

Reconciling the Universal Goals of Education with Diversity:
An Examination of Two Alternative Schools in Toronto

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List of Acronyms

AAST-	Africentric Alternative School of Toronto
FNST-	First Nations School of Toronto
FTE-	Full Time Equivalent
ICIE-	Indian Control of Indian Education
JK-	Junior Kindergarten
LGTBQ-	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Questioning
NHS-	National Household Survey
NSS-	Native Survival Schools
OECD-	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
RCAP-	Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples
TBE-	Toronto Board of Education
TDSB-	Toronto District School Board
UN-	United Nations
WSSS-	Wandering Spirit Survival School

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Abstract

Aboriginal and visible minority students consistently lag behind their Caucasian counterparts in their academic achievements in Canadian public schools. The dropout rates of the Aboriginal population ranged between 70 per cent in the 1980s to 40 per cent in the early 2000s, while the dropout rates of the Black populations have remained relatively static at 40 per cent since the 1990s. Institutionalized racism and the delivery of a Eurocentric curriculum that nullifies the experience and knowledge of non-European peoples have been identified by a number of scholars as key impediments to the academic success of non-White students. In certain instances, the establishment of alternative schools catering to the needs of a specific population has been adopted as a solution to these problems.

This project will examine the establishment of two alternative schools in Toronto: Wandering Spirit Survival School for Aboriginal students founded in 1976, and the Africentric Alternative School of Toronto for Black students founded in 2008, to determine the extent to which they are congruent with existing multicultural theories. To this end, the project will make use of three highly influential theories pertaining to the reconciliation of diversity within liberal democratic societies advanced by Charles Taylor, Will Kymlicka, and Brian Barry. It will then consider the ways in which normative discourse can influence public policy and subsequently speculate on how the justifications for policy instruments can change over time. The project concludes that the establishment of alternative schools such as Wandering Spirit Survival School and the Africentric School of Toronto are imperfectly aligned with current conceptions of multicultural theory.

Introduction

Canada is one of the most diverse countries in the world. In 2011, Canada's foreign-born population accounted for 20.6 per cent of the total population, which was the largest reported share among the Group of Eight countries, and the second largest in the world (surpassed only by Australia's share of 26.8 per cent.)¹ Results from the 2011 National Household Survey (NHS) revealed the presence of over 200 ethnic groups in Canada, and found that 19 per cent of Canadians identified themselves as members of visible minority groups.² According to the survey, the most prominent religion in Canada was Christianity followed by Islam, Hinduism, Sikhism, Buddhism, and Judaism. The top languages spoken were English and French, followed by Chinese languages, Tagalog, Spanish, and Punjabi.³ Nowhere is Canada's increasing diversity better reflected than in the makeup of the student body of mainstream educational institutions; for example, in 2006, 71 per cent of grade seven to twelve students in the Toronto District School Board self-identified as members of minority groups.⁴ This diversity presents both challenges and opportunities for Canada. Chief among the challenges is reconciling diversity within the country's liberal democratic traditions and institutions.

There are two different conceptions of the role of the state in accommodating diversity: the first encourages the state to actively facilitate the survival of minority cultures, while the second advocates for state neutrality in relation to cultural/religious differences and universal equality. In Canada, the predominant approach has been the former, accomplished through the

¹ Statistics Canada. National Household Survey. "Immigration and Ethnocultural Diversity in Canada" 2011. <http://www12.statcan.gc.ca/nhs-enm/2011/as-sa/99-010-x/99-010-x2011001-eng.cfm#a10>

² Ibid

³ Ibid

⁴ Canada. Ontario. Toronto District School Board, 2011-2012 Student Census. Prepared by Maria Yau, Lisa Rosolen & Bryce Archer, May 1, 2013 <http://www.tdsb.on.ca/Portals/0/AboutUs/Research/2011-12CensusFactSheet1-Demographics-17June2013.pdf>

institutionalization of multicultural policies at the municipal, provincial, and federal levels that support the country's diversity. As a result of the openness towards multicultural policies shown by all levels of government in Canada, minority groups have increasingly applied for rights that either exempt groups from mainstream practices that conflict with minority values, or grant extra rights to minority groups that other groups do not enjoy. These rights are referred to as minority group rights and their application can be controversial, particularly when a minority request is seen to conflict with societal values and norms. One such potentially controversial embodiment of minority group rights is the establishment of alternative education for members of disadvantaged minority groups.

Education is a major preoccupation in all societies because of the importance it has on the life prospects of individual citizens, as well as on the success of society as a whole. What is revealed to students about themselves as ethical or intellectual beings through formal education has the power to shape their academic confidence, inter-personal relations, and self-efficacy.⁵ Education scholar Henry Giroux contends that school knowledge is important because it equips students with the skills and knowledge required to succeed in society, and provides “students with an introduction to how culture is organized.”⁶ Further, school curriculum signals which cultures are “considered worthy of valorization, and what forms of culture are considered invalid and unworthy of public esteem.”⁷ All of these factors can have long lasting effects on individuals and on their ability to succeed in life.

According to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), Canada is a top-performing country in terms of the quality of its educational system. Moreover,

⁵ Ratna Ghosh, *Education and the Politics of Difference: Canadian Perspectives*. (Toronto, ON: Canadian Scholars' Press and Women's Press, 82.

⁶ Henry, Giroux, “Insurgent Multiculturalism and the Promise of Pedagogy,” in *Multiculturalism: A Critical Reader*, ed. D.T Goldberg, 325-343. (Boston, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 1994), 329.

⁷ Ibid

the OECD's Programme for International Student Assessment revealed that Canada is consistently one of the strongest member countries in terms of students' skills.⁸ Although Canada has established a world-renowned system of public schooling, significant imperfections nevertheless remain including substandard academic achievement and high dropout rates for some minority populations. According to the Toronto District School Board's (TDSB) 2006 Student Census, students belonging to Asian minority groups were the only minority students performing at or above provincial standards.⁹ Furthermore, the 1994 Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (RCAP) report revealed that, in 1981, only 29 per cent of Aboriginal Peoples held a high school diploma; by 1991, the number of Aboriginal high school graduates had risen to 43 per cent. A survey of Toronto high-school students in the 1990s revealed a 42 per cent drop out rate for Black students, which declined to 40 per cent in 2008.

Possible explanations for these troubling trends have been articulated by education theorists such as Henry Giroux, Ratna Ghosh, and Stephen May. In his essay *Insurgent Multiculturalism and the Promise of Pedagogy*, Giroux explains that the mainstream education system mainly benefits "white middle-class students whose histories, experiences, language, and knowledge largely conform to dominant cultural codes and practices."¹⁰ Additionally, Ghosh argues in her essay *Public Education and Multicultural Policy in Canada*, that minority ethnic students are marginalised by the mainstream education system due to the Eurocentric nature of the curriculum and the existence of racism in the education system, and as a result, minority ethnic students do

⁸ The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, Better Life Index, "Canada."
<http://www.oecdbetterlifeindex.org/countries/canada/>

⁹ Samuel M. Zheng, Toronto District School Board. 2006 Student Census: Correlations of School Experience with Student Demographics and Achievement, 2009.
<http://www.tdsb.on.ca/Portals/0/AboutUs/Research/StudentCensusReport-SchoolExperiencesFinal.pdf>

¹⁰ Giroux, "Insurgent Multiculturalism," 337.

not receive the same life-opportunities as majority students.¹¹ She further argues that in privileging whiteness as the norm for understanding, the curriculum alienates students of different backgrounds who do not identify with the Euro-Canadian narrative.¹² This marginalization and alienation contributes to the persistent academic achievement gap between minority students and their Caucasian counterparts. One possible remedy to minority groups' substandard academic achievement and high dropout rates is the establishment of alternative schools for these students that are suited to their individual learning styles, preferences, and/or needs.

The TDSB defines alternative schools as “sites that are unique in pedagogy, forms of governance, and staff involvement” and have “strong parental and/or student involvement.”¹³ Some examples of existing alternative programs in the TDSB are schools that allow students to focus on sports or the arts, and programs that are identity-driven, dedicated to supporting minority group students such as Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Questioning (LGTBQ) students.

The Canadian government has a history of funding separate schools to protect the religious and linguistic differences of English-speaking Protestant and French-speaking Catholic minority populations countrywide through clauses in the 1867 and 1982 constitutions, and in the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms*. The establishment of alternative schools can therefore be situated within the historical practice of embedding difference protection into the education system.

¹¹ Ratna Ghosh, “Public Education and Multicultural Policy in Canada: The Special Case of Quebec,” *International Review Education* 50 (November 2004): 554.

¹² Ghosh, *Education and the Politics of Difference*, 51.

¹³ Toronto District School Board, *Alternative Schools Policy*, P062, (June 2, 2007).

While historically practiced, the strategy of creating alternative separate schools for target populations nevertheless presents a series of challenges to core tenets of liberal democratic principles, which are among some of the fundamental features of the Canadian state. Chief among these challenges is that alternative schools violate both the liberal principle of universal equality by treating target groups differently, and the principle of inclusion by physically isolating target group students from other students.

This project examines two alternative identity-driven schools established in Toronto, Ontario to order to determine the extent to which they are congruent with existing multicultural theories. The two test cases are Wandering Sprit Survival School (WSSS), later renamed the First Nations School of Toronto (FNST), and the Africentric Alternative School of Toronto (AAST). WSSS was the first alternative school to be defined by cultural adherence and the AAST was the first to be defined by racial characteristics. The two schools were selected because they were pioneering institutions that shared similarities that made for useful comparison. Since both schools were the first of their kind, they both had the potential to be contentious; however, examination of public opinion and the key debates surrounding the establishment of each school revealed that only the AAST was marred by controversy. Although the establishment of WSSS was clearly revolutionary, this paper will argue that opposition was likely assuaged by the open educational policy climate of the 1970s that saw an expansion in the number of private and alternative schools granted inclusion in the Toronto Board of Education (TBE), which could have influenced WSSS's lack of controversy. The paper will also suggest that WSSS was not controversial at the outset because it was established privately, and did not later become controversial because of the growing acceptance in Canada of the Native right to self-government and self-determination, which Native control over Native education has been situated within.

This project has two objectives. First, it aims to assess the relative congruence between both WSSS and the AAST with existing multicultural theories. Second, it aims to allude to the ways in which policymakers can draw authority from these existing theories to bolster or shred support for particular policy options. To these ends, the project will make use of the theoretical arguments advanced by three influential multicultural theorists: Charles Taylor, Will Kymlicka, and Brian Barry. The paper will conclude that alternative schools such as WSSS and the ASST are imperfectly aligned with current conceptions of multicultural theory, and that due to their contextual nature, the schools do not serve as a bellwether for the re-conceptualisation of the role of education in liberal democratic societies. The paper will then consider the ways in which normative discourse can influence public policy and subsequently speculate on how the justifications for policy instruments can change over time.

Chapter 1 – Education in Liberal Democratic Societies

General Education

Education is a major preoccupation in all societies because of the importance it has on the life prospects of citizens, and eventually the very success of society as a whole. Because education is “relative to the society for which it is designed,”¹⁴ the precise objectives of educational systems vary by country, and even among different polities within them. Common goals can nevertheless be identified in education systems worldwide. For example, the United Nations (UN) articulated a set of universal goals for education in the *Convention on the Rights of a Child*. While the declaration served to create universal educational goals, it lacks an enforcement mechanism to ensure that signatory states actually implement policies geared toward reaching its stated goals. According to the Convention, the goals of education include, but are not limited to, the following:

¹⁴ Michael Walzer, *Spheres of Justice: a Defence of Pluralism and Equality*. (New York, NY: Basic Books, 1983), 197.

the development of the child's personality, talents, and abilities to their fullest potential; the preparation of the child for responsible life in a free society, in the spirit of understanding, peace, and tolerance among all peoples; and the development of respect for the child's cultural identity, language and values, and for civilizations different from his or her own.¹⁵ In addition to the UN's universal goals of education, states typically articulate individual goals that are designed to ensure that students acquire the contextually necessary skills and knowledge to succeed academically, economically, and in their social lives.

