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**UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA**

**BLACK STUDENTS AND SCHOOL SUCCESS:  
A STUDY OF THE EXPERIENCES OF ACADEMICALLY SUCCESSFUL  
AFRICAN-CANADIAN STUDENT GRADUATES IN  
ALBERTA'S SECONDARY SCHOOLS**

by



**HENRY MARTEY CODJOE**

**A THESIS**

**SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES AND  
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THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY**

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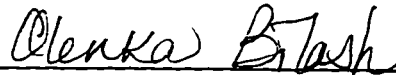
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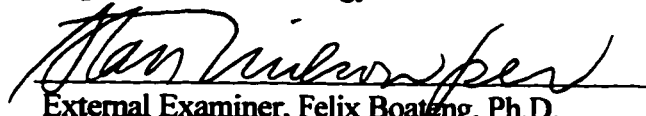
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*The social science literature of the 1980s and 1990s may have overemphasized minority school failure ... Recently, however, educational anthropology and critical theory have been focusing on new and more hopeful perspectives, on the success stories and the learned lessons that can help us face the educational challenges of the 21st century.*

*Henry Trueba*  
Reflections on Alternative Visions of Schooling



## **ABSTRACT**

This dissertation investigates, documents and analyses the experiences of academically successful Black youth in Alberta schools. Previous research has focused on describing and explaining the low academic achievement of Black students. Rarely do these studies identify Black students who are academically successful in school and determine what factors are associated with their success.

Using a narrative methodological approach within qualitative research traditions and a multicultural/anti-racist education theoretical framework, the study investigated 12 African Canadian students who have experienced academic success—with the goal of contributing toward more hopeful futures. Through individual and focus group interviews, supplemented by relevant research, the study provides personal insights to help gain an understanding of how some Black students have succeeded in school in spite of the odds against them.

The findings of the study show that contrary to popular opinion and research, not all Black students make poor choices about education. Black students also develop successful academic skills. A positive Black racial identity, enhanced with an awareness, pride and knowledge of Black and African affairs is crucial to school success. The implication here is that minority status and identity do not and should not always lead to negative educational outcomes. These and other findings of the study are generally supported in the research literature.

In the belief that society can do more to improve educational chances and success for Black and other minority students, the study identified four areas in which educators and policy makers can take specific actions to encourage and promote academic achievement among students from minority populations. Specific policy recommendations based on participants' feedback and current educational research and practices are also presented.

## **DEDICATION**

To my father, Henry Codjoe, Snr., who more than anyone else, developed in me at an earlier age, the love for reading and learning, which has carried me to this day and enable me to top it all up with a Ph.D. degree.

To my mother, "Auntie Ama", who carried on and supported me in the early part of my secondary school education in Ghana.

To my dear wife, Aku ("Mama Rho"), for your wonderful love and support. I couldn't have done this without your friendship, understanding and encouragement. Thank you.

To my dearest children, "Uncle" Nii Martey and "Mama" Marteki. This is especially for you. It is to inspire you so that one day you will also achieve the highest academic and professional honour.

To my brothers Hector and Horace, my biggest cheerleaders. You may not realize it, but your encouragement and 'cheerleading' helped me along the way. Thanks bros!

To my sisters, Hetty and Harriet. Although you're far away in Ghana, I knew your prayers were always with me. One day, we'll meet to celebrate this achievement with my nephews and nieces.

To the teacher in the Codjoe family, my step mother, Marcheta. Thanks for your support. May we continue our chats about educational matters.

And also:

To the loving memory of:

my late grandmother, "Mama" Rose, who never acquired formal education, but believed in the value of education and sacrificed all she had to make sure that I never gave up on schooling. Mama, I wish you had lived to see this day; and

my late grandfather, Ex-Agogohene, Nana Kyei Mensah, whom I never knew, but was told that he was a leading pioneer in promoting education in the Ashanti-Akim region during Ghana's colonial days. Legend had it that, as chief, he issued an edict in the town of Agogo that all parents must send their children to school. Those who disobeyed were rounded up and punished. Who says Africans don't value education!

