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# Institutional Barriers to the Implementation of Antiracist Education: A Case Study of the Secondary System in a Large, Urban School Board

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## Abstract

*A major premise of antiracist education is that structural barriers in educational institutions reinforce and perpetuate inequitable power relations, which alienate and marginalize some groups, and have a deleterious effect on all participants. Although there is anecdotal evidence of this, few in-depth studies have been conducted on how these barriers, which block the implementation of anti-racist education initiatives, manifest themselves. This case study of the Toronto Board of Education's secondary system, which involved a survey of key decisionmakers, principals and teachers, provides a detailed analysis of the barriers to the implementation of antiracist education in a large, racially diverse education system. The findings highlight the difficulties, including leadership, informal resistance, and decentralization of decisionmaking, in implementing antiracist education. Furthermore, the findings show that racial minority teachers have little power to influence the implementation of antiracist education.*

## Resume

*Un postulat fondamental d'une pedagogie antiraciste soutient que les entraves structurelles des institutions d'education renforcent et perpetuent des relations de pouvoir qui marginalisent et alienent certains groupes et ont un effet nocif sur tous les participants. En depit des preuves anecdotiques de ce fait, peu d'etudes en profondeur ont etc menees pour demontrer comment se manifestent ces entraves qui bloquent l'implantation d'initiatives educatives antiracistes. Cette etude de cas menee aupres de leaders, directeur(e)s et enseignant(e)s du niveau secondaire de la Commission Scolaire de Toronto fournit une analyse detaillee des restrictions qui empechent l'implantation d'une pedagogie antiraciste dans un systeme scolaire de grande taille et de composition ethnique tres diverse. Les conclusions soulignent les difficultes a implanter une pedagogie antiraciste, y compris le leadership, la resistance cachee et la decentralisation de pouvoir decisionnel. De plus, les conclusions demonstrent que les enseignant(e)s de minorite raciale ont tres peu de pouvoir d'influencer l'application d'une pedagogie antiraciste. (TDLR)*

## Introduction

Antiracist education is designed to critically examine and ultimately increase the effectiveness of educational institutions in meeting the needs of all students, teachers and other participants in the education system. It addresses the inequities and systemic barriers in educational institutions, provides a voice to all groups and individuals, but especially those from marginalized backgrounds, and legitimizes and validates their lived experiences. In antiracist education, the need to analyze power relations critically, which was not a key focus of the multiculturalism era, is pivotal for educators and students alike in order for them to discuss and understand the social construction of knowledge and identity. Although several researchers (Alladin, 1995; Brandt, 1986; Dei, 1993a, 1994a, 1994b, 1996; Lee, 1985; Massey, 1991) have examined the meaning and effect of antiracist education, its implementation has not been studied widely and thus the extent to which it is effectively realized in schools is unknown.

This paper seeks to answer the question: What institutional barriers have impeded the full implementation of antiracist education in the secondary school system of the Toronto Board of Education (TBE) from the early 1970s to the early 1990s? We answer this question using data from a survey of key officials, principals and teachers in the Board's secondary system. The Toronto Board was selected for the study because of the lead it has taken in equity initiatives, with twenty five years of policies related to social class, ethnicity, gender equity and antiracist education to its credit.

The paper has six sections: a review of the theoretical framework of antiracist education used in this study; an overview of the Toronto Board of Education; a description of the Board's involvement in the area of equity; a review of the research methods; a presentation of the findings with discussion; and, conclusion.

### **Theoretical Framework**

For antiracist theorists, race is a social construct, meaning that the concept is produced, shaped, and influenced by society. Despite the beliefs of some race theorists (Herrnstein & Murray, 1994; Rushton, 1994) it is generally recognized that race neither determines the cognitive characteristics of individuals such as intelligence (Alladin, 1995; Omi & Winant, 1993; Rensberger, 1994) nor is it the sole determinant of social identity. In defining the latter, a number of variables in addition to race must be considered, including gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation, language, place of origin, family experience, place of residence, social class, and so forth (Breton, Isajiw, Kalbach, & Reitz, 1990; James, 1992, p. 16; Lee, 1985, p. 11). It is often the case, however, that race is the most visible and controversial variable, a premise on which this study is based. Whatever the form of marginalization, whether it be gender, disability or sexual orientation, the added feature of race almost always renders the life experience of individuals or groups more difficult.

Antiracist education evolved first at the community level, gaining credibility in the mid 1980s as a response and alternative to more than a decade of multicultural education (Haughton, 1987; Lee, 1985; Thomas, 1984). The latter was seen to be primarily preoccupied with matters of awareness, tolerance and acceptance of diversity (Fleras & Elliot, 1992; Moodley, 1985; Peter, 1981; Young, 1990). According to Fleras (1995) multicultural education focuses on culture rather than structure, strives for sensitivity as opposed to the removal of discriminatory barriers, is concerned with ethnocentrism and ethnicity rather than systemic racism and race, aims at a better understanding of equality as opposed to personal self worth and at developing the ability to challenge inequities (p. 77). Antiracist education, on the other hand, highlights systemic and structural barriers, and locates racism as a central problem and consequence of inequitable power relations (Cheng, Brown, & Lines, 1994; Lee, 1985; Thomas, 1984). Some critics charge that multicultural education and antiracist education actually complement each other, having more commonalities than differences. Fyfe (1993), for example, argues for an intercultural education, while McLeod (1992) proposes a human rights education. Both argue for many of the predominant features of antiracist education enunciated by its proponents.