Education has been historically understood as instruction that helps students make the most of their lives through the cultivation of individual talents, training for the world of work, and preparing students for their civic responsibilities, otherwise known as citizenship education.¹⁶ Using the education system to foster societal equality has become an important focus of policymakers in many democratic countries because these decision-makers recognize that what students learn in school directly affects their life prospects. Therefore, the overarching goal of educational policy is to design a system that will produce fully enfranchised citizens capable of participating equally in society irrespective of "their social, economic, and ethnocultural origins."¹⁷ Although education has a role to play in the drive to facilitate and nurture societal equity and social integration, it is important to note that it is only one component of this drive. Other factors, such as access to the labour market and services of the welfare state like healthcare or employment insurance, are equally integral in fostering societal integration and equity.¹⁸

¹⁵ United Nations General Assembly (GA), Resolution 44, "Convention of the Rights of the Child," November 20, 1989.

¹⁶ Ken Osborne, "Public Schooling and Citizenship Education in Canada" *Canadian Ethnic Studies Journal* 32 (January 2000): 10-11.

¹⁷ Ghosh, *Education and the Politics of Difference*, 49.

¹⁸ "Integration of Migrants: Contribution of Local and Regional Authorities" European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions, 2006. Published by Cities for Local Integration Policy Network. Dublin, Ireland. Page 11-13

Despite its potential to foster societal equality in democratic states, education has largely failed to reach this mandate. Many scholars of education, including Ghosh, have argued that the education system has failed to bring about societal equity because mainstream curriculum typically transmits the values, norms, perspectives, and knowledge of the dominant culture, which assimilates minority traditions.¹⁹ In fact, an examination of school curricula in Canada revealed that “assumptions of European superiority continue to be an organizing force in the way that we select the content to which we expose the children and adults in our educational institutions.”²⁰ This educational content portrays Euro-Canadian experiences and perspectives as universal knowledge, nullifies the experiences of other cultural groups, and sends a signal to non-European origin students that their histories, knowledge, perspectives, narratives, and identities are not valued in the education system.²¹ As a result, school can become “a place of anxiety, failure, damaged self-concept, [and] withdrawal”²² for students belonging to marginalized groups. In privileging whiteness as the norm for understanding, the curriculum alienates students of different backgrounds who do not identify with the Euro-Canadian narrative.²³ The dominance of this narrative is manifested in part by the lack of educational materials written by non-white, non-European authors, and the use of learning materials that seldom portray ethnic minorities “as active agents in history, geography, or literature.”²⁴ Examining the Eurocentric nature of mainstream curriculum and the potential negative repercussions it can have on minority students’

¹⁹ Ghosh, *Education and the Politics of Difference*, 6.

²⁰ Celia Haig-Brown, “Resistance and Renewal: First Nations and Aboriginal Education in Canada,” in *Race and Racialization: Essential Readings*, ed. Tania Das Gupta, 168-178 (Toronto, ON: Canadian Scholars’ Press, 2007), 171.

²¹ Ghosh, *Education and the Politics of Difference*, 5.

²² Judith A. Pellerin, “A Case Study of Three Pupils at Wandering Spirit Native Survival School in Toronto,” (master’s thesis, University of Saskatchewan, 1982), 9-10.

²³ Ghosh, *Education and the Politics of Difference*, 51.

²⁴ Kogila Moodley, “Antiracist Education through Policy Literacy: The Case of Canada,” in *Critical Multiculturalism: Rethinking Multicultural and Antiracist Education*, ed. Stephen May, 138-152 (Philadelphia, PA: Falmer Press, 1999), 144.

academic achievement and success later in life has become increasingly important because of the rapid demographic transformation Canada has experienced in the past few decades.

The Transformation of Canada

Diversity increased dramatically in Canada throughout the 1960s and 1970s. This was due in part to revisions made in 1967 to the *Immigration Act* that made the immigration process more objective, including the removal of racial classifications and the institution of the point system.²⁵ The dramatic effects of these two changes were evident by the beginning of the next decade. In 1966, 87 per cent of Canada's immigrants were of European origin, but by 1970, 50 per cent of newcomers to Canada came from the West Indies, Guyana, Haiti, Hong Kong, India, the Philippines, and Indochina.²⁶ As a result of these new immigration trends, Canada's visible minority population grew from representing less than one per cent of the population in 1971, to representing 13.4 per cent of the population in 2001.²⁷ The transformation of the Toronto Metropolitan Area during this time period was even more remarkable; in 1971, racial minorities constituted roughly three per cent of the total population of Toronto, but by 2001, they represented 36.8 per cent of the population.²⁸

The dominance of non-European origin immigrants to Canada became a lasting trend in immigration policy that made visible ethnic and racial minorities a significant part of Canada's social fabric and challenged governmental officials and policymakers alike to reconsider the dominance of the English and French perspectives in the societal institutions that govern the lives of citizens.

²⁵Valerie Knowles, *Strangers at Our Gates: Canadian Immigration and Immigration Policy, 1540-2006* (Toronto, ON: Dundrun Press Toronto, 2007) 211.

²⁶ Ibid

²⁷ Jeffrey Reitz and Rupa Banerjee, "Racial Inequality, Social Cohesion and Policy Issues in Canada" in *Belonging? Diversity, Recognition and Shared Citizenship in Canada*, eds. Keith Banting, Thomas Courchene and F. Leslie Seidle, 489-545 (Montreal, QC: Institute for Research on Public Policy, 2007), 2.

²⁸ Ibid

The Multiculturalism Policy

As a result of Canada's increasing diversity, the federal government adopted the *Multiculturalism Policy* in 1971 – the precursor to the 1988 *Canadian Multiculturalism Act*. The adoption of the *Multiculturalism Policy* was intended to dilute the conception of Canada as a bicultural country that was reinforced by the adoption of the *Official Languages Act* in 1969.²⁹ One of the initial goals of the *Multiculturalism Policy* was to encourage ethnic minorities to maintain their cultures and languages, which was to be accomplished through the celebration and promotion of minority festivals, music, and folklore in mainstream society. The *Multiculturalism Policy* was also designed to facilitate the integration of immigrants into mainstream society,³⁰ and in 1981, the goals of the Policy were expanded to include the reduction of racism and the promotion of equity for all citizens.³¹ The *Canadian Multiculturalism Policy* implicated the education system as a site where children could interact with classmates of different backgrounds and where “multicultural ideas, views, and principles could be diffused among young Canadians.”³²

Multicultural Education

Consistent with the *Multicultural Policy* environment of the 1970s and 1980s, and in recognition of the existence of societal inequality, multicultural education policies were promoted by the federal government as transformative tools capable of establishing equity among all students.³³ And, they were adopted by provincial boards of education as “a solution to racial

²⁹ Johanne Jean-Pierre, and Fernando Nunes, “Multicultural Education Before and After the Federal Multiculturalism Policy: A Case Study of the Board of Education of the City of Toronto,” *Canadian Ethnic Studies*, Vol. 43, No. 1-2. (Summer 2011), 154; Knowles, *Strangers at Our Gates*, 219.

³⁰ Johanne & Nunes, “Multicultural Education,” 154-155.

³¹ Ibid

³² Adrienne S. Chan, “Race-Based policies in Canada: Education and Social Context,” in *Multicultural Education Policies in Canada and the United States*, ed. Reva Joshee, (Vancouver, BC: University British Columbia Press, 2007), 138.

³³ Diane Gérin-Lajoie, “Multicultural Education: Nothing More Than Folklore?” *Canadian Issues*, (2011): 24.

antagonism and minority underachievement in schooling.”³⁴

For the purpose of this project, multicultural education should be understood as education that promotes equity of information and represents “diverse indigenous accounts and perspectives that encourage critical thinking and avoid the use of dated terminologies, stereotypes, and demeaning, distorted characterizations.”³⁵ In broad terms, multicultural education as a policy has three specific goals: achieving equivalency in achievement, the development of positive intergroup attitudes, and the development of pride in heritage.³⁶

In Canada, education is a provincial responsibility; as a result, there is no federal multicultural education policy. Due to the absence of a centralized, federal multicultural education policy, provincial ministries of education across the country developed a wide array of guidelines and initiatives regarding student diversity.³⁷ For example, the Ontario Ministry of Education adopted the Policy on Race and Ethno-Cultural Equity in 1987, and developed guidelines for the adoption of Antiracism and Ethno-Cultural Equity programs for boards of education to adopt in 1993. The establishment of initiatives such as the Heritage Language Program in 1990, moreover, is yet another example of provincial efforts to adopt multicultural education policies.³⁸ To further complicate the picture, the Ontario Ministry of Education empowered individual school boards to create and implement board level anti-racism and ethno-cultural equity plans.³⁹ Although ostensibly complicated as a system, one of its benefits is that school boards are left considerable space to implement policies and procedures that are well

³⁴ Cameron McCarthy, “Multicultural Discourses and Curriculum Reform: A Critical Perspective,” *Educational Theory* 44 (March 1994): 81.

³⁵ Ellen Swartz, “Multicultural Education: From a Compensatory to a Scholarly Foundation,” in *Research and Multicultural Education: From the Margin to the Mainstream*, ed. Carl A. Grant, 32-46 (London: The Falmer Press, 1992): 34.

³⁶ Anna Kirova, “Critical and Emerging Discourses in Multicultural Education Literature: A Review” *Canadian Ethnic Studies* 45 (1) (2008): 105.

³⁷ Gérin-Lajoie, “Nothing More Than Folklore?” 25.

³⁸ Ghosh, “Public Education and Multicultural Policy” 556.

³⁹ Ibid

suiting to fit the specific needs and circumstances of their students, which was crucial for the development of alternative schools within the TDSB.

Criticisms of Multicultural Education Policies

This chapter will address the three most common criticisms of multicultural education policies. The first is that there is no consensus as to whether or not these policies have been effective in either increasing minority student achievement or reducing the prevalence of racism in the education system. The difficulty of assessing the effectiveness of multicultural education policies arose in part because educational achievement as a variable is entangled with various other variables, such as family structure, level of family income, and class size, making it difficult to pinpoint the direct effects of multicultural education policies. Education scholars including May and Giroux have observed that, in general, minority student achievement has remained stagnant over time and that the unequal treatment of minority non-white students persists in mainstream educational institutions.⁴⁰

Education commentators Ghosh and May have argued that one reason inequality persists in the education system is that multicultural education policies have tended to focus on merely exposing students to different traditions, practices, and celebrations at the expense of meaningfully examining systemic issues such as institutional racism.⁴¹ The prevalence of white, middle-class, Eurocentric culture in mainstream schools has also been identified as a reason why inequality persists in the education system.⁴² These types of celebratory policies have been dubbed “song and dance multiculturalism” and critics allege that their enactment allows schools to sidestep important issues, while maintaining that the school has implemented multicultural

⁴⁰ Kirova, “Critical and Emerging Discourses,” 124.