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**PART ONE:  
BACKGROUND TO RESEARCH STUDY**

**CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION**

*We can well feel proud of our few gains, fully conscious of the fact that it's not what we've done but what we've had to do it with, not how little we've gained but how much we've overcome.*

*Pearleen Oliver*

A Brief History of the Coloured Baptists of Nova Scotia, 1792-1953

**1.1 Black Students and School Success: Oversight or Neglect?**

Just like other Canadians of African origin interested in research in the Canadian public school system (e.g., Brathwaite, 1989; Dei, 1993a, 1994a; James, 1990), I am disturbed by the “marginality and depersonalization” of Canadian students of African origin. There is what Dei (1996) has termed a “racial, cultural and gender ‘othering’ of [Black] students” (p. 44). Black educational theory and practice have not been a priority in mainstream Canadian education. For example, the theoretical knowledge about education of African-Canadian children advanced in Ontario by such Black theorists as Carl James (1990), Enid Lee (1989) and Patrick Solomon (1992), to name a few, are rarely read or cited by Euro/Anglo-Canadian scholars in critical ways that challenge the status quo. In fact, there is minimal educational literature about Black students and there is hardly any community of Black educational researchers (Henry, 1993). This brings to mind Male’s (1986) point that “the issue of minority education is part of the larger question of how various groups are to be treated and whether they are to have access to the mainstream while retaining their group identity regardless of whether that identity is based on religion, race, color, or language” (p. 395).

When I began to think of a research idea for my dissertation, I asked myself what I could do to contribute to the Black educational experience in Canada.



Throughout my readings I became painfully aware that Black students do not perform as well as the majority of non-Black students. As Ogbu (1978) notes, not only do Black students perform poorly but they also are more likely to be diverted from mainstream education. In fact, there is no shortage of literature about the poor academic performance of Black students in the industrialized world. This has led to the observation that “the disproportionate school failure of minority-group children has become one of the most active research issues in education as researchers attempt to understand the underlying causes and to provide policymakers and educators with reliable and useful information” (Ogbu, in Foreword to Solomon, 1992, p. vii).

In my “attempt to understand the underlying causes” of Black student failure, I almost fell into the trap of continuing on the narrow and negative portrayal of Black educational and social experiences. Why talk to academically successful Black students about what makes Black students fail in school? Why should Black minority status always lead to negative educational outcomes? In the end, I came to agree with Le Gall and Jones (1991) that, “as a consequence of the focus on deficiencies in poor and ethnic minority children, there has been little systematic, accumulated understanding of the diversity of skills and talents in these groups of students” (p. 27). Small (1994) concurs when he adds that “while the images held of one another are real, they are too narrow a portrayal of the variety and vitality of Black life, or the range of diversity of [Black] contribution to society and the human experience” (p. 7).

When it comes to the Black experience, there is no doubt, as Small (1994) notes with reference to Blacks in England that, “like Ralph Ellison’s *Invisible Man*, Blacks in England seldom catch attention, except in the most obvious and stereotypical scenes” (p. 1). For example, according to Delpit (1995) “we are constantly told of the one out of four Black men who is involved with the prison system—but what about the three out of four who are not? ... When do we see their lives portrayed on the six o’clock news?” For Delpit, this shows “how power

imbalance and cultural conflicts within classrooms occur within a larger society that nurtures and maintains stereotypes” (p. xii). Thus, in the print and electronic media, pictures of Blacks are associated with what Reed (1993) calls “social pathology.” According to Reed (1993), Black authors and intellectuals, especially male ones, are seldom seen on television, unless it is to comment on “Black pathology.” Very often, the media are uncomfortable with them because they are not athletes, criminals, entertainers, or neoconservatives (p. xvi). A point made by one of the students in my study is very instructive here (I have italicized the student narratives throughout the study):