The basic principles of antiracist education, as formulated by Thomas (1984), highlight a need to go beyond the provision of

information to develop the ability to express their own lived experiences and realities, to engage those in the majority group to recognize and fight racism, and to develop collective strategies in the form of political education. Lee (1985, pp. 8-9), a pioneer in antiracist education theory, emphasized that critical pedagogy must form an integral part of this concept, and that antiracist education should be integrated throughout the curriculum and permeate all aspects of the school culture. The teacher is viewed as a critical component of successful antiracist education (Carr & Klassen, in press).

The theoretical framework for this study combines antiracist principles formulated by Dei (1994a)<sup>1</sup> with the antiracist policy of the Ontario Ministry of Education and Training (1993a).<sup>2</sup> Explanations of low educational outcomes for some groups, according to Dei, have for too long focused on the perceived dysfunctional family unit rather than institutional structures which fail to respond to the needs of all students. That institutions such as schools polarize students and communities by race and class, and thus perpetuate unequal relationships, is a central theme of

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<sup>1</sup> Dei's nine antiracist education principles (1994a, pp. 1-2) can be summarized as: 1) recognizing the social effect of "race" although race lacks a scientific basis; 2) teaching that the full social effects of race intersect with other forms of social oppression (race, class, gender, and sexuality); 3) questioning white (male) power and privilege; 4) addressing the marginalization of certain voices in society and the delegitimation of the knowledge and experience of subordinate groups in the educational system; 5) recognizing that students do not go to school as "disembodied" individuals, but that their background and their identities are implicated in the schooling and learning processes; 6) acknowledging the pedagogic need to confront the challenge of diversity and difference in Canadian society; 7) acknowledging the role of the educational system in producing and reproducing not only racial but also gender, sex, and class based inequalities; 8) stressing that the school problems of youth cannot be analyzed in isolation from the material and ideological circumstances of students; and 9) questioning explanations of pathological family and home environments as a source of school problems.

<sup>2</sup> School boards in Ontario were required in 1995 to produce antiracism and ethnocultural equity policies on ten aspects of their practices. This marked a change in government direction because of the requirement to involve marginalized communities in the development, implementation and monitoring phases. The areas subject to the equity policy are: 1) board policies, guidelines, and practices; 2) leadership; 3) school community partnership; 4) curriculum; 5) student languages; 6) student evaluation, assessment, and placement; 7) guidance and counseling; 8) racial and ethnocultural harassment; 9) employment practices; and, 10) staff development (Ontario Ministry of Education and Training, 1993a).

Dei's work. What is required, he argues, is not only increased numerical representation of minority groups, but effective representation and inclusiveness. Several interrelated factors or symptoms of inequity frame Dei's argument (1993a, 1994a, 1994b, 1996) for a complete overhaul of the public education system. In Ontario urban schools, these factors include a high degree of alienation and marginalization experienced by a large percentage of racial minority students, highlighted by the comparatively high drop out rate for Black students (Daenzer & Doi, 1994; Dei 1993b, 1995). There is also the demand from an increasing number of Black parents and students for Black focused schools (Collins, 1994).

Notwithstanding calls for action, the implementation of antiracist education has been slow. The Ontario education ministry's antiracism policies have stressed that "antiracist education does not negate the value of multicultural education [but] ... acknowledges the existence of racism, and forthrightly seeks its eradication within schools and in society at large" (Ontario Provincial Advisory Committee on Race Relations, 1987, p. 39). More recently, antiracist education has been seen as validating diverse individual experiences in order to "develop a positive self-image" while addressing the systemic nature of institutional discrimination (Ontario Ministry of Education and Training, 1993b, pp. 2-3). Other jurisdictions in Canada have also recognized the need to move further than the multicultural education phase, especially in those areas where there is a significant percentage of racial minorities among the local population (Alladin & Ramsankar, 1995; British Columbia Ministry of Education, 1994).

Antiracist education is part of a nebulous and volatile policy domain. The chief goal of such policy is to alter significantly the status quo.<sup>3</sup> Resistance, especially to the implementation of policy, is to be expected at all levels. In the democratization of an educational system, that is, in responding to concrete and valid demands for change and for greater accountability to all citizens and especially those in schools, risks are involved. Since educational institutions may not view it in their best interests to expose the presence of systemic barriers and inequities in the very systems they produce and reproduce, institutional resistance to conducting such research is acknowledged (Dei, 1996; Rymer & Alladin, 1995). Moreover, since few investigators have focused on institutional responses to antiracist education change policies, our

<sup>3</sup> The political, and therefore, the educational context shifted significantly with the election in June, 1995 of a Progressive Conservative government, which quickly withdrew support for a number of equity initiatives including the Employment Equity Act, the Ontario Antiracism Secretariat, mandatory antiracism policies for school boards, and funding for equity, in general.

investigation, which describes and analyzes systemic barriers of the TBE to implementing race related equity initiatives in its secondary system, takes the form of a case study.