⁴¹ Ghosh, “Education and the Politics of Difference,” 47; Stephen May, “Introduction: Towards Critical Multiculturalism,” in *Critical Multiculturalism: Rethinking Multicultural and Antiracist Education*, ed. Stephen May, 1-10 (Philadelphia, PA: Falmer Press, 1999), 1.

⁴² Kirova, “Critical and Emerging Discourses,” 124.

policies.

The above discussion of song and dance policies leads to the second criticism of multicultural education policies: so-called song and dance policies have the potential to strengthen the boundaries between majority and minority cultures through their emphasis on the differences among cultures, and their failure to nurture genuine dialogue between different groups.⁴³

The final criticism of multicultural education policies this paper will address is the lack of federal guidance. The lack of a federal policy, vision, or statement pertaining to multicultural education, and the lack of a centralized body to govern multicultural policies adopted by school boards has resulted in confusion and frustration among educational practitioners regarding how to design and implement multicultural policies.⁴⁴ This confusion and frustration led to the development of a multitude of policies that are inconsistent across school boards and challenge the seriousness of the commitment provincial Ministries of Education have made to multicultural education.

Alternative Education

Scholars who are critical of multicultural education policies have articulated a few elements that must be present in order for a curriculum to have the ability to reduce racism and increase the academic achievement of students belonging to minority groups. Firstly, education policies cannot merely present cultural differences in the curriculum;⁴⁵ secondly, the policies must analyze race as a social problem “rooted in real material and institutional factors that produce specific forms of inequality and oppression;”⁴⁶ and finally, they must be founded “on a

⁴³ Kirova, “Critical and Emerging Discourses,” 116.

⁴⁴ Ibid, 106.

⁴⁵ Giroux, “Insurgent Multiculturalism,” 340.

⁴⁶ Ibid

philosophy of education linked to equity and empowerment.”⁴⁷ Although guidelines for the effective establishment of multicultural education policies such as the ones above have been articulated, they do not specify what this system would look like in practice.

One possible configuration of the aforementioned guidelines could be the establishment of alternative education programs as a means of meeting the needs of disadvantaged minority group students. The TDSB defines alternative schools as “sites that are unique in pedagogy, forms of governance, and staff involvement” and have “strong parental and/or student involvement.”⁴⁸ Some examples of existing alternative programs within the TDSB are schools that allow students to focus on sports or the arts, and identity-driven programs, dedicated to supporting minority groups, such as LGBTQ students. Alternative schools operate in a way that is consistent with the practices of other schools in the TDSB and in compliance with both Ministry of Education guidelines and the *Ontario Education Act*. Proponents of alternative education have argued that such schools represent a much-needed new approach to meeting the needs of minority students that public schools have consistently failed to meet. However, opponents of alternative education typically contest this argument and assert that these programs violate the Canadian values of equality and inclusion.

Although the practice of opening alternative schools for select groups in society is a relatively new phenomenon (dating only to the 1960s), the Canadian education system has a long tradition of difference recognition embedded within it. Prior to Confederation in 1867, the Dominion of Canada was divided along linguistic and religious lines that created two main groups: English-speaking Protestants that resided largely in Upper Canada (modern day Ontario), and French-speaking Catholics that resided largely in Lower Canada (modern day Quebec). To

⁴⁷ Ghosh, “Education and the Politics of Difference,” 48.

⁴⁸ Toronto District School Board, *Alternative Schools Policy*.

appease the religious minority populations residing in each province, in the 1840s, political leaders of the former colonies of British North America decided to formally embed the protection of religious diversity into the education system.⁴⁹ The passage of Canada's first constitution in 1867 legally entrenched the practice of providing government funded religious minority education to Catholic and Protestant students countrywide. It was not until much later, in 1982, that legally protected education rights for linguistic minorities were encoded within Canada's education system. Section 23 of the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms* provides for the establishment of publically funded minority linguistic education institutions to French-speaking minority communities outside of Quebec and to English-speaking minority communities inside of Quebec. The establishment of alternative schools can therefore be situated within the historical practice of embedding difference protection into the education system.

General Tensions

Chief among the tensions that arise between the universalizing goals of education and the educational policies that have been adopted in Canada as a way of managing diversity is the fact that students attending alternative schools receive differential treatment based on subjective characteristics such as culture or race, and that this differential treatment violates the principle of universal equality. Although differential treatment does indeed violate the egalitarian notion of equality understood as sameness, it can be compatible with conceptions of equality that emphasize equality of outcome rather than equality of opportunity. Ghosh has argued that while equity implies fairness and justice, it does not necessarily signify evenness.⁵⁰ This principle implies that it can be possible to achieve equity through measures that do not treat everyone evenly. If one subscribes to this understanding of equity, the establishment of alternative schools

⁴⁹ William Hoverd, Erin LeBrun and Leo Van Arrago. "Religion and Education in the Provinces of Quebec and Ontario" Religion and Diversity Project- Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council; 12.

⁵⁰ Ghosh, "Education and the Politics of Difference," 51.

for students belonging to disadvantaged minority groups can be understood as a justifiable means for achieving the end goal of equality.

A second criticism is that institutions of alternative education are representative of a return to segregation because alternative education programs often physically separate students in the target group from students in mainstream schools, which can lead to further spatial and psychological distance among students. Proponents of alternative schools, including leading Canadian researcher George Dei, contest this allegation because enrolment in alternative schools is voluntary and members of the targeted population are neither required to attend the school, nor barred from enrolling in public schools.⁵¹ Additionally, alternative schools are not exclusively available to members of the target population and the schools welcome the applications of students, teachers, and school administrators of all backgrounds.

A related criticism of alternative schools is that they may actually serve to increase the divide between groups because they limit interaction among students of different cultural backgrounds by placing them in physically separate environments. The concern is that this separation could prove damaging to long-term integration efforts if children are not exposed to and expected to get along with children of different backgrounds at a young age.

Assuming policymakers and wider society can agree in principle that a public policy is required to solve a problem, tensions can nevertheless arise when it comes to determining and designing the policy instruments that will be used to achieve the policy goals. In the case of redressing chronic substandard minority academic achievement it is not clear that physically removing minority students from public education institutions is the most appropriate policy instrument. Opponents argue that delivering an accurate and inclusive curriculum to all students

⁵¹ George Dei, "Black-Focused Schools are About Inclusion, Not Segregation," *Guelph Daily Mercury*, February 19, 2005, <http://elibrary.bigchalk.com/libweb/canada/> (accessed September 20, 2014).

in public school could also be an effective way to increase minority underachievement. Because alternative education also focuses on the importance of providing intragroup role models to minority students in the form of teachers and schools administrators, combatting institutional racism in the educational system, and providing additional resources to groups of students that suffer disproportionately from the effects of societal issues such as addiction or crime, it is unlikely that an enriched mainstream curriculum would benefit minority students to the same degree that alternative education would.

The universalizing goals of education are designed to equip students with the contextually necessary skills to participate successfully in the economic and social structures of their society. Education is also a key means of transmitting citizenship. In liberal democracies, the education system has also been understood as a useful component in the drive to nurture societal equity. The curriculum in mainstream schools has been shown to be Eurocentric and, as such, can alienate students that are of non-European background;⁵² this alienation can cause students to lag behind their majority counterparts or to dropout of school. As a solution to these problems, some minority groups have pursued the establishment of identity-driven alternative schools. These schools can be controversial because they are in tension with the universalizing goals of education and conflict with the societal norms of equality and inclusion.

The following chapter will examine the establishment of two alternative schools in Toronto, Ontario: the First Nations School of Toronto (FNST) and the Africentric Alternative School of Toronto (AAST).

⁵² Ghosh, "Education and the Politics of Difference," 51.

Chapter 2 - The Test Cases

Test Case One: the First Nations School of Toronto (1976)

The First Nations School of Toronto (FNST) was established in 1976 under the name Wandering Spirit Survival School (WSSS), and was the first Native run public school in Canada. WSSS became the model “for a separate movement of community-based culture schools”⁵³ and inspired the establishment of numerous Native Survival Schools (NSSs) across Canada, such as the Kahnawake Survival School outside of Montreal in 1978, the Plains Indian Cultural Survival School in Calgary in 1979, the Saskatoon Native Survival School in 1980, and Spirit Rising School in Vancouver in 1982.⁵⁴ NSSs were considered capable of instilling both the “strong cultural identity and [the] equally strong individual academic performance” necessary to enable First Nations’ citizens to “walk with ease and confidence in two worlds.”⁵⁵ They did so by offering students the opportunity to gain an academic education within an Aboriginal cultural framework. The success of the proposal to found an Aboriginal run school in Toronto was the result of numerous changes in the education policy environment during the 1960s and 1970s, including the end of the residential school system, the integration of off-reserve Aboriginal students into provincial schools, the gradual transfer control over Native education to Natives themselves, and the open educational policy environment that existed in the 1970s.

History of Native Education in Canada (1600s-Present)

Formal attempts to educate Aboriginal populations date back to the 1600s, when religious orders established small-scale, voluntary, formal education programs for Aboriginal children with

⁵³ Sharon Berg, “Wandering Spirit Survival School: Native Education & Emancipation Through the Four Seasons Curriculum” (master’s thesis, York University, 1998) 5-6.

⁵⁴ Robert Regnier, “Survival Schools as Emancipatory Education,” *Canadian Journal of Native Education* 14.2 (1987): 4.

⁵⁵ Jan Hare, “First Nations Education Policy in Canada: Building Capacity for Change and Control,” in *Multicultural Education Policies in Canada and the United States*, eds. Reva Joshee and Lauri Johnson, 51-68 (Vancouver, BC: University of British Columbia Press, 2007), 52.

the goals of "civilizing" and Christianizing them.⁵⁶ Two centuries later the Canadian Government, in concert with numerous Christian churches, embarked on an aggressive assimilationist education policy that would have disastrous consequences on Aboriginal culture and Aboriginal society as a whole.

In the 1800s, government officials believed that the most effective way to assimilate Native populations into mainstream society was by re-educating and indoctrinating young Aboriginals with Euro-Canadian beliefs and values. It was also believed that successful induction of Aboriginal youth into Euro-Canadian society demanded their removal from their families and communities and their placement in boarding schools where their languages, cultures, traditions, and beliefs would be replaced with Euro-Canadian Christian practices.⁵⁷ Thus, in 1831, the residential schooling system was born. The educational content of residential schools was structured in way that would denigrate First Nations society⁵⁸ and completely replace Aboriginal students' "ancestral culture and languages through a process of repression, exclusion, and especially intellectual marginalization of First Nations ways of being, thinking, and acting."⁵⁹

Residential schools had many negative consequences on the lives of the students that attended the schools; addressing these consequences, however, is beyond the scope of this project. What is crucial for understanding how and why NSSs were established across Canada is the fact that residential schools systematically stripped Native children of their cultures, histories, languages, families, and identities as Natives. Furthermore, the church run schools failed to equip their students with the skills and knowledge required to participate in the economic and social spheres of mainstream Canadian society, which trapped students in an enduring cycle of poverty

⁵⁶ Canada, Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, *Report*.

⁵⁷ Canada, Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, *Report*.

⁵⁸ Ghosh, "Education and the Politics of Difference," 130.

⁵⁹ Jerry Paquette and Gérald Fallon, *First Nations Education Policy in Canada: Progress or Gridlock?* (Toronto, ON: University of Toronto Press, 2010), 5.

and dependency.⁶⁰

The residential school system endured into the late 1940s, when the federal government began to pursue a strategy of integrating Aboriginal students residing off reserve into provincial schools⁶¹ in an attempt to better assimilate them into mainstream society.⁶² Educational integration was made possible by an amendment to the *Indian Act* (1876) that transferred control of off-reserve Native education from the federal government to the provinces.⁶³ Over the next four decades, the residential school system would slowly dismantle and its students were either transferred to mainstream provincial schools, or returned to reserves.

