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School leadership and equity: Canadian elements

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Abstract

There are great movements of people taking place around the world and our societies are becoming more diverse and multiethnic in nature, especially in the urban environments of the larger cities. In most countries, schools still represent the ‘status quo’ and most principals are from the ‘majority culture’. There is little empirical evidence describing how schools respond to the changing demographics of the contemporary world.

In this paper such empirical evidence is presented. The research question guiding this eight nation study was: In what ways do principals facilitate access to schools for all children? Exploring matters such as school policies, recognition of difference and, inclusion strategies, I present data from the Canadian elements of this international collaborative study.

School leadership and equity: Canadian elements

In this article are presented data from the Canadian elements of an eight nation collaborative study. Cross-cutting themes that emerged from a comparison of those international data are also discussed. Interviews were conducted with the principals from four Canadian schools in a western city. The schools were:

- Delimited to public schools in an urban environment;
- Part of the compulsory education system (serving children aged 5 -16); and,
- Identified as having an ethnoculturally diverse student population.

This limited qualitative pilot study sought to identify emergent themes from a Canadian context. These, then, when combined with data from other countries, will form the basis of a larger international quantitative study yet to be undertaken.

The Canadian context

Canada receives, on average, 225,000 new immigrants of all ages each year, with the majority relocating to urban centres. The province of Alberta receives approximately 15,000 new immigrants on an annual basis, with 61% of these newcomers choosing Calgary as their home. The changing profile of the immigrant population has shifted dramatically over the past twenty years. In the 20th century, most new immigrants were from the United Kingdom or Western Europe. Nearly all spoke either English or French as a first language. In 2002, 57% of newcomers arrived from ten source countries; the majority originating from India, China and Philippines. Eight of these ten countries have their own strong national languages, resulting in 48% arriving with no previous knowledge of English or French, the two official languages of Canada (Alberta Learning, 2003). The literature confirms “social, economic, and demographic changes taking place

in Canadian society have placed tremendous amount of pressure on educational systems to respond to the accompanying growth in the diversity of student enrollment” (Anisef & Kilbride, 2004, p. 10). As the key administrators at the school level, principals must take the lead role in meeting the demands of these social, economic, and demographic changes. Principals exhibit varying degrees of success in providing leadership required to adapt to the pluralistic society.

One of the factors inhibiting the ability of educators to respond to diversity is the lack of representation of principals and teachers from minority cultures in the Canadian school system (Carr, 1997). The principals surveyed in Carr’s study agreed that given equal qualifications, the recruitment, hiring and retaining of racial minority teachers and principals would provide much needed role models for racial minority students and teachers, and bring a broadened perspective into the system. “The lived experience of principals, regardless of race or origin, will shape their perceptions, attitudes and behaviors, as with teachers and others in the school system” (p. 5). Many faculties of education in Canada have special provisions to admit non-matriculated adult students and members of disadvantaged communities. Not only must the system strive to achieve equitable representation of administrators and teachers, the current body of administrators must maximize their potential to positively affect the degree of equitable access in the school system.

Although many schools now recognize ethnocultural diversity and make efforts to prevent discrimination, there continue to be inequities in terms of potential achievement for minority students. Anisef and Kilbride (2004) assert that visible minority youth “will continue to be at risk unless the system as a whole is actively working to accommodate

differences and needs” (p. 10). A number of underlying barriers are cited, including “lack of supportive school policies, discriminatory attitude of teachers, and the organizational structure of schools to which the newcomer has difficulty adjusting” (p.10). Lam (1994, cited in Anisef & Kilbride, 2004, p.11) describes the need to focus beyond finding ways for immigrants to fit into the system, to one where it is questioned as to “why and how the education system fails to meet their needs. The problems facing youth are rooted in socio-economic inequality and different forms of institutional and systemic discrimination.” This recognition of systemic challenges can be overwhelming for the administrator. Carr (1997) identifies three responses from Canadian principals to the challenge of equity. The first group (50%) acknowledges supportive policies and diversity but is not proactively implementing anti-racist education. The second group takes an interest in equity but is overwhelmed by the initiatives demanding their attention, and tends to focus on effective management rather than broader systemic issues. The third group is able to critically analyze the school culture and commits to ensure that certain groups are not marginalized. This is accomplished by involving many players in creative solutions that deal with issues of inclusion and equity. (p. 1)

The legislative context

Canada might be best described as a loosely confederated nation state. Politically, the country consists of 10 provinces and three territories. In Canada, the Constitution Act (1867) mandates educational governance to each of the provinces. Section 93 of this Act states that “in and of each Province the Legislature may exclusively make Laws in relation to Education.” The stipulations of the Constitution Act (1867) are stoutly defended by the provinces.