### **The Toronto Board of Education: An Overview**

The Toronto Board has 154 elementary and secondary schools with a total enrollment of approximately 76,000 full-time students and a staff of more than 5,000 teachers and principals, of whom approximately 2,400 are in secondary schools. In addition, the Board has more than 100,000 adult and continuing education students. It administers a budget in excess of \$600 million and is governed by a director (who is CEO) and 21 trustees elected in 16 districts. There is a hierarchy of committees with only a handful (Finance, Human Resources, Curriculum) reporting directly to the full Board (TBE, 1993, p. 1).

The demographic characteristics of the Board's student population illustrate a changing society (Yau, Cheng, & Ziegler, 1993). In 1991, the proportion of secondary students whose mother tongue was *not* English was 45%, of which the largest groups were Chinese (14%), Portuguese (7%), and Vietnamese (5%). Just over half (54%) of the secondary students were White, about one third (30%) Asian, and 9% Black. Slightly fewer than 43% of students were born outside Canada with nearly one quarter born in Asia. More than half (57%) the foreign born students immigrated in the past five years, with a high proportion of those from Africa, the Middle East and Central America. In sum, the student population in the Toronto Board is highly diverse in terms of race, ethnicity, place of origin, length of time in Canada and languages spoken.

Given these demographics, the representation of racial minority teachers has been a concern in the TBE. The racial minority teacher representation in its secondary schools has increased little over time, hovering around 10% (Carr, 1995).<sup>4</sup> One reason for the dearth of racial minority teachers is the relatively small number of racial minorities attending teacher training institutions. In general, racial minorities have tended to be discouraged from teaching occupations (Carr, 1995). One result of this low level representation is that the Board's superintendents and director are overwhelmingly White.

<sup>4</sup> Gathering accurate data has been problematic over the years. Employment equity programs require voluntary self-identification, and participation in these programs has been challenged over the years. The Board has made relatively few attempts at collecting quantitative data on the representation of racial minority teachers. It is from these studies, however, that the 10% figure is derived (Cheng 1987a, 1987b, 1987c; Cheng, Brown, & Lines, 1992).

### **Equity in the Toronto Board From the Early 1970s**

Over the past 20 years the TBE has undertaken numerous and diverse initiatives in the field of equity. In the Board's Final Report of the Work Group on Vocational Schools (TBE, 1974), for example, social class issues were a focal point. The report highlighted the streaming and ghettoizing of "ethnic" and "immigrant" students into "basic level" vocational schools. Stemming from the recognition of systemic barriers against students of a certain background and class, a flurry of initiatives, related to ethnicity, followed the establishment of multicultural programs (TBE, 1975, 1976) and heritage languages classes (Larter & Cheng, 1986). Gender equity was also a prominent feature of the Board's equity agenda in the late 1970s and early 1980s. With the establishment of an affirmative action framework for women, the central power relation paradigm was altered (Sheffield, 1992).

By the late 1970s the idea of antiracist education had led to a reassessment of the Board's approach to equity (TBE, 1989, 1990). Issues of race and racism, packaged initially under the rubric of "race relations," were introduced in the Board's Final Report of Subcommittee on Race Relations (TBE, 1979) and continued to gain prominence in the Board's thinking in the early 1980s. The 1979 Report provided, for the first time, a framework for examining a range of issues related to human resources, the curriculum, and other aspects of diversity in education, listing 119 recommendations on matters such as teacher hiring and training, teaching materials, and so forth. A mid 1980s evaluation of the implementation of the recommendations was highly critical of senior management's low level of commitment and of the little day-to-day follow-through on the part of the key implementors in the schools (Hitner Starr Associates, 1985).

Two institutional responses characterized the Board's involvement in the 1980s: the establishment of an Equal Opportunity Office and the Race Relations Committee. The former housed both an affirmative action advisor for women and a race relations advisor. The race relations advisor, who reports to the Associate Director of Education, does not have line authority but works as an internal advocate and external community liaison. The Race Relations Committee does not report directly to the Board as a whole. Its recommendations are channeled through two senior committees.

In the 1990s a more focused conceptualization of race related issues emerged, one that involved the potential for substantive change through employment equity and curriculum reform (TBE, 1991a, 1991b). In 1994, a racial and ethnocultural mistreatment policy (TBE, 1994) was introduced which outlined how racial and ethnic complaints are to be dealt with. The employment equity program for racial minorities was accelerated and the training of staff for antiracist education was increased.