Since the 1940s, Aboriginal students who attend public schools have frequently reported being bullied and made fun of for being Aboriginal and are often exposed to racist attacks. Studies have revealed that the identity and self-worth of Aboriginal students is typically eroded by their experiences in mainstream schools⁶⁴ and that, due to cultural differences, many Aboriginal students find these educational experiences “individualistic, competitive, intrusive, regimented, immoral, and emotionally frigid.”⁶⁵ The aforementioned factors contribute to both the substandard academic achievement of Aboriginal students in mainstream schools and Aboriginal students’ high propensity to drop out of school (40 per cent compared to 13 per cent for the non-Aboriginal population).⁶⁶

The persistent failures of the federal government’s approach to the education of Aboriginals in Canada caused Aboriginal groups to develop their own initiatives for redressing

⁶⁰ Ghosh, “Education and the Politics of Difference,” 133.

⁶¹ Canada, Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, *Report*.

⁶² R.A. Hoey, National Indian Affairs Superintendent, to Dr. Dorey, Deputy Minister, Ottawa. Volume 6205, file 468-1, MR C 7937, 29 May 1944 to 7 June 1944. National Archives of Canada. RG10.

⁶³ Ghosh, “Education and the Politics of Difference,” 132.

⁶⁴ Canada, Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, *Report*.

⁶⁵ Pellerin, “A Case Study,” 11.

⁶⁶ 2006 Profile of Aboriginal Children, Youth, and Adults in BC, administered by Statistics Canada

issues that plague Aboriginal students.⁶⁷ One such initiative was the articulation of Native self-determination rights, including the right to local control over education that developed in the 1960s.⁶⁸ In 1969, “the National Indian Brotherhood [an Indian rights organization now known as the Assembly of First Nations] issued a position paper entitled ‘Indian Control of Indian Education [ICIE].’” This paper “advocated for local control and parental involvement in Aboriginal education.”⁶⁹ ICIE became federal policy in 1972 and paved the way for two Aboriginal parents, Pauline Shirt and Vern Harper, to found the first NSS in Canada.

The Establishment of Native Alternative Education

Shirt and Harper lived in Toronto in the late 1970s and had a son who attended public school in the city. Their son, like many Aboriginal youth, struggled in the mainstream system and was often the victim of racism and bullying. One day, he refused to return to school.⁷⁰ Unsure of how to help her son, Shirt underwent the traditional Cree practice of fasting for guidance from the Good Grandfathers (spiritual leaders) who counselled her to found an alternative school for Aboriginal youth in Toronto.⁷¹

Shirt and Harper’s decision to establish a Native school was likely influenced by the Aboriginal leaders of the 1960s and 1970s who advocated for ICIE, the open educational climate of the 1970s, and the establishment of the Red School House in Minnesota in 1972.⁷² The open educational climate of the 1970s included the TBE’s incorporation of existing private schools in to the board, as well as the establishment of alternative schools within the board.⁷³ Additionally, the establishment of the Red School House showed Aboriginal groups that Native run schools

⁶⁷ *Wandering Spirit Survival School*. Motion picture, dirs. Marvin Midwicki, Les Holdway, and Christopher Wilson (1978; Montreal: National Film Board of Canada)

⁶⁸ Hare, “First Nations Education Policy,” 53.

⁶⁹ *Ibid*, 58.

⁷⁰ *Wandering Spirit Survival School*.

⁷¹ Berg, “Wandering Spirit Survival School,” 19.

⁷² Pellerin, “A Case Study,” 14.

⁷³ Berg, “Wandering Spirit Survival School,” 19.

were a realistic possibility in North America.

Shirt and Harper began by forming a parents' council that would come to play a significant role in both the establishment of WSSS, and in its continued administration and governance. The school was founded in 1976 as a private school and fittingly named after Wandering Spirit, "a Plains Cree warrior who devoted his life (1845-1885) to protecting his nation and advocating for the preservation of his people's cultural ways."⁷⁴ In 1977, WSSS's request to join the TBE was accepted, and the school was "embraced as part of the Alternative Schools movement, within the TBE and nationally."⁷⁵ In 1983, the TBE reclassified WSSS as a Cultural Survival School, which allowed it to have an explicit mandate "to preserve the children's cultural values while providing them the skills to relate to urban society."⁷⁶ The cultural survival school designation also offered "the possibility of preferential policy support distinct from the TBE's alternative and regular school"⁷⁷ policies, which gave WSSS more resources, and more freedom to design its operational structure. In 1989, WSSS was renamed the First Nations School of Toronto (FNST) and has operated under that name ever since.

Goals of WSSS

When WSSS was established, its main goals were to "enhance the Indian child's self-concept and sense of pride in himself as an Indian person"⁷⁸ and provide students with a sound academic education. The current goal of the FNST is to "ensure that urban Native children will have the opportunity to learn about their heritage and the traditional Anishinaabe cultural

⁷⁴ First Story, "First Nations School," http://www.newsatlas.ca/tnchp/report.php?ListType=Cultural_data&ID=928

⁷⁵ Berg, "Wandering Spirit Survival School," 19.

⁷⁶ Canada. Ontario. Toronto District School Board. School Profile - First Nations School of Toronto School Year: 2009-2010. <http://www.tdsb.on.ca/profiles/5360.pdf>

⁷⁷ Regnier, "Survival Schools as Emancipatory Education," 43.

⁷⁸ Pellerin, "A Case Study," 2.

perspective while acquiring the skills necessary to survive in today's world.”⁷⁹ When WSSS was first established, it was governed by an all-Native council that consisted of an executive council of parents, supporters and a student representative⁸⁰ and was active in the administration of the school and in the development of its curriculum. While there are records attesting to the existence of this governance structure in the first few years of WSSS's existence, the current governance structure of the FNST is less documented.

Although the FNST curriculum and operational procedures are based on Ojibway and Algonquian worldviews, students of all cultural backgrounds are welcome to attend the school. In WSSS's first year operating within the TBE, its fulltime equivalent (FTE) enrolment was nine students. In 1978, the school had a population of 24 students; in 1979, 28 students; in 1980, 23 students; and, in 1981, 57 students.⁸¹ The most recent enrolment figures available are for the year 2011, when 92 students were enrolled at the FNST.⁸² *

The FNST operates within the TDSB and, as such, its policies and guidelines are consistent with Board policies. Most importantly, this means that the school has inclusive hiring practices, an inclusive admission policy, and that it conforms to provincially mandated curriculum standards. FNST adheres to Regulation 274 of the *Ontario Education Act*, which sets out a standard hiring process based on a listing of teachers' rank by seniority; the school also conforms to the TDSB's *Alternative Schools Policy* that allows for any student from the city of Toronto to apply to an alternative school. Selected teachers, administrators, and students do not

⁷⁹ Toronto District School Board, "Aboriginal Education"

<http://www.tdsb.on.ca/Community/AboriginalEducation/Schools.aspx>

⁸⁰ "First Nations School."

⁸¹ The Toronto District School Board.

⁸² Toronto District School Board, "Facts and Figures"

<http://www.tdsb.on.ca/Findyour/Schools/FactsAndFigures.aspx?schno=5360>

* I have submitted a request to the TDSB for a breakdown of the enrolment numbers to determine how many Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students attended the school. At the time of writing, the TDSB had not provided the information.

have to be Aboriginal, but they must have an interest in First Nations education, and teachers must deliver their class content in a way that is congruent with Aboriginal pedagogical methods and the Aboriginal worldview.

School Curriculum

The FNST meets the requirements set by the TDSB and the Ontario Ministry of Education by delivering “the Ontario Curriculum with an ‘overlay’ of Native language, tradition, and culture.”⁸³ One marked departure from the provincially mandated curriculum is that students at the FNST do not have to take French-language classes, and are instead offered Ojibway courses.⁸⁴ The portion of the curriculum that focuses on Native culture includes teaching students Native history, legends, philosophy, and spirituality, as well as Native arts, drumming, and song and dance, among other things.⁸⁵ The portion that focuses on academic skills uses learning materials and resources that are both relevant to Native experiences and acceptable to the TDSB⁸⁶ to provide an academic curriculum that aligns with Native educational practices and student needs. The school also provides additional services such as community feasts, a nutritional program that distributes breakfast and lunch to needy students, family healing guidance, and emotional support and counselling for students that hail from dysfunctional families.

When the school was established, the curriculum was taught using the Medicine Wheel (also known as Four Seasons or Native Way) teaching method. This is a traditional teaching method that is used by Aboriginal elders, and was adopted as a pedagogical method at WSSS.⁸⁷ The underlying principle of this pedagogical method focuses on the “importance of appreciating

⁸³ Canada. Ontario. Toronto District School Board. School Profile - First Nations School And “First Nations School.”

⁸⁴Ibid

⁸⁵ Canada. Ontario. Toronto District School Board. School Profile - First Nations School”

⁸⁶ “First Nations School.”

⁸⁷ Berg, “Wandering Spirit Survival School,” 6.

and respecting the ongoing interconnectedness and interrelatedness of all things.”⁸⁸ The Medicine Wheel drawing resembles a compass and is divided into four main sections that are used to guide students through their lessons. For examples of Medicine Wheel Diagrams used in Native education refer to Appendix A. The four sections can represent different concepts to different Aboriginal groups: for example, the four seasons, the four cardinal points, or the four aspects of the self (spiritual, physical, emotional, and mental). Regardless of how the four sections are labelled, they all represent the interconnectedness of the different stages of Aboriginal learning. One example of a teaching wheel lists these four concepts: awareness (seeing something), understanding (relating to it), knowledge (figuring it out), and wisdom (participating in it) as the guiding force through which students are presented all curricular materials.⁸⁹

Key Debates

What one may assume would be a controversial move actually garnered very little public debate and did not generate much controversy. The lack of debate pertaining to the devaluation of Aboriginal schooling was perhaps due to the fact that WSSS was developed privately and its founders did not try to make it part of the TBE from the outset. This delay enabled the school to be established through the work of a dedicated Native community and volunteer teachers without interference from the wider community or the TBE. A year later, when the school applied for status within the TBE, it had already been established thereby not requiring a trustee debate about how and why such a school was necessary.*

Test Case Two: The Africentric Alternative School of Toronto (2008)

On January 29, 2008, trustees of the TDSB voted 11-9 to approve of a three-year

⁸⁸ Ibid

⁸⁹ Nicole Bell, “Teaching by the Medicine Wheel: An Anishinaabe Framework for Indigenous Education” *Education Canada* 54 (Summer 2014).

* I submitted an information request to the TDSB on October 20, 2014 to get access to the meeting minutes explaining why the school was accepted into the TBE in 1977. At the time of writing, the TDSB had not provided the requested information.

Africentric alternative pilot school in Toronto.⁹⁰ The establishment of the AAST occurred quickly; it opened its doors a year and a half after the TDSB vote. However, “the idea originated in the 1990s when community organizations, a formal working group, and a Royal Commission all suggested establishing experimental Afrocentric schools in the city.”⁹¹ The proposal to found an Africentric school in Toronto was congruent with the TDSB’s *Alternative Schools Policy* adopted in 2007⁹² and followed the example of pre-existing alternative schools, such as WSSS for Aboriginal students (1976), and Oasis Alternative Secondary School for LGTBQ students (1995), as well as a host of other schools that allowed students to focus on sports or arts programs.⁹³ The proposal for an Africentric school nevertheless differed from the aforementioned alternative programs in that it would be the first alternative school to be defined by race (WSSS was culturally defined), which made the proposal highly controversial. The debate garnered constant media coverage and generated heated public debate about the appropriateness of separate schools in multicultural societies.