In Alberta, elements of these responsibilities are then delegated to the schools via seventy-seven public, separate, Francophone and Charter authorities (Alberta Education, 2004), each of which is elected locally. One of these authorities is the Calgary Board of Education [CBE]. In terms of enrollment, the CBE is the largest educational jurisdiction in Alberta, and the second largest in Canada. It consists of 213 schools which between them serve the needs of 95,808 students (CBE, 2004). The four schools involved in this study were all drawn from the CBE.

Federal participation in education

There is only limited federal intervention in education. The federal government funds the education systems in the Northwest Territories, Nunavut, and Yukon. All K-12 education in the provinces is funded by the provinces, with the exception of that provided to Aboriginal and First Nations peoples. The right to a federally provided education system was afforded to the First Nations under various aspects of the Treaties signed between the First Nations and the Crown in the late 1800s. Thus Treaty Seven (1877), which covers the geographical area now known as southern Alberta, and which includes the city of Calgary, states that:

Articles of a Treaty made and concluded this twenty-second day of September, in the year of our Lord, one thousand eight hundred and seventy-seven, between HER MOST GRACIOUS MAJESTY THE QUEEN of Great Britain and Ireland, by Her Commissioners, the Honorable DAVID LAIRD, Lieutenant-Governor and Indian Superintendent of the North-West Territories, and JAMES FARQUHARSON MACLEOD, C.M.G., Commissioner of the North-West Mounted Police, of the one part, and the Blackfeet, Blood, Peigan, Sarcee, Stoney

and other Indians, inhabitants of the Territory north of the United States Boundary Line, east of the central range of the Rocky Mountains, and south and west of Treaties numbers six and four, by their Head Chiefs and Minor Chiefs or Councillors, chosen as hereinafter mentioned, of the other part.

The Treaty goes on to state:

Further Her Majesty agrees to pay the salary of such teachers to instruct the children of said Indians as to Her Government of Canada may seem advisable, when said Indians are settled on their Reserves and shall desire teachers.

There are many who argue that these articles of a Treaty signed 128 years ago should no longer be accepted as face value. However, the right to a federally funded school system for First Nations peoples was reaffirmed in the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms (Constitution Act, 1982), Section 35 (i) of which stated that “the existing aboriginal and treaty rights of the aboriginal people of Canada are hereby recognized and affirmed.”

The practical application of the Treaties has been that many First Nations communities manage their own federally funded schools. A number of First Nations have signed bilateral agreements with provincial school jurisdictions, and their children attend provincial schools. Such arrangements require the First Nations to transfer the education tuition fees they receive from the federal government to the appropriate provincial authority. In addition, many First Nations people have moved off the reserve lands controlled by their people and now reside in urban centers, where their children attend the local school.

Such is the case in Alberta, where data suggest that only 9,418 (Alberta Education, 2005) of the estimated 52,340 Aboriginal children and youth of school age in

Alberta (Statistics Canada, 2004) attend federal schools. This is only 18 per cent of the population. The remainder of the 5 to 19 year old population are either not in school or else attend schools that fall under provincial jurisdiction. In Calgary there are 6,490 Aboriginal children of school age residing in the city (Statistics Canada, 2001). However, it has not been possible to determine how many of those are attending CBE schools, as the system is not required to – and does not – collect or share such demographic data.

Demographic descriptions

Alberta is a province in western Canada. It is bounded to the west by the Rockies, to the south by the US border, to the east by Saskatchewan, and to the north by the Northwest Territories. Geographically, the western flank of the province consists of mountains and foothills; the northern region is an area of boreal forest and post-glacial lakes; and, the southern and central zones are prairie farmland, bisected by steeply eroded river valleys known as the badlands. The total 2001 population of the province was 2,941,150, of whom 11 per cent (329,925) identified themselves as being members of a visible minority (Statistics Canada, 2001). This is slightly lower than overall Canadian demographics, where 13.5 per cent (3,983,845 of 29,639,035) identified themselves as being a member of a visible minority group.

Calgary

Calgary is a rapidly growing city of almost one million people. It attracts many new residents each year, both new Canadians and those migrating from other provinces. Indeed, Calgary is the principal secondary destination for people who move to Canada, initially settle in a community determined by government mandate, family relationships, or employment opportunities, and then relocate within the country.

