeting minority communities in particular.

Such community outreach may include support for establishing resource centers and recreational facilities in socioeconomically disadvantaged neighborhoods. After-school programs for culture and heritage education, indigenous language education, and community forums and workshops are

useful in conscientizing learners on the issues of race, difference, and power. There must be concrete efforts to support curricular initiatives and development that promote curriculum rewrites to ensure questions of race and oppression are addressed.

We need diverse staff representation in our schools if we are serious about addressing the question of difference and power. These bodies are crucial in linking identity to schooling and knowledge production. Their presence helps ensure learners of a sense of caring, that all peoples have something to contribute to the educational process. The physical representation of different bodies can assist in establishing a link between educational theory and practice around equity and diversity issues. This representation addresses questions of power and knowledge and the importance of grounding school knowledge in daily lived experiences of learners.

The challenges are enormous but with political will, institutional commitment, and support they can be overcome. It is vital for us to work with a philosophy of hope in antiracist politics by recognizing our possibilities and limitations. In conclusion, I want to paraphrase Adrienne Rich and assert that the working-class racialized youth in our school systems today are not there to receive an education, they are there to reclaim their education.[34] These youth see themselves as active and creative subjects and not simply youth to be acted on. Educators must assist learners in their endeavors and make learning and education possible for these youth. Together, we must assist these students as they challenge any attempts to dominate the past, contaminate the present, and steal their future. Breaking out of the increasingly gated-community mentality of education, new, empowered, and community-based visions of education must be given voice and operationalized. In opening these proverbial gates, the circle of educational inclusion is widened to more voices, more meaningful participation, and the potential for societal gains.

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