History of Black Education in Canada (1850-Present)

The presence of Black populations in Canada can be traced back to New France in the 1600s when Black people were imported to the colony for the purpose of domestic slavery. Waves of Black immigration to Canada – including both free and enslaved persons – from the United States of America and the British Caribbean were common throughout the 1700 and 1800s, with the largest numbers arriving during the American Revolution, during the War of 1812, and throughout the existence of the Underground Railroad.⁹⁴ The majority of these

⁹⁰ Debra Thompson and Jennifer Wallner, “A Focusing Tragedy: Public Policy and the Establishment of Afrocentric Education in Toronto,” *Canadian Journal of Political Science* 44 (December 2011): 823.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 807.

⁹² Toronto District School Board, *Alternative Schools Policy*, P062, (June 2, 2007).

⁹³ Thompson and Wallner, “A Focusing Tragedy,” 820.

⁹⁴ Ontario Black History Society. <http://www.blackhistorysociety.ca/news.php/news/30> accessed November 5, 2014.

immigrants settled in Ontario and Eastern Canada, notably in Nova Scotia⁹⁵ and, as a result, this discussion will be limited to Black education policies that were adopted in these two provinces. Concerns over Black education in Canada began in earnest in the 1830s, and by the 1850s it was a major preoccupation of school boards, parents, and policy-makers in both Nova Scotia and Ontario.

Racism and prejudice against the Black population was apparent in both provinces during the late 1800s and served as the impetus behind the provinces' adoption of segregated schools for Black students. These schools emerged through both policy and practice as separate schools for Black children⁹⁶ that represented normative practices instituted by law in the Education Acts of both provinces. The establishment of Black schools in Nova Scotia came as a result of increased Black migration from the United States in the late 18th century. These schools were "initially advanced as a source of opportunity for Black students"⁹⁷ who faced the option of attending a segregated school or receiving no education at all. Due to intense prejudice and discrimination from the White population, as well as a rapidly growing Black population in Nova Scotia, the province passed an Education Act in 1836 that enshrined separate schools for Black children⁹⁸ and provided financial aid.

The situation in Ontario mirrored that of Nova Scotia during this time period. Racist attitudes coupled with a growing Black population resulted in "ongoing tensions surrounding access to schooling" and caused Ontario to pass the *Separate School Act* in 1850, which allowed for the creation of separate schools according to religious and racial considerations.⁹⁹ According to the Ontario *Separate School Act*, a group of either five Black families, or twelve White

⁹⁵ Ibid

⁹⁶ Chan, "Race-Based policies," 132.

⁹⁷ Chan, "Race-Based policies," 132.

⁹⁸ Ibid

⁹⁹ J.W. St. G. Walker, *A History of Blacks in Canada*. Hull: Minister of Supply and Services Canada. 1980.

families could request that the Board establish a separate school for Black students.¹⁰⁰ In communities where there was not a sufficient Black population to support a separate school, Black students were allowed to attend “common” or public schools. But, in these cases, they were often given separate benches at the back of the classroom”¹⁰¹ in order to maintain a level of segregation.

Segregated schooling in Nova Scotia prevailed until the 1960s, although this was largely due to community and neighbourhood demographics rather than enforcement of the *Education Act*.¹⁰² In contrast, teachers in Ontario began protesting the segregated system as early as 1864,¹⁰³ but it was not until the 1950s that the vast majority of separate schools were closed. After this time, Black students began to integrate into the public school system¹⁰⁴ in the province. However, the law permitting segregated schools was in effect until a 1964 speech by Member of Provincial Parliament Leonard Braithwaite that led to its abolishment.¹⁰⁵

The Establishment of Black Alternative Education

Africentric curriculum is organized “around a holistic model of communal principles, while making the totality of black-lived experience relevant to all parts of the curriculum in order to foster the social, physical, spiritual, and academic development of students.”¹⁰⁶ The objective of Afrocentric education “is to promote student engagement by providing an atmosphere which is more culturally congruent and free from negative racial and cultural biases.”¹⁰⁷ In addition to a curriculum that better reflects, and is more relevant to, students of African descent, Afrocentricity

¹⁰⁰ J.W. St. G. Walker, *Race, Rights, and the Law in the Supreme Court of Canada*. (Waterloo, ON: Osgoode Society for Canadian Legal History and Wilfrid Laurier University Press).

¹⁰¹ Chan, “Race-Based policies,” 133.

¹⁰² Ibid, 134.

¹⁰³ Ibid, 133.

¹⁰⁴ Chan, “Race-Based policies,” 134.

¹⁰⁵ Ontario Black History Society. “Leonard A. Braithwaite.”

<http://www.blackhistorysociety.ca/index.php?id=249&inner=true>

¹⁰⁶ Dei, “Black-Focused Schools are About Inclusion.”

¹⁰⁷ Rosina Agyepong, “Black Focused Schools in Toronto: What do African-Canadian Parents Say?” (doctoral thesis, University of Toronto, 2010), 17.

also emphasizes the importance of providing Black role models for students, such as Black teachers and school administrators.¹⁰⁸

Over the past few decades, a series of studies has consistently revealed that integrated schools in Toronto are uninviting for Black students because of low teacher expectations for Black students, the disproportionate streaming of Black students into special needs or remedial classes, stereotypical images of the Black population that sometimes appear in educational content, the marginalization of Black participation in history, and the fact that Black students are often treated more harshly by school administrators when disciplinary action is required.¹⁰⁹ These elements have contributed to the persistently high percentage of Black students who drop out of school – 40 per cent – and Black students’ chronic substandard academic achievement. African-centered scholars such as Asante have argued that “the social realities of Africans are different from that of Whites, given the way power, privilege and history works in Canadian society.”¹¹⁰ And, because of that, “the African social reality cannot be understood within the parameters of [sic] framework that reflect European values and worldview.”¹¹¹ Calls for an Africentric worldview that recognizes “the importance of providing education that speaks to the lived, material and social realities of African-Canadian youth in a White dominated society”¹¹² could be used to educate Black youth more effectively, and to curb their disproportionately high dropout rates.

The first advocates of Africentric schooling in Toronto began to mobilize in the 1980s and established “Saturday morning schools run by volunteers providing cultural education and

¹⁰⁸ Thompson and Wallner, “A Focusing Tragedy,” 808.

¹⁰⁹ Will Kymlicka, *Finding our Way: Rethinking Ethnocultural Relations in Canada* (Toronto, ON: Oxford University Press, 1998), 86.

¹¹⁰ Agyepong, “Black Focused Schools in Toronto,” 86.

¹¹¹ *Ibid*

¹¹² *Ibid*, 8.

remedial academic support for children in the Black community.”¹¹³ Proposals for an alternative school for Black students “arose out of the deep frustrations of the black community in Toronto about the disengagement of their students and the need for strategies to encourage academic engagement” and achievement.¹¹⁴ One such strategy was the 1986 establishment of the Afro-Caribbean Alternative Secondary School at D.B. Hood Community School (then part of the York Board of Education). The school represented the first attempt at Africentric schooling in the city; however, it was plagued by consistent opposition throughout its three-year tenure and was often labeled segregationist. The school was ultimately closed down amid complaints from the Black community that teachers were under-qualified and students were receiving a substandard education.¹¹⁵

In 1987, the TBE undertook a study on the education of Black students, which “revealed troubling trends among the population and called for a renewed approach to address the obstacles faced by the student body.”¹¹⁶ Following this study, a broader inquiry examined the state of race relations in Ontario after a Toronto-based protest that had turned violent exposed tensions between the Black community and wider society. The inquiry recommended that the TDSB seriously consider the notion of Africentric schooling, although the recommendation was not acted on at the time.

Further support for Black-focused schooling is found in the 1994 *Royal Commission on Learning* that focused on the high dropout rates and inferior academic achievement levels of Black students in public schools in Toronto.¹¹⁷ The Royal Commission helped to drive the idea of

¹¹³ Thompson and Wallner, “A Focusing Tragedy,” 809.

¹¹⁴ Gordon, Megan K. & Zinga, Dawn. “Fear of Stigmatisation”: Black Canadian Youths’ Reactions to the Implementation of a Black-Focused School in Toronto,” *Canadian Journal of Educational Administration and Policy* 131(March 2012): 1.

¹¹⁵ Andrew Wallace, “The Test,” *This Magazine*, January-February 2009.

¹¹⁶ Thompson and Wallner, “A Focusing Tragedy,” 809.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid*, 810.

Africentric schooling back into public consciousness. The Commission's final report recognized that the TDSB needed to better support the needs of its Black students, and suggested the establishment of a demonstration school "in which particular interventions are planned and carried out to boost the achievement of students"¹¹⁸ as the solution. The Commission recommended that the curriculum of the demonstration school be challenging, innovative, and relevant to Black students, and that it should make use of "engaging teaching methods, and stronger and mutually sustaining links between the school and its parents and community."¹¹⁹ Although the Commission recommended the establishment of a demonstration school with a tailored curriculum, it did not support the idea of Africentric schooling as a separate institution outright.¹²⁰ The TDSB backed away from the Royal Commission's "watered-down version of the Afrocentric schools proposal"¹²¹ and the issue was put on the backburner until its re-emergence in 2007.

The call for Africentric education in Toronto was renewed after the shooting death of a Black student at C.W. Jeffrey's Collegiate Institute on May 23, 2007. Jordan Manners was the first student "gunned down within the walls of his or her public school in Canada,"¹²² and his death garnered significant public shock and outcry. The incident served to publically illustrate the critical failures that existed in the public school system in Toronto. The TDSB was "held accountable for the tragedy by all sides" and thus "found itself in the unenviable position of either defending the status quo or taking decisive action to respond to incident."¹²³ The TDSB chose to take action and quickly moved forward to implement the proposal for Africentric schooling. Upon its establishment, the AAST ran programs from junior kindergarten through fifth

¹¹⁸ Ontario, Royal Commission on Learning, *Report, Toronto: ON* Queen's Printer for Ontario, 1994), 94-95.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid*

¹²⁰ Thompson and Wallner, "A Focusing Tragedy," 810.

¹²¹ *Ibid*

¹²² *Ibid*, 818.