In 2001, Calgary had a population of 943,310, of whom 20.9 per cent were foreign born (Statistics Canada, 2001). There were 21,915 people in Calgary who identified themselves as having an Aboriginal identity, approximately 2 per cent of the population. A much higher number, 17.5 per cent (n = 164,900), considered themselves to be members of a visible minority group. Of these, almost one third (51,850) were Chinese and almost one quarter (36,855) were South Asian. The remainder identified with a multitude of ethnocultural backgrounds: Black, Korean, Japanese, Southeast Asian, Filipino, Arab / West Asian, and Latin American were among those specified. Approximately 19 per cent declared a language other than English or French as their mother tongue. Of greater concern to educators, however, is that almost 2 per cent (15,940) stated that they had no working knowledge of either English or French, the two official languages of Canada, but had to converse through interpreters once they left their linguistic group.

In summary, Calgary can be described as a small city with an incredibly diverse population. The various ethnocultural groups tend to initially live in close proximity to others who share their language and culture; thus, 'Chinatown' and 'the Vietnamese quarter' are commonly used euphemisms for visible concentrations of specific ethnic groups. As new arrivals become more established in the city, however, they tend to move out to the rapidly expanding urban fringes of Calgary. In these new communities a much broader ethnic diversity is visible.

Urban zones

The city of Calgary is commonly divided into five urban zones, each bounded by clear physical markers. The Bow River runs west to east through the centre of the city,

effectively dividing it into areas north and south of the river. From the Calgary Tower, a highly visible landmark usually designated as the heart of the city, Centre Street runs due north and south, effectively demarcating the eastern and western areas. Based on the intersection of Centre Street and the Bow River, Calgary is divided into four quadrants (NE, SE, SW, NW). Over this grid an urban core, the central zone, is imposed. This area, the “inner city”, is bounded by 17th Avenue (NE and NW) to the north and 17th Avenue (SE and SW) to the south, and by two major roads (Crowchild Trail and Deerfoot Trail) to the west and east, respectively. Schools from three of the five zones were selected for this study. Should the research be taken further, the findings from this preliminary study will be tested across all five city zones.

The study

In this study we interviewed the principals of four (4) urban schools. One of the principals was male, three were female. All were white (Anglo-Canadian) and were aged in their 40s or 50s. The interviews were conducted during the 2004-2005 school year.

The schools were drawn from three different zones within the city. Statistics Canada (2001) data were used to describe the community served by the school. However, electoral boundaries are not coterminous with school enrollment boundaries, and school board policy permits the travel of students across catchment areas. School demographic data were reported by the principal of the school and triangulated against those listed on the school websites.

The first school, Riverside, was located in the northwest zone. It served a predominantly (90.4 per cent) English speaking area, although some 2.1 per cent of the local population classified themselves as Aboriginal and a further 0.5 per cent as Chinese.

The average annual family income for the riding was \$75,151, although the principal reported that there was a “huge range of income in the school”. The school was located in an area of mixed income housing, with homes ranging from riverside mansions to multifamily apartment blocks all present in the catchment zone. Riverside was an elementary school that enrolled 144 students from kindergarten to grade 6.

Approximately 10 per cent of the student enrollment were new immigrants to Canada. A further 10 to 12 per cent of the students were Aboriginal. The majority of the remainder of the students were low to middle income white Anglo Canadians. There were some children of upper income families in the school, but most children from such families were perceived to attend one of the numerous private schools in Calgary.

The second school, Hilltop, was also in the northwest area of the city. It served a generally high socio-economic area, with an average income of \$74,105. This junior high school served 650 students in grades 7 to 9, and according to the principal the students were of “upper class to middle-upper class” status. The school was a designated “bus receiver” facility, with a number of children being bussed in daily from another affluent suburb. The school was in a leafy and well-maintained area considered to be a desirable residential location. The local community was 81 per cent English speaking, 3.4 per cent Chinese, and 0.9 per cent Aboriginal. Some 135 – or over 20 per cent – of the students in the school required English as a Second Language support and interventions. Most of these students were the Calgary born children of recent immigrants to Canada; the principal observed that very few of her students were new immigrants themselves. Only two of the 650 students in the school were identified as being of aboriginal background.