### **Research Methods**

A qualitative (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992) case study format (Merriam, 1988) was used with a focus on educational policy analysis (Churchill, 1987, 1990; Downey, 1988; Samoff, 1991). The study was neither initiated nor funded by the TBE but the Board did provide invaluable assistance in facilitating the research. A multilayered survey of key officials, principals and teachers was conducted in 1994-1995 and supplemented by a review of relevant documents. The survey consisted of indepth interviews with 28 key officials and 22 teachers who identified themselves as members of racial minorities; and, two mailed questionnaires, one using a random sample of 352 teachers and the other targeting 120 self-identified racial minority teachers. Seventy responded to the first questionnaire, 25 to the second. For both the interviews and mailed questionnaires a combination of closed and open ended questions were utilized. All of the interviews were taped and then transcribed while the questionnaire responses were analyzed using a computer program.<sup>5</sup>

The officials interviewed include four trustees, two directors of the board, three race relations advisors, six principals, and other senior staff and individuals involved in the community-school relations area. The total accumulated TBE corporate experience of these people exceeded 400 years. Many of those interviewed had come "up through the ranks" starting as teachers, thus they also provided insight as former teachers and principals. Sixteen of these officials are members of racial minorities—eight Black, five South Asian, two East Asian and one of mixed racial origin—and represent a large percentage of the racial minorities in key positions. The interviews with the 22 racial minority teachers were conducted to better understand their experiences in the classroom as well as serving to triangulate comments and perceptions of key officials.

For the main mailed questionnaire a random sample of TBE secondary teachers was selected from a list of all permanent teachers working in the 1994-95 school year. Of the 70 respondents 86% were White and 14% racial minorities. The response rates for White and racial minority teachers were comparable to their representation in the teaching corps. Because of the relatively small number of teachers who are racial minorities, a targeted mailing to this group resulted in 25 additional completed questionnaires. In

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<sup>5</sup> All questionnaire responses were entered in the Q and A software package, allowing answers to be sorted according to characteristics (e.g., race) of respondents.

total, approximately 24% of all racial minority secondary teachers in the Board either responded to the survey or were interviewed.<sup>6</sup>

To ensure the identities of participants remained anonymous, and the information they supplied confidential, pseudonyms were used. Descriptors indicated the gender of the participant, the type of position held, whether or not the participant was White or a racial minority, and, in the case of teachers, the number of years the individual has been with the Board.<sup>7</sup> Wherever possible the position held by decisionmakers was identified.

### Specific Barriers to Implementation

The survey and review of Board documents identified five barriers to implementation of antiracist education: 1) lack of vision; 2) decentralized nature of the school system; 3) lack of racial minorities in key positions; 4) compartmentalization of equity interests; and 5) informal resistance to racial equality.

#### Lack of Vision

Until the early 1980s trustees were elected every two years which meant the composition of the Board changed often and agendas and priorities oscillated.<sup>8</sup> Traditionally, the Board had been quite politicized, being significantly influenced at times by community and grass-roots social movements. As a result there were many separate and narrowly focused initiatives but no overall coherent, holistic, and long term vision nor implementation strategy for antiracist education emerged. The specialized units within the Board do not necessarily have a mandate to tackle some of the pervasive and interlocking issues, such as human resources planning, needed to set the wheels of change in motion. Many teachers and principals believe the racial and ethnocultural mistreatment policy that was introduced in 1994 was the antiracist education policy. In fact, it only covers some narrow aspects of antiracism such as a mechanism for dealing with the

<sup>6</sup> This figure is based on the Board's data, which indicate that roughly 10% (240) of the teachers in the secondary system are racial minorities as of 1990. Therefore, the 22 interviews and 35 completed questionnaires result in an estimate that 24% of racial minority teachers were surveyed.

<sup>7</sup> The indicators used to frame the identity of the participant are: 1) gender indicated through the pseudonym; 2) level of employment at the Board represented by K for key decisionmakers, or T for teachers; 3) categorization as White (W) or racial minority (R); 4) for teachers only, the number of years of employment at the Board. An example of this combined information would be: Robert-T-R-17.

<sup>8</sup> School board officials in Ontario have since been elected for three year terms.

more visible and tangible problems of racism in schools. The policy does not address issues of power relations. Unfortunately, the Race Relations Committee, which could be a source of coherent vision, is limited by the fact that it reports to senior committees of the Board rather than the Board itself. As a result, the concerns raised and issues debated by interest groups at Race Relations Committee meetings are often diluted before reaching the full Board.