¹²³ *Ibid*, 819.

grade, although in 2012 the school expanded to welcome students until the eighth grade.¹²⁴

Goals of the AAST

According to the TDSB, the school has three goals for its students: high academic achievement, self-pride, and a motivation to succeed.¹²⁵ The school's vision and values include high expectations for all students, the development of a safe, positive, nurturing, and caring learning environment, strong instructional leadership, and caring, collaborative, exemplary staff.¹²⁶

Like the FNST, the AAST operates within the TDSB and is therefore consistent with the Board's policies and goals. Most importantly, this means that the school has inclusive hiring practices, an inclusive admissions policy, and conforms to provincially mandated curriculum standards. Theoretically, there is no preference for teachers, school administrators, or students of African descent in the staffing and admissions processes of the school; however, selected teachers, administrators, and students must have a professed interest in Afrocentricity, and teachers must deliver their class content in a way that is congruent with Afrocentricity as a pedagogical method. The FTE enrolment numbers for AAST's first six years are as follows: 2009, 128 students (junior kindergarten (JK) to Grade 5); 2010, 156 students (JK to Grade 6); 2011, 182 students (JK to Grade 7); 2012, 202 students (JK to Grade 8); 2013, 177 students (JK to Grade 8); and the preliminary number for 2014 is 136 students (JK to Grade 8).¹²⁷ *

School Curriculum

In terms of its curriculum, the AAST teaches the standard curriculum mandated by the

¹²⁴ Toronto District School Board. Africentric Alternative School (GR. JK-08), <http://www.tdsb.on.ca/FindYour/Schools.aspx?schno=3949>

¹²⁵ Ibid

¹²⁶ Toronto District School Board. Africentric Alternative School. "Principal's Message." <http://schoolweb.tdsb.on.ca/africentricschool/PrincipalsMessage.aspx>

¹²⁷ The Toronto District School Board

* I have submitted a request to the TDSB for a breakdown of the enrolment numbers to determine how many Black and non-Black students attended the school. At the time of writing, the TDSB had not provided the information.

province of Ontario, but does so in a way that refers to “black and African-Canadian culture and heritage wherever possible.”¹²⁸ Unlike the FNST, the AAST does not offer additional courses or subject matter, but rather refocuses and adjusts the standard curriculum and learning materials to include African perspectives, achievements, people, and knowledge.¹²⁹

Key Debates

While it was obvious that the standard approach to education was failing Black students, TDSB Trustees, the media, and society at large were divided over whether the proposal to found an Africentric school was the best way of addressing these failings. The main disagreements over the institution of Africentric education included that it was reminiscent of segregation, violated Canada’s values of equality and inclusion, and failed to promote societal integration. It was also argued that Africentric schooling could serve to promote the development of a separatist Black subculture, reduce the pressure on mainstream schools to address institutionalized racism, and set a dangerous precedent that could result in the fractionalization of Toronto’s public schools by race or culture.

The segregationist argument, while inaccurate, was a common reaction to both the 1986 and 2008 debates pertaining to the adoption of Africentric schooling. Many proponents including George Dei, argued that Africentric schools could not be considered segregated because there is no legal basis neither requiring Black students to attend such schools nor barring them from enrolling in public schools. He also asserted that the spirit of the Black-focused school was

¹²⁸ Louise Brown, “Behind the Scenes at Canada’s First Africentric High School Program,” *The Toronto Star*, February 27, 2014.

http://www.thestar.com/yourtoronto/education_blog/2014/02/behind_the_scenes_at_canada_s_first_africentric_high_school_program.html (accessed September 22, 2014).

¹²⁹ “Growing Pains at Canada’s Aficentric Elementary School,” *Radio Canada International*, July 26, 2012.

http://www.rcinet.ca/english/daily/reports-2012/15-29_2012-07-27-growing-pains-at-canadarsquo-s-africentric-elementary-school/ (accessed September 22, 2014).

radically different than the spirit of the Black segregated schools that existed in Canada in the first half of the 20th century because segregated schools “sought to exclude blacks from meaningful participation in society,” whereas black-focused schools “aim to address an educational crisis and help minority youth succeed.”¹³⁰ Although clearly unfounded, the segregation argument will likely continue to resonate in the minds of policy-makers and wider society because of the emotional reaction it incites.

There was also concern that the establishment of the AAST could be potentially detrimental to societal integration because Black students would not get the chance to interact with different students, which could promote difference at the expense of inclusion. Although public schools are uncontestedly major sites for social interaction among people of diverse backgrounds, they are not the only sites where socialization and interaction can take place. It is likely that youth will be exposed to others who are different from themselves through participation in social activities and in other arenas than at school. While proponents of the AAST admitted that removing specific groups of children from public schools would indeed limit short-term integration, they argued that the AAST would promote long-term integration of Black youth by equipping students with the educational credentials required for long-term success in the larger economic, political and social communities.¹³¹

Opponents of the AAST were also concerned that the establishment of Africentric schooling would contribute to the creation of a separatist Black subculture, however, this argument was dismissed by proponents who believed that the successful long-term integration of the Black population into mainstream society would reduce the social problems and ghettoization of the Black community, thereby combating the threat of long-term separation and subculture

¹³⁰ Dei, “Black-Focused Schools are About Inclusion.”

¹³¹ Maggie Patterson, “Multiculturalism and Toronto’s Africentric Alternative School: an Examination of the Policies, Principles, and Values” (master’s thesis, Saint Paul University, 2011), 28.

development.

The debates pertaining to the establishment of the AAST also revealed concerns that the mainstream education system may fail to confront institutional racism if disadvantaged groups withdrew from the public system, because teachers, parents, and students from the disadvantaged group would no longer be present to pressure administrators to act. This was a valid concern, although its importance has been overstated due to the small size of the proposed Africentric School. According to the TDSB's 2011 Census Portrait, there were approximately 32,000 Black students enrolled in schools in the TDSB.¹³² The AAST would be able to accommodate around 200 students. Therefore, even with its establishment, the majority of Black students would remain in the public system, and thus the impetus to deal with institutional racism would not disappear.

A final point raised in the debate was that not allowing the African community to establish its own alternative school would have raised issues of equity and fairness, and questioned the "seriousness of the board's commitment to addressing the challenges faced by Black students in Toronto."¹³³ This was a powerful argument because there were already a host of alternative identity-driven schools available for other at-risk populations within the TDSB. The response from opponents, however, was that although there were alternative identity-driven schools, they were not defined by race, and thus the proposal for AAST could not be compared to or conflated with existing alternative schools. A further concern was that the establishment of the AAST would set a dangerous precedent that could result in a factionalized educational environment because other cultural or racial groups could push the School Board to set up

¹³² Canada. Ontario. Toronto District School Board, Research and Information Services. Census Portraits Understanding Our Students' Ethno-Racial Backgrounds: Black Students. Portrait prepared by Maria Yau, Jan O'Rielly, Lisa Rosolen, and Bryce Archer. 2011

<http://www.tdsb.on.ca/AboutUs/Research/ParentandStudentCensus/CensusPublications.aspx>

¹³³ Thompson and Wallner, "A Focusing Tragedy," 820.

alternative schools for their students as well. This was a valid and powerful concern throughout the policy debates. However, it was not successful in preventing the establishment of the AAST.

The FNST and the AAST were the first culturally and racially driven identity schools to be founded in Canada. Both schools were established to solve the problems of high dropout rates and chronic substandard academic achievement of the Aboriginal and Black student populations that mainstream educational institutions had failed to redress. The FNST had the additional goals of fostering Native pride and maintaining the distinctiveness of Native identity through the transmission of Native culture to young Aboriginals. Notwithstanding the fact that the schools were conceived as a policy response to the failings of mainstream education, debate that questioned the appropriateness of the policy instruments was generated, particularly in the case of the AAST. Theoretical arguments formed the basis of many of the key debates over the appropriateness of the AAST and the next section will take a closer look at these theories.

Chapter 3 – Multicultural Theory

Reconciling Diversity in Liberal Democratic Theory

Managing diversity in liberal democratic societies has become a preoccupation among government officials and policymakers because increased plurality has presented new governance challenges and opportunities in these societies. Political theorists have also taken an interest in societal plurality and have proposed countless methods of reconciling diversity within liberal democratic institutions. This chapter examines the work of three influential multicultural scholars whose theories have permeated Canadian public consciousness and have been highly influential on Canadian public policy-making: Charles Taylor, Will Kymlicka, and Brian Barry.

Taylor, Kymlicka, and Barry recognize that equality among majority and minority groups has not yet been achieved in liberal democratic states and attribute its absence to the lack of

neutrality in the norms, values, and institutions that govern the lives of citizens.¹³⁴ Taylor argues that the norms, values, and institutions of liberal democracies are founded on Judeo-Christian principles and beliefs and, as such, minority groups that subscribe to different principles and beliefs are disadvantaged vis-à-vis majority groups in mainstream society.¹³⁵ The three theorists have formulated influential frameworks that aim to neutralize minority group disadvantage and foster intergroup equality. The line of argument advanced by Taylor and Kymlicka emphasizes the need for society and its institutions—including the education system—to do more to recognize and actively promote difference. In contrast, Barry’s line of argument emphasizes society’s need to re-commit to sameness and the norm of equal treatment as the most effective way of fostering societal equality.

Theories for Fostering Societal Equity

Taylor is best known for his work on identity and recognition in multicultural societies. He suggests that individual identity plays a crucial role in determining the course of peoples’ lives because it serves as the background against which their opinions, desires, and aspirations are developed.¹³⁶ In other words, he argues that collective identities are highly influential in the development of individual identity because they provide the narratives that shape individual identity¹³⁷ and, as such, minority cultures deserve to be preserved and protected by the state. He argues that for a minority group to feel accepted in mainstream society, the minority identity must be recognized and valued by both group insiders and outsiders, or else there can be negative

¹³⁴ Charles Taylor, *Multiculturalism: Examining the Politics of Recognition* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994), 62; Brian Barry, *Culture and Equality: an Egalitarian Critique of Multiculturalism* (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2001), 304; Will Kymlicka, *Multicultural Citizenship: a Liberal Theory of Minority Rights* (New York: Clarendon Press, 1995),

¹³⁵ Taylor, *Politics of Recognition*, 62.

¹³⁶ Taylor, *Politics of Recognition*, 33.

¹³⁷ Patrick M. Jenlink and Faye Hicks Townes, “Introduction: Cultural Identity and the Struggle for Recognition,” in *the Struggle for Identity in Today’s Schools: Cultural Recognition in a Time of Increasing Diversity*, eds. Patrick M. Jenlink & Faye Hicks Townes, 1-13. (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield Education, 2009).

consequences on the life prospects of the minority individual.¹³⁸ Taylor further contends wider societal recognition must be driven by a genuine respect for minority cultures rather than an obligatory act of recognition in order for this recognition to affirm the equality of minority groups vis-à-vis majority groups. Taylor's recommended solution in cases of a lack of recognition or misrecognition is the institution of a "politics of difference" that redefines non-discrimination as requiring that society make distinctions on the basis of differential treatment and recognize the unique identity of an individual or group.¹³⁹ Due to the importance that Taylor places on identity and the role of culture in forming it, he supports the idea that communalism may sometimes take precedence over individualism, especially in instances where cultural survival is at stake.

Kymlicka formulated a second method for the reconciliation of diversity: the accordance of "group-differentiated rights" that either grant minority groups exemptions from societal practices that are contrary to their own practices or beliefs, or accord extra rights to minority groups that other groups do not enjoy as a way of protecting their distinctiveness. It is important to note however, that Kymlicka's theory of group-differentiated rights does not apply equally to all minority groups. In fact, he develops a rights hierarchy wherein group rights accorded to "national minorities" are designed to maintain the group's distinctiveness, whereas group rights granted to immigrant groups are designed to facilitate the long-term integration of group members into mainstream society.¹⁴⁰ Kymlicka defines a national minority as a group that was present at the foundation of the modern nation, has a prior history of self-government and governing institutions, uses a common language, and practices a common culture. Examples of

¹³⁸ Taylor, *Politics of Recognition*, 36.

¹³⁹ Ibid, 38-39.