The third school, Central, served a community that the principal described as having a “huge range of family income, from very high to very low”. The average annual income was \$63,566. The area was reported to be 86.6 per cent English, 1.1 per cent Chinese, and 2.1 per cent Aboriginal. The school served 344 students from kindergarten to grade 9, with some 2% or 3% of those children reported as being recent immigrants to Canada. The school had a high population of students requiring ESL support, the majority of whom were drawn from the Cantonese, Mandarin, and Urdu speaking communities. There were only 5 children of Aboriginal background at the school. The principal reported that “the students typically mingle well” together.

The fourth school, Prairie Vista, was located in a low socio-economic quadrant of the city. The average income of the area served by the school was \$61,918, and the principal reported that many of the people in the area lived in poverty. The community was quite evidently culturally diverse, with many shops of an “ethnic” nature and many advertising signs written in languages other than English. Census data show that English-speaking families comprise 63 per cent of the local population, with a further 6.9 per cent Punjabi, 2.8 per cent Aboriginal, and 2.2 per cent Chinese. The school served 501 students from kindergarten to grade 6. The principal reported that 17 per cent of the students were recent immigrants to Canada and, of these, some 2 per cent were refugees. There were 16 students of Aboriginal background. A total of 29 languages were spoken by the pupils in the school and the principal also noted a high mobility rate of 70 to 75 per cent, with over one thousand students actually passing through the school over the course of an average year. Over half the population – 274 students – required English as a Second Language support and a significant number (n = 135) of the children had special

education needs. The principal noted that the students mixed well with each other, and that she saw no evidence of segregation among the various ethnic groups.

In each school the researchers interviewed the principal. All the interviews took place in the principal's office. Three occurred after school had finished for the day and one during the school day itself. Each interview lasted between 45 and 70 minutes, with the average being 60 minutes. The interviews were tape recorded and then transcribed by the interviewer. The transcripts were returned to the interviewee for "member check" and the text was approved by each participant before being analyzed as data. Minor edits to the transcript were requested by one participant. As these edits reflected the style rather than the substance of the interview, the appropriate changes were made without an impact on the data themselves.

In addition to conducting semi-structured interviews with the principal, the researchers also collected and analyzed relevant policy documents. Further, we collected a variety of observational data, such as: descriptions of the area served by the school (local context, economic activity, cultural identity, and so forth); the gender, age (approximate), and cultural affiliation (majority / minority) of the principal and teachers; the degree to which minority culture students appeared visible in the school; and, the types of cultural artifacts that were present in the school - e.g., type of music playing over speakers, trophies in cabinets, murals and artwork, entrance to grounds, signs to visitors (language), cultural affiliation of teachers, etc.

Data collection was completed in October 2004. In addition to collecting empirical data, the researchers reviewed the various policies and procedures that affect educational practice in Alberta schools.

Interpretations and Discussion

The research question guiding this study was: *In what ways do principals facilitate access to schools for all children?* Specifically the study investigated matters such as: school policies, recognition of differences, and inclusion strategies. In this paper, Canadian interactions with these issues are presented.

School policies

School policies are key in supporting the principal's efforts to facilitate equal access to all students within the school environment. The *Alberta Learning Guideline for Recognizing Diversity and Promoting Respect* outlines criteria related to the academic K-12 program, criteria that are designed to ensure equitable access for all students. Policies of this nature promote the monitoring and development of supporting materials and learning resources that are inclusive and representative of the population. These policies also provide support for the principal to implement programs designed specifically to accommodate the diverse needs of the students. Heritage language programs, diverse hiring practices, early literacy programs, and a commitment to provide ESL support, together with a culturally balanced curriculum, are indicative of supportive policies for equal access. This study identified which of such policies exist, and through the interview process sought to determine the extent to which such policies were followed, and their relative merits and challenges.

It was determined that principals adhered diligently to the local board policies. All four respondents stated that their school served all children who lived in the designated catchment area, or school enrolment boundary. They noted that children who lived outside the catchment area may be admitted, subject to space limitations. Such a rigid

adherence to policy may seem natural, perhaps inevitable, in a large organization. It does, however, lead to some problems.

When new immigrants arrive at a school, they are first sent for a language assessment at the Riverside Bungalow, a CBE facility established for that purpose. The counsellors then recommend an appropriate English as a Second Language program with which the students should be provided. Unfortunately, as Roessingh (personal correspondence, 2005) has noted, many of the specialist teachers who were charged with implementing this program were reassigned to regular classroom duties during a previous period of reorganization. As a result, often there is nobody present with the skills and mandate to provide the dedicated ESL program required by the students. Rather, the already overburdened teachers receive the ESL program recommendations as simply another Individualized Program Plan, among the many they are already required to implement, and do their best with no specialized training.