*... in North American society, Black kids are supposed to be good in things like basketball. A lot of who you see up there, they're either rappers or basketball stars or involved in some area of sports. The only time you see more Black people on television in Canada is during the Olympics or during the (inaudible) ... That's something that I could never fully understand. Paul Robeson was a football star, he was an actor, he was a writer, he was a singer, he was a letter man in college; he was I think a lawyer too. He went to Rutgers and Columbia. His grades rank the highest in the school's history. It's like, we have to focus on the fact that he was a football star in College. The man did so much more and there's so much more than physical exertion, but if you're Black it's considered that's what you're supposed to do (hmcT/95/4-5).*

Within current North American educational practices, the image of the Black student as an academic failure takes on a special dimension when it is viewed in the context of what Reed (1993) has termed the “why-can't-you-Blacks-be-like-Asians” perspective. It is no secret that “one of the myths promoted by neoconservatives is that while Black society is rife with problems, the Asian-American community, through hard work and devotion to Anglo values, has proved that assimilation correlates with success” (Reed, 1993, p. xii). All too often, Asians are depicted as the group that Blacks ought to be like. Although the view of Asian students as a “model

minority” has been repeatedly challenged by many Asian scholars and community activists as “racial stereotype” and “empirically inaccurate,” the image has persisted in the mainstream press (Maclear, 1994; see also Mah, 1995). Asian students are extolled as a “super minority,” “academic giants,” and “math whizzes.” But something else is at play here, as noted by Maclear (1994):

At the heart of this image-making is the creed that hard work, morality and perseverance can tackle any obstacle to achievement. Canada is a meritocracy, full of opportunity for anyone who persists ... What is implied here is that the educational system is right for everyone and individuals need only adjust to it. “Successful” Asians who have “made it” without aid or support become “models” for other “minorities.” Their “success” is used as proof by liberal educators and apologists of current educational practices that the system is just—that individual efforts are indeed rewarded equally. The “successful” Asian student has been advanced as a prototype of what is possible for all marginalized students and used to counter charges from working class and Black communities that the system is failing. The myth of minority success has been put forward, in particular, to discredit demands for such radical change as “de-streaming” and more generally to avoid focusing on the economic and socio-political institutions, which create barriers that marginalize people of colour, working class people and women, and prevent them from attaining equal rewards for their labour ... If we are to cut through the constellation of stereotypes that entrap a heterogeneous grouping of “Asian” students and locate the partisan values invoked through “model minority” discourse, we should be asking several questions: “Success” on whose terms? “Model” of what? “Model” for whom? These questions help illuminate how Asian academic “success” has been constituted, in part, as a critique of the academic performance of other “racial minorities”—after all, “success” only takes on meaning when set against “failure.” Thus the ramifications of “model Minority” discourse are far-reaching (pp. 55-57).

I’d like to believe that this portrayal of Asians as a “model minority” is what Chan and Hune (1995) has described as “a racial formation created by majority

cultural and ideological structures,” and “implies that minority status, in itself, is not a proxy for discrimination or racism in [North] American society, nor does it necessarily result in discriminatory outcomes” (pp. 221-222). Furthermore, it also suggests that if a racial minority such as Asians can “make it,” then what holds back Blacks and Latinos? If institutional or cultural racism is not at fault here, then the argument goes, there may be something inherently wrong with the cultural character of Black and Latino communities. Besides breaching any potential solidarity among minority groups, this reasoning also has resulted in a direct assault on the integrity of the culture and family values of Blacks and others and served “as a convenient political device to explain away the persistence of racial inequalities in a liberal democratic society that now legally prohibits racial discrimination” (Chan and Hune, 1995, p. 222; see also Macias, 1993; Mickelson, Okazaki, and Zheng, 1993; Osajima, 1988; Mah, 1995). Of course, in all of this, we forget that media accounts of Asians as academic successes compared to other minorities such as Blacks distort reality. For example, in the United States, “one might conclude that Asian-Americans have indeed prospered in the American educational system. But it is only by disaggregating the data, as Asian American scholars argue, that the overall representation of the Asian-American community can be revealed as a misrepresentation. For example, recent immigrants from Cambodia, Laos, and Vietnam have high school completion rates of approximately 35 percent, 36 percent, and 58 percent, respectively—well under the 82 percent group statistic for all Asian-Americans” (Chan and Hune, 1995, p. 226). In Canada, a Toronto Board of Education study found out that “the hard data doesn’t reflect Asian realities. Many students do well in terms of marks, but not in a comprehensive sense” (quoted in Maclear, 1994, p. 57). Moreover, this blind acceptance of the Asian “model minority” concept ignores the tremendous heterogeneity of the Asian community in North America and denies the needs and problems of large numbers of Asians who do not share in this so-called academic success story. As Mickelson et al. (1993) have