¹⁴⁰ Caroline Dick, *Group Rights and the Politics of Intragroup Difference*. (Vancouver, BC: University of British Columbia Press, 2011), 67-68.

groups that constitute national minorities in Canada are Aboriginal populations and French Quebecers. Kymlicka's rights hierarchy effectively means that the scope of justifiable rights for national minorities is wider than the scope of rights that immigrant groups can expect to be granted in liberal societies. His justification of this hierarchy rests on the fact that national minority groups were forcibly incorporated into modern liberal democratic states,¹⁴¹ whereas immigrant groups, in large part, chose to relocate to these societies. The former should therefore be able to maintain its distinctive culture, while the latter should expect, and be expected to integrate into mainstream society. Kymlicka dismisses the concerns that group-differentiated rights could enable one minority group to dominate others, or enable a minority group to oppress its own members by inserting a caveat into his theory. He insists that group-differentiated rights can only "play a valuable role within a broader theory of liberal justice"¹⁴² if said minority rights protect both "equality *between* groups, and freedom and equality *within* groups."¹⁴³

Barry is an influential political theorist who has written extensive critiques of multicultural theory and policies, and advanced an egalitarian liberal argument favouring equality as the most effective mechanism for managing diversity in liberal democracies. Although he recognizes that not all members of society are on equal footing with one another, he claims multicultural policies that institutionalize cultural diversity are not the way to rectify inequality because they threaten to segment society.¹⁴⁴ Barry's preferred approach to managing diversity and protecting equality is grounded in the paramount concern for the autonomous individual and guided by the belief that an egalitarian, or "difference blind" liberalism, driven by a core commitment to equality and

¹⁴¹ Kymlicka, *Multicultural Citizenship*, 60.

¹⁴² Kymlicka, *Multicultural Citizenship*, 194.

¹⁴³ Ibid

¹⁴⁴ Barry, *Culture & Equality*, 328.

universal human rights is the appropriate method of fostering societal equity.¹⁴⁵ He argues that rather than embracing recognition and a host of differentiated-group rights as a means to managing diversity, liberal societies should instead recommit themselves to the core liberal value of universal equality. This recommitment would ensure that the institutions and processes that govern the lives of citizens treated all members of society equally, irrespective of their class, creed, or culture. Although Barry recognizes the reality of cultural diversity, he views cultural difference as insignificant compared to the fundamental issues of justice and equality.¹⁴⁶ He argues that it is impossible to promote both cultural distinction and equality, because equality cannot be achieved through differential treatment.¹⁴⁷

Notwithstanding the fact that Barry ardently opposes state policies that account for cultural difference, he does not ascribe to the idea that public policy need be always neutral. In fact, he insists that policymakers cannot be neutral about the distribution of goods or equality of opportunity in society, because these elements directly influence equality. He argues that the state should accord “special measures” to disadvantaged individuals, provided they are not responsible for their disadvantage, as a way of compensating for disadvantage.¹⁴⁸ Barry cites unemployment, low income earning, a poor education, and low quality housing as examples of the types of disadvantages that qualify for state redress. It is important to note that he makes reference to individuals and not groups because his belief in the necessity of state intervention to rectify disadvantage is targeted at individual disadvantage, and not at disadvantages groups face as a collective.

¹⁴⁵ Andrew Wright, “The Politics of Multiculturalism,” review of *Culture and Equality: An Egalitarian Critique of Multiculturalism*, by Brian Barry, *Studies in Philosophy and Education* 23 (July 2004): 299.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid*, 300.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid*, 303.

¹⁴⁸ Barry, *Culture and Equality*, 114.

The Education System and Societal Equality

While the three theorists discussed above recognize that the education system can play a role in nurturing societal equality, they do not share an understanding of what that role should be. In Taylor's limited discussion of education in *The Politics of Difference*, he argues that the Eurocentric curriculum delivered in mainstream schools subjugates and ignores non-European narratives by insinuating that all creativity and worth is inherited in males of European background.¹⁴⁹ He stresses the importance of students being able to identify with the curriculum as an important step in their level of academic success, and therefore advocates for effecting changes to curriculum that would give due recognition to excluded groups. Mirroring the histories and experiences of minority cultures in school curriculum would serve to recognize and validate these histories and experiences, thereby nurturing equality among minority and majority students.¹⁵⁰

Kymlicka's essay *Education for Citizenship* recognizes that there can be value in alternative education as a transitional step in the quest for long-term societal integration. He suggests that the development of minority students' self-esteem may be best served by these students receiving "their early schooling in separate schools, alongside others who share their background," and in an environment free from prejudice.¹⁵¹ Nevertheless, Kymlicka asserts that common schooling is "necessary—or at least highly desirable—at some point in the educational process" so that students can develop civility and public reasonableness through firsthand exposure to and collaboration with students from other backgrounds.¹⁵² Kymlicka argues that it is through this firsthand experience with difference that students learn to see other traditions,

¹⁴⁹ Taylor, *Politics of Recognition*, 66.

¹⁵⁰ Taylor, *Politics of Recognition*, 65-66.

¹⁵¹ Will Kymlicka, "Education for Citizenship," in *Education in Morality*, eds. Terence McLaughlin and Mark Halstead, 79-102 (London: Routledge, 1999), 89.

¹⁵² Ibid

thoughts, practices, and beliefs as valid and reasonable ways to live one's life. Although he is supportive of alternative education in theory, it is unclear whether his arguments could be used to justify the establishment of alternative schools for all minority groups, or whether it would apply exclusively to national minority groups.

Barry's conception of the proper role of the state in fostering equality emphasizes sameness and equal treatment for all members of society. Barry argues that the mainstream curriculum is a fallacy because it emphasizes the triumphalism of Eurocentrism and ignores the legacy of colonialism and the contributions that non-Europeans have made to history.¹⁵³ For this reason, he advocates for the incorporation of additional material to the standard curriculum that would present different historical narratives, practices, and beliefs. According to Barry, an inclusive curriculum would be beneficial to all students because it would expose them to richer and more accurate educational content, and make peers better able to relate to one another.¹⁵⁴ Barry strongly advocates for a common curriculum to be taught to all students because he argues that society cannot function well if its members are divided up into mutually exclusive groups who attend different schools and follow different curricula.¹⁵⁵

Methods for the reconciliation of diversity in liberal societies generally fall into two categories: the first encourages the state to actively facilitate the survival of minority cultures, while the second advocates for state neutrality in relation to cultural/religious differences and universal equality. Influential multicultural theorists Taylor and Kymlicka have advanced theories of difference accommodation that are congruent with the former conceptualization of the role of the state, while multicultural critic Barry articulated a theory of egalitarian equality that aligns with the latter.

¹⁵³ Barry, *Culture and Equality*, 235.

¹⁵⁴ Barry, *Culture and Equality*, 235.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid*, 237.

Conclusions

Alignment of Multicultural Theory with the FNST and the AAST

The stated goals of each school include the development of self-esteem and positive self-identity as a member of either the Aboriginal or Black minority groups.¹⁵⁶ The schools' focus on the creation of positive intragroup identity can therefore contribute to the process of individual identity formation by strengthening and reinforcing the collective identity of minority groups. The schools can also play an integral role in nurturing intragroup recognition by enabling target group students to socialize with other students belonging to their minority group. Therefore, the FNST and the AAST are congruent with Taylor and Kymlicka's conceptions of multicultural theory that emphasize and support the importance of minority identity formation.

The very existence of alternative schools can facilitate the drive for intergroup or wider societal recognition of minority identities because the schools represent a public way of showing minority groups that they are valued and that society takes their needs seriously. This recognition is congruent with Taylor's assertion that wider societal recognition must be driven by a genuine respect for minority cultures rather than an obligatory act of recognition in order to affirm the equality of minority groups vis-à-vis majority groups. Therefore, both the FNST and the AAST are reflective of conceptions of multicultural theory that emphasize the importance of identity and recognition on the success of an individual.

Where the two schools differ is that the FNST has the added goals of re-educating young Aboriginals in the lost cultural ways of their ancestors, and maintaining the distinctiveness of Aboriginal culture.¹⁵⁷ These added goals make the FNST congruent with conceptions of multiculturalism that view Aboriginal populations as "citizens plus" or national minority groups

¹⁵⁶ Africentric Alternative School (GR. JK-08); Pellerin, "A Case Study," 2.

¹⁵⁷ Pellerin, "A Case Study," 2.

deserving of a wide range of rights designed to preserve and protect the distinctiveness of their culture and beliefs.

Another potential difference between the two schools is their level of public support and the extent to which each school is considered to be legitimate in the public eye. Since the 1990s, there has been growing governmental and public support for the Native rights to self-government and self-determination in Canada.¹⁵⁸ This support was reflected in the conclusion of the 1991 Citizen's Forum on Canada's Future where the Commission stated that it would "join with the Canadian people in their support for native self-government."¹⁵⁹ Further, the results of two public opinion surveys commissioned in 1998, the National Angus Reid Omnibus Poll and the Angus Reid Aboriginal Syndicated Study, revealed that a third of Canadians supported Native self-government as a policy priority of the federal government.¹⁶⁰ Although the normative articulations of community empowerment and self-determination through Native control over Native education were applied to WSSS after its establishment, this understanding of Native rights has afforded the school an added level of legitimacy. This added legitimacy signals that the public and policy-makers alike have largely accepted the Aboriginal right to self-government and the frame of normative arguments that depict the Aboriginal population as a national minority group, or a founding nation entitling them to minority rights intended to maintain the distinctiveness of their group identity.

While the FNST targets students of Aboriginal descent and the AAST serves the needs of Black students, these groups are likely not as homogenous as they appear. Although the FNST curriculum and operational procedures are based on Ojibway and Algonquian worldviews, and

¹⁵⁸ David Martin and Chris Adams, "Canadian Public Opinion Regarding Aboriginal Self- Government: Diverging Viewpoints as Found in National Survey Results," *American Review of Canadian Studies* 30 (Spring 2000): 79.

¹⁵⁹ Martin and Adams, "Canadian Public Opinion," 80.

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid*, 81.

the AAST is based on an Afrocentric pedagogical model, students of all cultural and racial backgrounds are welcome to apply to the schools. Therefore, considerable differences are likely to be found in the student body of each school. Even if one assumes that the majority of students attending alternative schools will be members of the targeted group, it is to be expected that a level of diversity will nevertheless be present. For example, there is a plethora of different Aboriginal groups in Canada that have different histories, customs, and speak different languages; likewise, Black people in Canada claim a variety of different geographic origins, belong to numerous religious affiliations, have different histories and experiences, and speak many different languages. On top of this intragroup diversity there is the potential for intergroup diversity within the FNST and the AAST given that students, teachers, and school administrators of all backgrounds are welcome to apply. Therefore, the FNST and the AAST align with conceptions of multicultural theory that emphasize interaction with difference and the cultivation of civility and public reasonableness through exposure to difference, such as Kymlicka's, even in their configuration as physically separate institutions.

Finally, both schools can be situated within theories of multiculturalism that grant differentiated rights to minority groups. Due to the fact that the FNST caters to an officially recognized national minority group, its establishment and continued existence aligns with numerous multicultural theories that view the protection of the distinctiveness of Canada's founding nations as legitimate. The validity of the AAST in terms of differentiated minority rights is more complicated since the Black population in Canada does not constitute a national minority group, nor is it representative of an immigrant group due to the population's history and original status in Canada as slaves. The institutions established to serve Canada's original Black population were segregated and designed to purposefully disadvantage the population vis-à-vis its white counterpart. Afrocentric education is an attempt to neutralize some of the institutional

disadvantages the Black population faces in Canada, and as such, the AAST is congruent with conceptions of multicultural theory that view identity-driven alternative schools as temporary, or transitional steps in the process of establishing universal equity and the successful integration of non-national minority groups into mainstream society.