An evaluation of early antiracist education implementation found that "many of these [senior] personnel did not exercise their responsibility. This does not mean that specific activities were not done, but simply that . . . many were done on an ad hoc and discretionary basis" (Hitner Starr Associates, 1985, p. 11). One official involved in the curriculum area noted that:

*When it comes to really implementing them, it is well documented that we /the Board/ fall down on that. That has happened with race relations policies as well. The common way in which people in authority go about it is a "do nothing" kind of approach. They don't openly challenge issues, but nothing is ever done. That is basically what is happening to racism, race relations and work against racism. (Meg-K-R)*

Some participants emphasized that too few employees are dedicated to doing equity work as a primary part of job functions. The Board's belief that equity should be incorporated at all levels and that all individuals be responsible for inculcating principles of equity was perceived by many as being unrealistic since system wide sensitization had not successfully taken place. In fact, many teachers commented that they were unaware of Board policies in this area, except for the mistreatment and harassment policy; and a large number of teachers noted that they were disconnected from the whole process of conceptualizing and developing antiracism policies. The lack of a coherent vision is underscored by repeated comments from racial minorities and from significant numbers of Whites who questioned the Board's commitment, stating that the needs of marginalized students were not being met.

Finally, the survey noted the lack of shared vision among those charged with the implementation of antiracist policies. Principals, for the most part, acknowledged the difficulty in implementing sensitive issues related to change, especially the inclusion of people and groups who did not form part of the "mainstream" of the school system. However, they often found themselves drawn to responding to day-to-day crises and management issues rather than striving to implement the kind of institutional change envisioned by the champions of antiracist education.

### *Decentralized Nature of the School System*

The organization of the TBE's secondary school system allows for significant power to be vested in principals and school departments. These two sources of power are discussed in turn vis-a-vis their role in antiracist education.

The vast majority of those surveyed felt that their principals could, or did, play leadership roles in antiracist education. One teacher noted that, "*The principal of a high school is a god. He can direct policy by force of his personality.*" Principals agreed. As one expressed it:

*The principal is crucial, what the principal accepts, the philosophy. . . . If I believe that racism is something that is pervasive in my school and do nothing, then the teachers and students will get the wrong attitude as to how to deal with it. If the principal is upfront and open about that philosophy and puts in place the programs the Board wants in place . . . I think that is crucial.* (Maria-P-R)

In fact, senior officials who considered equity issues to occupy a top priority on the overall Board agenda had the same view. One insider working on these issues stated that:

*If a principal in a school is committed to the issues, walks the talk and means it and has a vision for the school, the staff buy into it and join into it. The staff who do not buy into it either leave or are uncomfortable enough to leave. A principal can build the kind of staff he or she wants and create the kind of climate that would embrace the diversity that is required.* (Nina-K-R)

Notwithstanding the importance of the principal in implementing antiracist strategies, his/her role is constrained in several ways. First, principals face competing demands and have only limited power to provide leadership, often valuing stability over change. A long-time Board employee in the equity area noted that a principal has

*a million things that are going on, you've got school buildings that are under capitalized and falling apart, you're dealing with stuff that's coming down from the Board, you've got parents breathing down your back. . . . Whenever anything goes wrong, you're the one who gets it in the neck. You don't want to antagonize anybody. Your job is to try and keep things calm. If your school is one where all hell has broken loose, and you're fighting with your heads of departments, it's not going to look good.* (Winston-K-W)

Second, principals feel constrained because they are members of the same union as the teachers reporting to them. This creates tension over matters of accountability and responsibility. Incidents of racism or racial inequality, for example, may not be dealt with systemically for fear of alienating fellow union members whose cooperation principals require to maintain cohesiveness of the school. Generally speaking it is not perceived to be in the best

interests of principals to arbitrate negatively on issues affecting the predominantly White union.

*To talk about an emperor as a god is to think of him as having clothes. Principals don't have clothes; they're captives of the federation. So if they go out too far in front of the troops, or if they lag behind the troops, or if they move in the wrong direction from the troops, they're going to be called to account to a body other than the Board or the superintendents.* (Cameron-K-W)

Third, some principals lack the knowledge to implement antiracist education. An official in the Equal Opportunity Office in the early 1980s commented that:

*Part of the reason that the Race Relations policy hasn't gone anywhere [is] because the principals in the schools did not want to deal with this issue, and they hoped it would go away. . . . Because they don't know how to deal with it . . . And they have never been taught how to deal with it.* (Ronald-K-R)

The fact that most principals are White males who have come up through the ranks in the TBE as teachers and share a certain institutional ethos was an area of concern flagged by a number of those surveyed. Sensitization and exposure to antiracism issues was not, for the most part, an integral part of their formal educational experiences, while their lived experiences may constrain their actions, however well intentioned, to improve the educational chances of marginalized students.

The racial origin of the principal was viewed as critical by a number of participants. One teacher noted that:

*The principal is from the Caribbean and this is very helpful in giving support and as a role model. Also, matters of discipline can be dealt with and there is no implication of racial bias.* (Karen-T-W-11)

Not only do racial minority principals provide visible examples of more equitable hiring practices, they can serve as role models for students of any racial origin, as well as influence the character and culture of their institutions.

The departmental structure of the secondary school also presents a barrier to the implementation of antiracist initiatives. Although criticized by a number of key decisionmakers and racial minorities as being ineffectual in dealing with antiracist education, departmental structure was defended by a number of White teachers and principals as the best and most appropriate to deal with subject specialization in schools. Departmental structure is criticized for fostering nepotism in hiring, creating a "bunker mentality," resisting interdisciplinary learning required in antiracist approaches, and allowing departments to control decision making to the exclusion of the principal.