found out, the strong motivation and the willingness to work hard in school are neither innate qualities of Asian-American youth nor signs of their cultural superiority; rather, they serve as functional tools. These researchers also determined that Black and Asian high school seniors in their study shared the same high regard for education. On this, I'll agree with Chan and Hune (1995) that the overemphasis on Asian success is a way for the dominant society to divest itself of responsibility for addressing the barriers that maintain racial and social inequality and, as a consequence, discussions of economic and educational achievement continue to be racialized rather than focusing on the institutional barriers that inhibit the advancement of minorities. Let me close off with this interesting comment by one of the student participants in my study:

*Even with the case of Asian students, Asian students weren't to my knowledge really regarded as super students or as brilliant really until the last couple of decades. That's I think mostly because of the fabulous industrial action of the newly industrializing countries: Japan, South Korea and that sort of thing. That's had a major effect. Just like in the 60's for instance, Africans in North America gained a whole new consciousness because of people like (inaudible) and the Pan Africans. That made an impact in North America but that success was almost instantly destroyed by the world imperial system. Now whereas the newly industrializing countries are intrinsically part of that imperialist system, so they're strong and so this has an impact upon how Asians look at themselves here and how other people look at them. It's interesting because Africans, as a global community tend to be looked at as just one group, whereas Asians are more readily broken into different groups, such as Japanese, Chinese, Vietnamese, Filipinos. When you just hear those different national names, you get different mental images and the stereotypes are that yes, the Japanese are the hardest workers; I think that's an established stereotype, they are the hardest working and the most successful. When you hear Chinese, however, then you get the stereotype of the gangsters, that comes in, you also get restaurateurs. Those are stereotypes. You get Vietnamese, certainly criminal activity but not academic success. Filipinos, not academic success and not public prominence, so that gets broken down. Now in the African case, you take a look at people like*

*for instance, Ibos and (inaudible) who whenever I meet them are almost at the top of their fields. Whites have no concept and also most Africans from North America have no concept of breaking down Africans by region or by nationality. To them, Ibos are just ranked as what they call Africans, meaning continental Africans. Whereas when I meet an Ibo person, I just automatically say well this person is probably going to be a success ... In some ways, we might be better off promoting knowledge of our individuality by region, that might break down some of the stereotypes [of Black people] (hmcT/95/3-4).*

When I told some colleagues of mine that I was working on a research project regarding academically successful Black students in Alberta, I was met with some kind of disbelief: Black students in Alberta? And successful ones to boot? It is hard to convince people, even including some Blacks that, although in the majority of cases Black students do not show high rates of school success, there are enough exceptions to that general pattern so as to raise questions about the academic abilities of Black students. I share Brathwaite's (1989) observation that "the perception that Black students as a group cannot achieve as highly academically as some other groups has its origins in a racism which is pervasive in the institutions in which they are educated" (p. 205). This, in my view, explains the dearth of literature about successful Black educational experiences and the antitheses of "re-racializ[ing] and misrepresent[ing Asians] into what appears to be a positive stereotype" (Chan and Hune, 1995, p. 222).

This research presents a small but positive effort to highlight certain aspects of the Black experience not commonly known to the general public. It is trying to speak "about the silences that often are registered but not so often highlighted and analyzed" (Sultana, 1995, p. 113). As Orange (1995) points out:

Concerned educators and administrators must first believe that we can win against the enemies of Black achievement, then be willing to keep trying until we do win. The educational imperative is that paying attention to Black students may garner the attention of significant

others who can be helpful but who may not otherwise pay attention. We must know that Black children—all children are more than worthy of our efforts (p. 4).