Second, many new immigrants are often living in subsidized public housing. The same is true of those referred to as the “working poor”, to many Aboriginal people who have moved to the city from a rural community or reserve, and to many Canadians of all ethnocultural groups who have made inter-provincial migrations in search of work. These families often follow what has been called the “rental flit pattern”. They save enough money to pay for the first and last month’s rent on an apartment, make the payments, and move in. They do not pay any more rent. At first the landlord does not care, as rent has been paid for two months. In the third month, however, pressure mounts for payment to be made. It is not, and towards the end of that month the family either leave the apartment secretively (the classic “moonlight flit”) or else are evicted. During this period

the family has saved enough money for the first and last month's rent on another apartment, and the cycle begins again. In moving even two streets, however, the family can easily cross school boundaries. As a result, multiple school transfers during the year are common. When questioned about what would happen to children in their school who experienced such forced movement to outside the school boundaries, the four principals all reiterated the mantra that "we follow the CBE guidelines for boundaries".

It is apparent, therefore, that school policies are not flexible enough to meet the varied needs of individual students. They provide an environment of equality but not one of equity, and appear to disadvantage those who are already marginalized.

Recognition of Differences

It is recognized that "schools have become learning centres for a very diverse (ethnically and racially) student and faculty body" (Woodrum, 2002, n.p.). Principals need to be taught about cultural values and how they influence people's expectations, if they are going to lead multiethnic, multiracial schools effectively, "without marginalizing or alienating important parts of the similarly diverse school community" (n.p.).

Understanding school culture and the impact on school leadership is key. Research supports "a focus on societal culture in leadership studies, contending that management of people and organizations is a socially constructed process, and suggesting that since social culture influences values and norms shaping human behavior, management of people will vary across cultures" (Hallinger & Leithwood, 1998, p. 127). Barton and Ward (2002) provide an illustration of the educational leader's adaptation to the cultural context in their article describing how the principal and staff at an inner city Canadian prairie school responded to student needs by making their school more intentionally

inviting. The school gradually began to reflect the surrounding community by incorporating the Native American culture of many of its students.

With cultural awareness and an appreciation of differences, the principal moves beyond a climate of tolerance to one where the potential of diversity is recognized and shared. Alberta Learning (2000) has mandated guidelines for recognizing diversity and promoting respect which support the development and implementation of materials and learning resources that reflect different cultural values, historical perspectives and equity in potential for student contribution for society. The degree to which difference and diversity are recognized was a core investigative focus of the study reported here.

The study found that the principals actively resisted any attempts to recognize diversity and difference. They stressed that, in their school, all students were treated the same. Further, noted the administrators, the academic performance of students in various subjects was not categorized, recorded, or analyzed according to ethnicity or home language.

Such an assimilationist approach limits the educational experiences of the minority culture child. There is ample research suggesting that children learn in different, culturally-determined (or, at least, culturally-influenced) ways (e.g., Hughes & More, 1997; Orey, 1989; Swisher, 1994). There is other research to suggest that competency in the language of instruction is often overlooked when assessing student achievement in specific subject areas (Dunn, 1979; Price, Dunn, & Dunn, 1977; Reiff, 1992; Roessingh, 1999). Thus, for example, a student may obtain a failing grade in science or mathematics not because she or he does not understand the scientific or numerical concepts involved but because she or he does not understand the questions being asked. Through the

implementation of policies and procedures that view all children as culturally, linguistically, and ethnically the same, the nuances of individual learning styles are lost.

Inclusion strategies

The leadership role of the principal in a multicultural society requires strategies of inclusion to create a culture of equitable access for all children. Inclusion efforts are made manifest in many ways. They might be reflected in curricular leadership that recognizes differences in values, “through staff development in the multicultural curriculum and through recruitment and retaining of minority teachers” (Sushil, 1988, n.p.). In such instances, principals encourage teachers to differentiate their teaching practices to support more inclusive classrooms. Factors such as democratic governance, a culture of collaboration, commitment to professional growth, strong leadership, and concern about the equity, success, and well-being of individual students contribute to the transformation of school culture and the implementation of inclusive education (Kilgore, Griffin, Sindelar, & Webb, 2002). Through these strategies principals facilitate and support a teaching environment which provides equitable – albeit, in some cases, unequal – access and inclusion for all children.