Nonalignment of Multicultural Theory with the FNST and the AAST

The FNST and the AAST do not align with multicultural theories that stress the importance of inclusion in the process of recognition, like Taylor's, or the importance of inclusion for the successful integration of minority and majority groups. While this argument may be true in the short-term, Kymlicka argues that alternative education can be used as a method of achieving long-term integration by ensuring that members of disadvantaged minority groups are equipped with the skills and knowledge to be successful in their economic and social lives that are acquired by receiving an education.¹⁶¹

Although the establishment of alternative schools would likely foster strong, positive intragroup identities and facilitate intragroup recognition, these schools would also limit the chances for group outsiders to recognize the identity of minority students because alternative schools restrict interact among different groups, which is incongruent with conceptions of multicultural theory that emphasize interaction with difference and the cultivation of civility and public reasonableness through exposure to difference. It is likely that there would be less plurality in alternative schools than in mainstream schools, which would decrease the chances of intergroup identity recognition throughout the school day. However, the assumption that mainstream schools are intrinsically diverse, or at least more diverse than alternative schools, is problematic. Students attending their neighbourhood mainstream school are typically alike in many ways including their socio-economic, cultural, ethnic, and linguistic backgrounds that

¹⁶¹ Kymlicka "Education for Citizenship," 89.

reflect the demographic trends of the area. Bearing in mind this fact, and the aforementioned existence of diversity within groups, one should not automatically assume that minority group students interact more frequently with difference in mainstream schools than in alternative schools.

The two schools are also incongruent with conceptions of multiculturalism that emphasize universal equality and neutrality in state institutions because they treat students differently based on objective characteristics such as cultural and racial identity. This regard for difference is exactly the sort of differential treatment that Barry argues ardently against in his critique of multicultural policies on the basis that equality cannot be achieved through differential treatment.¹⁶²

Finally, alternative schools conceived of as embodiments of group-differentiated rights can be incongruent with theories of multiculturalism that are designed to protect both freedom and equality *within* groups and equality *between* groups.¹⁶³ The establishment of alternative schools for Aboriginal and Black students in Canada has the potential to exacerbate the social problems these communities face and contribute to their ghettoization through student segregation, thus serving to increase inequality between groups.

The Importance of Ideas in Public Policy Making

The above analysis demonstrates that the FNST and the AAST are imperfectly aligned with current conceptions of multicultural theory, and sets the stage for the following discussion on the importance of ideas in public policy making. Traditionally, the literature on public policy has focused on the self-interests of policymakers as determinants of public policy. There is now a growing body of literature that explores the influence that ideas- broadly conceived as paradigms,

¹⁶² Wright, "The Politics of Multiculturalism," 303.

¹⁶³ Kymlicka, *Multicultural Citizenship*, 194.

conceptual models, norms, worldviews, frames, and principled beliefs- have on decision-making¹⁶⁴ because scholars have recognized that ideas have the power to shape public policy.

The above theoretical discussion helps to situate this project with the growing body of literature, since theoretic ideas shape what a person believes and how a person thinks. Scholars such as Peter Hall have convincingly argued that in order for a public policy option to be implemented the option must appeal to the values and norms of political elites responsible for instituting policies, as well as to the values of wider society.¹⁶⁵

Understanding the normative frameworks operating in society is thus a crucial part in appealing to decision-makers and the public alike when formulating public policies. Since a person's normative framework consists of "taken-for-granted assumptions about values, attitudes, identities, and other 'collectively shared expectations'"¹⁶⁶ the framework forms one's belief system and colours how one sees, interprets, and understands the world. As such, normative frameworks lie in the background of policy debates and "constrain action by limiting the range of alternatives that elites are likely to perceive as acceptable and legitimate"¹⁶⁷ to those that are congruent with their normative beliefs.

The influence of ideas is one element that can be used to explain why some public policies options are pursued over others. The viability of the proposed option is another. According to Hall, a plausible public policy option will have degrees of administrative, political, and economic viability, as well as being theoretically appealing and free from potential restraints on its implementation.¹⁶⁸ Administrative viability refers to the likelihood the policy option has to be

¹⁶⁴ John Campbell, "Ideas, Politics, and Public Policy" *Annual Review of Sociology* (Annual 2002): 21.

¹⁶⁵ Peter A. Hall, "Conclusion: The Politics of Keynesian Ideas" in *The Political Power of Economic Ideas: Keynesianism Across Nations*, ed. Peter A. Hall, 361-392. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1989), 371; 374.

¹⁶⁶ Campbell, "Ideas, Politics, and Public Policy," 22.

¹⁶⁷ Campbell, "Ideas, Politics, and Public Policy," 22.

¹⁶⁸ Hall, "Conclusion," 371-374.

accepted based on the degree to which the new ideas fit the long-standing administrative biases of the relevant decision-makers.¹⁶⁹ Hall states that political viability is judged by the fit between new ideas and the existing goals and interests of the dominant political parties, as well as the appeal the policy option has in the broader public arena,¹⁷⁰ and that the economic criteria for accepting public policy options is dependent on the likelihood that the policy option would solve the problem. Future research would do well to consider how the alignment of policy instruments with public norms can foster and reinforce commitments to certain practices, or alternatively, erode and undermine the commitments.

In conclusion, Canada's growing cultural, ethnic, racial, and religious diversity presents both challenges and opportunities for the country. Chief among the challenges is reconciling this diversity within the country's liberal democratic traditions and institutions. This paper has discussed two different conceptions of the role of the state in accommodating diversity: the first encourages the state to actively facilitate the survival of minority cultures, while the second advocates for state neutrality in relation to cultural/religious differences and universal equality. The accommodation of diversity has become increasingly important in Canada as a way of mitigating existing inequalities between minority and majority groups. The education system has been identified as one institution capable of nurturing the drive for societal equity because education has the potential to directly influence what students believe and how they act.

Although Canada has established a world-renowned system of public schooling, significant imperfections nevertheless remain including substandard academic achievement and high dropout rates for some minority populations, including the Aboriginal and Black communities. One solution to the aforementioned imperfections in Canada's education system

¹⁶⁹ Ibid, 371.

¹⁷⁰ Hall, "Conclusion," 371; 374.

has been the establishment of alternative schools such as the FNST for Aboriginal students and the AAST for Black students. This paper examined the FNST, the AAST, and the arguments of influential political theorists Charles Taylor, Will Kymlicka, and Brian Barry, and determined that the two schools are imperfectly aligned with current conceptions of multicultural theory. It also found that due to the contextual nature of the establishment of both WSSS the AAST, the schools do not serve as a bellwether for the re-conceptualisation of the role of education in liberal democratic societies.

Appendix A

Examples of Medicine Wheel Pedagogical Diagrams

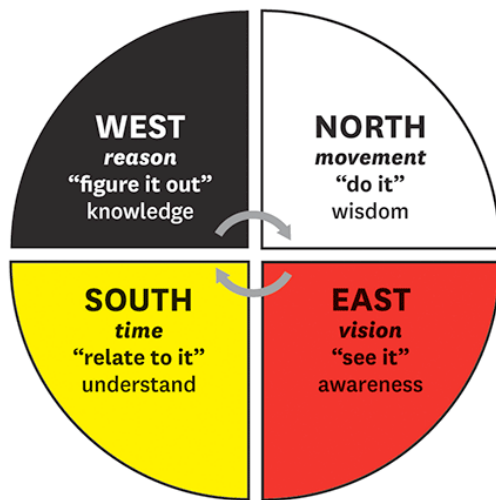
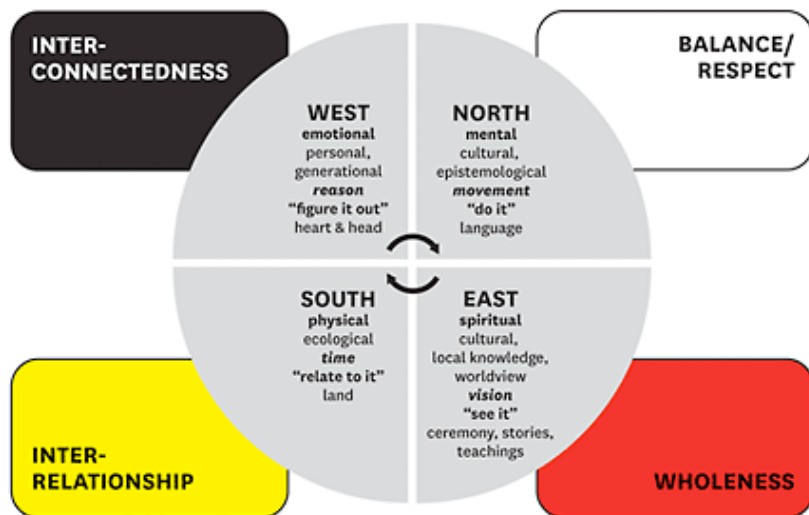


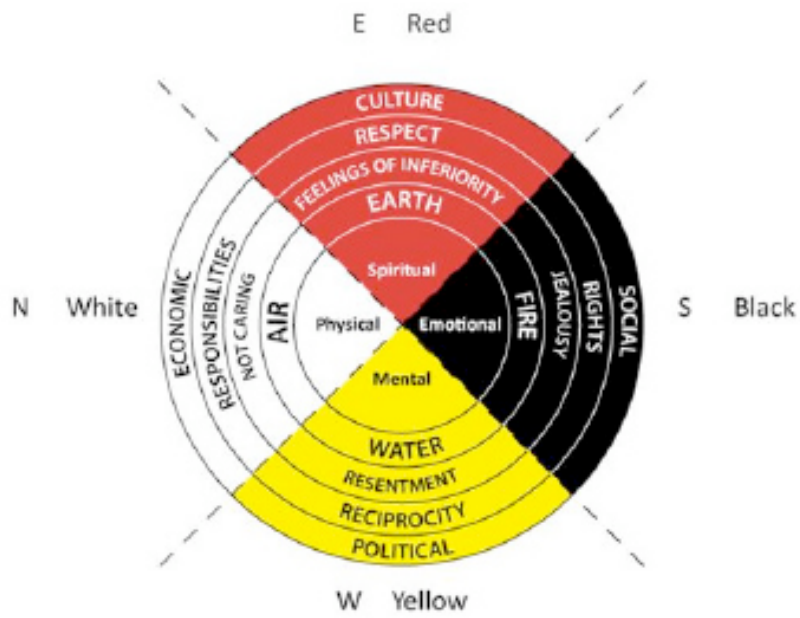
Figure 1: Gifts of the Four Directions 171



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¹⁷¹ Bell, "Teaching by the Medicine Wheel," figure 1.

¹⁷² Ibid, figure 2.



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¹⁷³ Manitoba Trauma Informed Education & Resource Centre, “The Medicine Wheel,” <http://trauma-informed.ca/trauma-and-first-nations-people/cultural-practices/the-medicine-wheel/>

Appendix B

While performing the research for this project I made an effort to obtain additional and supporting documents from the TDSB, the FNST, and the AAST, such as the governance structure of the schools, the meeting minutes from the TBE Trustee meeting where the adoption of WSSS was decided, and the breakdown of student enrolment in the schools, but was unable to do so. I had no intention of conducting interviews with representatives of the above mentioned institutions, I was simply trying to obtain additional material that would support my project. According to the TDSB website, these are publically available documents; however, to access them you need to submit an official request. At the time of writing, the TDSB had not provided the requested documents. If this research were to be pursued further, the researcher would need to acquire an ethics approval from the FNST, the AAST, and the university of Ottawa.

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