One Equal Opportunity Office official described the situation in this way:

*It's a feudal system. Real power lies in the schools, and real power lies in the departments. [Principals] are just the administrators. They're there to keep the boat from rocking. They don't want to antagonize their heads of departments.... I think the average age in the Toronto Board is in the 50s. A lot of them are really old. They don't want to rewrite their curriculum at this stage in their lives. They're just holding their breath and wanting to retire.* (Winston-K-W)

Another central office consultant who spent almost two decades teaching at the secondary level echoed these concerns:

*At the secondary level, it's the departments, it's that separation into departments, the separation of the school into different departments. The principal in the secondary schools is almost like a figure head. The department heads run the school, they have the power to make the decisions internally, and there's a constant fight for funds, for space.* (Chelsea-K-W)

The in-fighting which can occur within and among departments has the net effect of diluting any cohesiveness and solidarity required to achieve a common goal of an inclusive and equitable education. The traditional ghettoization of teachers within their departments does not readily facilitate, or even permit, an integrated approach to learning. Some teachers noted that there is the added consequence of students feeling alienated and unconnected to the system because of the compartmentalization of learning. As one teacher noted:

*The departmental structure hinders efforts [in relation to antiracist education] /Antiracist education/ does not occupy a high priority area. The curriculum is still "Eurocentric." It's not openly resistant; it's the way we were trained. If I ever poked my nose [re: the Eurocentric history curriculum in the History Department], I wouldn't be heard again, because I'm a science teacher.* (Eric-T-R-8)

Departmental structure can also erect barriers to equitable hiring as exemplified by the following remarks of a senior official:

*[There was the] case of the racial minority teacher with fifteen years experience who didn't get the job as Assistant English Department Head. . . . Given the stated employment equity policy in the Toronto Board, and the stuff that has gone on for fifteen years, I assumed that this person would get the job. He's an excellent, excellent teacher, with a good reputation and a lot of history. He didn't get the job; I asked why not: "Well you know, he's such a sweet, sweet person, he's such a nice person, and I like him so much, but you know, we [those doing the hiring/ really needed someone with experience in ESL [English as a Second Language] to be Assistant Head." Now this was an English teaching position, it had nothing to do with ESL. . . . So the rules change.* (Chelsea-K-W)

In summary, principals can have a significant impact on the culture of their schools. Their willingness or reluctance to involve the community in the school, promote the interests of marginalized

students, and effectively manage and set the tone for all teachers, including racial minority ones, is critical to the implementation of antiracist education. The other significant variable is the role played by school departments. If they are led by progressive individuals willing to openly discuss change then their relationship with the principal, the teachers and students can facilitate implementation of antiracist education. A weak or uninterested principal, on the other hand, can allow intransigence in the departments to flourish and hinder antiracist education.

#### *Lack of Minorities in Key Positions*

Racial minority teachers can play key roles in bolstering and legitimizing antiracist education, especially by providing role models for all students. There is an overwhelming perception by a number of White teachers and almost all racial minority ones that racial minority teachers play a critical role in connecting racial minority students. This can occur in several ways, as described by teachers:

*Students of color feel comfortable or easy to talk to teachers of racial minority /origin]. As a minority teacher I feel I have more patience and understanding of new students lacking some of the social aspects of schooling. On the other hand, they cannot fool me. I may know where they are coming from.* (Felicity-T-R-17)

A principal confirmed this view:

*I seek out whenever possible, if I have an option, I seek out a visible minority teacher because, if they are good at what they do, they are an unbelievable gift because they model what you want, and youngsters, they're intuitively comfortable with this person because they know they have a shared background.* (Mark-P-W)

Others speculated that racial minority teachers "are more sensitive to subtle biases [and] would be better able to sensitize their colleagues" (Lawrence-T-W-30), or that "Their very presence would lend realism to a subject that might otherwise just be dealt with theoretically" (Jack-T-W-27).

Several teachers, Whites as well as racial minorities, stressed that the principle of seniority conflicts with the principle of employment equity that would otherwise allow more minorities to become teachers and be promoted. As in many bureaucratic and highly unionized workplaces, employment and promotion decisions are based on seniority. This gives priority to teachers who have served for many years, the vast majority of whom are White. According to one former Director the issue is one which upholds union rights over equity interests.