A second focus of inclusion must be through engaging the families of the children in the educational process. Ovando and Abrego (1996) presented findings that addressed parental involvement in site-based decision making (SBDM) in schools in which minority students were becoming the predominant student group. They reported that: (1) principals and teachers who do not recognize the need to redefine the traditional roles of stakeholders will not succeed in the implementation of SBDM; (2) a change in school culture that moves away from a ‘protective model’ and seeks to overcome ‘the cultural

constraints problem' is necessary; (3) principals must work to establish a school climate that makes all parents feel welcome and that they have something positive to contribute; (4) schools must be places where principals work to provide a wide variety of parental involvement roles; and (5) schools must clearly state the parental role and expectation for parental involvement in site-based decision making.

These research findings indicate that “a more responsive and flexible approach to classroom instruction, to the school as a community institution with open boundaries, and the other diversity of learning needs, backgrounds and expectations in our changing population” (Anisef & Kilbride, 2004, p.13) is required. The strategies adopted by principals to facilitate inclusion were explored in this study.

A great deal of home-school communication takes place through newsletters. All four principals, when asked, confirmed that their newsletters were published only in English. One respondent also noted that the newsletter is only published on-line, in English, and is not distributed in hard copy. A second commented that “we have the ability to get translations, where necessary, on really important forms such as registration forms, report card descriptions, and so on”. These observations suggest a number of matters of concern. First, that only the school (or the principal) can determine what information is important. Second, that general information about the school – the events, happenings, and stories generally recounted in a newsletter – are not of importance to non-English speaking families. Third, there would appear to be an assumption that all families have access to the Internet and, more importantly, that they would have the time and the inclination to regularly check the school website for updates to the newsletter. And, fourth, that the importance of providing regular and effective communication

between the school and the home in a language comprehensible to the recipients had not really registered as a priority to these administrators.

This latter point was evident during the discussion about interpreters. The principals reported that interpretation services were available if needed, but that the ESL teachers determined whether this was the case. The lack of trained specialist ESL teachers was conceded to be a difficulty in some situations. Often it was expected that the students would translate for their parents if necessary. There was no standing policy, or even expectation, that interpreters would be available, as a matter of course, at all parent-teacher interviews or other parent-school interactions.

Conclusion

The findings of this small-scale preliminary investigation suggest that, in four schools located in a single Canadian jurisdiction, principals use avoidance strategies to minimize differences with the intention of creating equitable access and opportunity for all students. The lack of attention to differences, however, can create a situation where “only students who adjust to the dominant culture will be successful” (Penny, 1993, p. 31). An assumption of shared orientation results in a well-intentioned leader avoiding dealing with the inherent cultural differences and diverse needs of the students, resulting in misunderstanding, and isolation.

The principals who participated in this study stressed that they diligently complied with all board policies. These, as one stated, sought to “ensure that equal access was provided to all students in the catchment area”. The respondents noted that “the board goes out of its way to make sure we are a highly inclusive community” and that

“there is not a lot of ethnic segregation” among students. Such views suggest a pattern of assimilation.

The public education system is constructed according to the values and belief systems of the dominant cultural and linguistic class. In Alberta, this dominant class is white, English speaking, and politically conservative. The underlying assumption of the education system seems that if only children would arrive at school “ready to learn”, then they would be successful. Ready to learn implies that the children will arrive daily, on time, well fed, attentive, fluent in the language of instruction, and obedient to the teacher and the rules of the school.

Such expectations ignore the realities of life for those who come from transient families, who live in poverty or who are homeless, who were abused by authority figures in their home country, who do not speak English with native-like fluency, or who have no prior experience of a formal school environment. These children are, however, treated exactly the same as everyone else.

This insistence on sameness has led to what Penny (1993) called the predominant ideology of ‘racelessness’. If educators do not collect data according to linguistic or ethnic difference, then they can claim that all children are being treated equally. As Orwell (1996/1946) pointed out, this practice results in some being more equal than others. Public schools must recognize that diversity and difference exist among the students they serve. It is only good practice, both pedagogically and ethically, for the education system to adjust its structures and policies to reflect this diversity and difference. School administrators must, if they are to be both moral and effective leaders,

recognize that the demographics of Canadian society are changing and that their practices must also change.

From the findings of this preliminary study it would appear that the automatic and equal application of educational laws and policies creates a restrictive environment for children from minority and marginalized cultural groups. Similarly, the tendency to ignore diversity and difference among the student population leads to a habitus of assimilation that does not provide the most effective learning environment for children from outside the dominant cultural group. Further and more comprehensive research is required to determine the extent to which these findings may be replicated throughout the school system studied here and, indeed, in other jurisdictions throughout the province and across Canada itself.

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