*It's the principle of seniority that is near and dear to the hearts of the union [re: climbing the ladder]. Here's a sense that, "Wait your turn, I've been waiting a long time, and there's not going to be any queue*

*jumping here. " I don't know that they would block people; they just wouldn't pave the way. (Cameron-K-W)*

One teacher described the negative effect of these rules:

*This is a hoax [regarding emphasis being put on hiring racial minority teachers]. We have had three Black teachers in my school and two were declared surplus; one of the two was probably the best teacher we ever had. (Darrell-T-W-21)*

The vast majority of White teachers felt the Board was placing a priority on the hiring of racial minority teachers whereas the latter were divided on this matter with half believing employment equity was not a priority. Many racial minority teachers firmly believe they face barriers unknown to White teachers, and that discrimination has been widespread in hiring and promotions for a number of years in the Board. One racial minority teacher summed up the situation as follows:

*Color, accent, lack of Canadian idiom [and] proper and correct English decrease chances of promotions to positions of responsibility. Often, discouraged, the teacher gives up. (Alice-T-R-25)*

Several racial minority teacher participants acknowledged or complained that their accent was a factor in relation to promotions, while at the same time they saw White colleagues with equally thick Scottish or Australian accents move up the system.

The lack of racial minorities in key positions puts an undue and unhealthy burden on the limited number of racial minorities in the system. It would appear that many innovative student and parent outreach initiatives for specific racial minority groups are designed and implemented as the result of the efforts of one or a few racial minority teachers able to maneuver and mobilize the necessary resources. However, such maneuvering carries professional risks. Some racial minority teachers reported they are responsible for handling racial complaints in their schools because they are the sole teacher "of color." This puts them in extremely compromising positions. For instance, a racial minority teacher may feel ill at ease in mediating complaints from racial minority students directed at White teachers since the minority teacher may be perceived as taking sides thus jeopardizing his/her credibility and/or status with both groups.

#### *Compartmentalization of Equity Interests*

A number of potentially compatible equity interests in the TBE have been on a collision course over the past twenty five years. For example, considerable tension has existed between those advocating antiracism and those advocating gender equity. One Race Relations Advisor noted that:

*It [the relationship between race relations and affirmative action for women] didn't play out very well. Although the Board brought out the Affirmative Action policy and the Race Relations policy at*

*approximately the same time, in the mid to late 70s, and although the race relations advisor and the affirmative action advisor have always been part of the same office, the Equal Opportunity Office, in the initial stages they did not work as a team, and there were different networks, and the network of women included at that time only White women. They identified employment as an issue right from the beginning, and were able to develop a systemic program approach related to vice-principal and principal positions by the early 80s. There were no such networks as far as racial minorities are concerned, so they did not have the same weight in the system. (Terrence-K-R)*

Moreover, not only was there conflict between gender and racial equity but some observers noted tensions between and within racial minority groups themselves. That is, while members of some groups thought they had specific settlement, linguistic or outreach needs to strengthen their identities as members of minorities, others were more preoccupied with integration into the mainstream and advancing through the system.

Some participants provided evidence of anti-Black racism while others suggested that race was of only minor significance. Some White teachers resented being asked their racial origin in the survey arguing that White does not constitute a race. While these teachers often seemed to support the principle of equity many of them viewed ethnicity and/or culture as more significant than racial origin. A number of White teachers also noted that racism exists between racial minority groups and that students "of color" often disregard racial minority teachers. In response to this contention some racial minority teachers explained how difficult it was being an advocate, a concerned parent, community member, mentor and skilled professional all in one, stating that institutional racism often causes some people to undervalue race and racism and pits marginalized groups against each other.

The lack of solidarity within the equity movement has slowed the implementation of antiracist education. According to many of the participants this is because of the priority given gender equity issues. Among racial minority administrators and teachers the overwhelming perception is that affirmative action benefits solely White women and that it has not addressed the needs of racial minority women nor the linkages with racism.

#### *Informal Resistance to Racial Equality*

Like all organizations, the TBE has formal as well as informal decision making processes. The latter process can support, neglect or resist the former. There is evidence of informal resistance to antiracist education initiatives, often in the form of undervaluing race in the lived experiences of teachers and students. This is most apparent with respect to the employment equity policy. A significant number of White teachers expressed strong reservations and, in some cases, even hostility toward employment equity for racial minorities. They thought that merit rather than race should

be the chief criterion for employment related decisions. On the other hand, the vast majority of racial minority teachers strongly supported employment equity. The difference in perception between White and racial minority teachers is due, in large part, to lived experiences and power relations. As one teacher succinctly observed:

*Most teachers consider antiracist education an unnecessary fad. They don't view themselves as racist even, if they are, so question why it is important. (Gary-T-W-4)*

Some racial minority teachers felt they are at a disadvantage when it comes to participating or having influence in the informal school networks, such as setting the tone of staffrooms, choosing content for staff newsletters, and organizing professional development or student activities. All these involve informally condoned or constructed practices which reflect the lived experiences of the White majority.

A number of racial minority teachers remarked that when they voiced concerns or made suggestions to change the curriculum they were often perceived as being an advocate for an interest group, whereas the same is generally not true for White teachers. The general perception among many of the former is that White teachers are rewarded for pursuing antiracist education or equity issues whereas they were made to feel unidimensional or obsessed with race and racism. White teachers who are seriously involved in these issues probably realize they would be constrained dealing with them as they move up the ladder.

The informal network is typically supportive of the status quo. According to one key decision maker:

*And quite often, vice-principals and principals were those who expressed racial bias or prejudice and racial stereotypes. It's an old network, and people perpetuate the same old thing. . . . For example, I would try to intervene on behalf of a racial minority student with one member of the administration and be told that these people are over sensitive, I can't treat "X" student differently than other students just because he or she is a member of a racial minority group. A lot of denial, resistance, refusal to acknowledge what was going on. Resistance, for example, to requests, as a department head, for money to change the learning materials, to make them more inclusive. (Chelsea-K-W)*

Principals stated their support of the Board's direction but expressed concern about the "top-down" approach and the perceived inability of head-office officials to comprehend the range of challenges facing the principal outside of the equity agenda. However, key decision makers critiqued this position, arguing that antiracist education should be viewed in an integrated manner and that the limited vision of some principals hampered its implementation.

Judging by the information provided by survey participants, many racial minorities did not work to change the system and many acknowledged that, in order to survive, they have to be extremely cautious in advocating on behalf of antiracist education. A critical factor, therefore, is the privilege, on the basis of racial origin, that some people are accorded which enables them to decide how far they wish to become involved in these issues without fear of being labeled an advocate on behalf of a "special interest."

## Conclusion

Evidence of five barriers to the implementation of antiracist education in the TBE has been presented: lack of a shared vision, decentralization of decisionmaking, few minorities in positions of power, compartmentalization of equity interests, and informal resistance. These barriers are interrelated and often manifest themselves in subtle ways that reinforce inequitable power relations. For example, the lack of a strong vision from the leadership, combined with the decentralized nature of the secondary system, has allowed for an ad hoc approach to the implementation of antiracist education. The net effect is that some groups and individuals remain marginalized, unable to effectively access or influence the system. This is illustrated by the lack of racial minorities in key administrative positions, in the teaching corps, and by high drop-out rates for some racial minorities.

Some clarification is required concerning our contention that decentralization of decision making is a barrier to the implementation of antiracist education. We do not suggest that the other extreme, that is, a tightly controlled centralized organizational structure is the answer. Our concern is with the way the decentralization that has developed appears to have reinforced existing inequities in terms of representation, inclusivity, influence over the school culture, and the role of marginalized groups in the school system. Rather than being rooted in a concept of creating true community-school "partnerships," the present institutional structure is not sufficiently flexible and responsive to demands of the progressive antiracist and equity forces. The linkage between antiracist theory and antiracist practice necessarily involves the participation of the community at the grass roots level, as well as input from teachers. Therefore, a more thoughtful, innovative and pliable approach in which there is a good measure of institutional accountability is required to implement antiracist initiatives.

The survey indicated that a large number of racial minorities felt they have limited power to influence antiracist education although many expressed a personal commitment to it. The strong feelings of powerlessness a large number of racial minorities have, juxtaposed against the reactions of White teachers, of whom many are uncommitted or disinterested, illustrates how the institutional culture hinders the implementation of antiracist education. The

finding that the implementation of antiracist education is impeded by power and privilege being accorded to Whites within a White administrative and political system supports the research done by Sleeter (1993) and Roman (1993).

Notwithstanding our findings, the TBE displays many of the features of an organization with potential to transform itself. The priority it has given to antiracist education and equity has increased over time and is exemplified by the current sophisticated level of formal and informal debate and by the initiatives the Board has taken. In part, because of the demographic characteristics of its students, the TBE has been a leader among school boards in Canada in dealing with equity matters (Carr & Klassen, in press; Henry & Tator, 1994). One drawback to leading the pack, however, is the absence of models or experiences from which to gain knowledge, especially with respect to the implementation of equity policies and programs. That the Board allowed this study to proceed speaks to the degree of its "openness." Yet the fact that the number of equity specialists and advocates is small, their presence across the system limited, and that many people in the system are unaware of their activities illustrates the precarious nature of antiracist education. It is troubling to discover that teachers feel disconnected from the process of developing and implementing such education.

The Board reflects and mirrors the larger society and cannot easily deviate from the values of that society. The education system plays a key role in orchestrating social change, and its failure to act more quickly on antiracist education highlights the difficulty of implementing change. The issue of racism and inequitable power relations must be tackled in a holistic and strategic manner, placing educational institutions in a position of leading social change.

Areas of further research identified by our study include the significance and impact of informal networks, and the nature of change in large institutions. Our investigation found that racial minorities believe their influence on informal decision making networks is limited. A follow-up study on the dynamics of informal decision making in relation to the informal process would enhance the understanding of how decisions are made and identify ways to better accommodate the voices of those marginalized. The second area of additional research is the nature of change in large, complex and institutionalized organizations. Much of the research to date has documented the marginalization of groups in education whereas less critical analysis has been done on factors linked to institutional change.

In conclusion, the study provides a graphic portrait of how good intentions, policies, and equity initiatives encountered institutional barriers and intransigence. The study makes explicit the barriers to implementing antiracist policies and may be of utility to

policymakers. An improved understanding of how change does not occur can be of benefit in bringing about change.

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