Perhaps one of the greatest myths promoted about people of African origin is that, as a people we lack “the values of scholarship and study” and that we see “academic achievement as forms of ‘acting White’” (D’Souza, 1995, p. 499). This perception of Blacks as genetically inferior when it comes to academics is reinforced in the minds of some educators and the public at large, partly because of the achievement levels of young Blacks in the school systems and the overemphasis in the literature of school failure and underachievement among Black youth. But as Macias (1993) reminds us Black underachievement is a “complex social phenomena [that] must be explained within a historical, socio-structural view” (p. 411). Nonetheless “scholars” like Herrnstein and Murray (1994) and D’Souza (1995) continue to produce “research” that continues to denigrate African peoples. Reed (1993) correctly perceives this as “propaganda in which one denigrates the achievements of those considered an enemy, or problem people” (p. xvi).

I am often offended when some Whites who visit my home express some kind of shock and disbelief to see my numerous books and other reading materials. It is as if, as a Black person, I am not supposed to read or enjoy books. One of my neighbours was surprised to learn that since coming to Canada from Ghana I have acquired university degrees. Of course, the image of Africa and the African in western minds is one not associated with learning. There is ample evidence that show that Blacks view success in school as of utmost importance. Black parents, in particular, see the need for an education in North America as critical. As Slaughter and Epps (1987) put it: “Black American families supported schools because they had considerable faith in the power of the American educational system to produce literacy, which in turn would assure freedom and prosperity to Black children and youth” (p. 5). In Canada, West Indian parents in Toronto suffered a loss in status,

which they initially accepted, hoping that through education their children would get more decent and better-paying jobs (Solomon, 1992; Thakur, 1988; Richmond and Mendoza, 1987). Writing about 'The Educational Experiences of Caribbean Youth' in the Toronto region, Yon (1994) also notes that: "Caribbean parents place an inordinately high value on education, which is important in its own right and is also considered the only avenue of mobility for people from the lower social class. Even poor single mothers will do their utmost to ensure that their children receive as much schooling as possible" (p. 126; see also Head, 1975, p. 28; Richmond and Mendoza, 1990). In fact, Pollard (1989) has presented some interesting and consistent findings that show that Blacks and their families—across socioeconomic levels—consistently report higher educational aspirations than their White counterparts. Cummins (1986) further adds that "in reality, most parents of minority students have high aspirations for their children and want to be involved in promoting their academic progress" (p. 26).

In his book, *The History of Blacks in Canada* (1971), Robin Winks devotes an entire chapter to education as does Daniel Hill in *The Freedom Seekers: Blacks in Early Canada* (1981). In these works, history shows that Blacks assign immense value to the weight of education in the experiences of African peoples in Canada, Winks citing it as a "source of strength" for Black people. Indeed, as James and Brathwaite (1996) write:

During the 1970s, research on the educational aspirations of Black students showed that regardless of their social background, they tended to have high educational and career aspirations. Researchers have argued that Black parents and students place a high value on education because they see education as making it possible for them to get ahead [in] society (p. 16).

For example, a 1982 study of Grade 8 students in the Toronto Board of Education by Larter et al. (cited in James and Brathwaite, 1996) found that Black and Caribbean



students were the only groups who rated education as the most important to them. According to the researchers, it was because of the support of their parents that made these students aspire to high levels of education—as they see formal education as “an opportunity for self-realization” (p. 17). Further south, African Americans’ early and determined struggle for formal education, including the perception that this was a key, if not *the* key, to attaining full citizenship in America has been well documented (see Bullock, 1967; Franklin, 1984; Tyack, 1995; Weinberg, 1977; Lieberman, 1980; Fischer et al., 1996, chpt. 8). In fact, as Orange (1995) points out, “African Americans, once deprived of education, were killed, mutilated, and incarcerated for their efforts to acquire an education. Years of deprivation made education such a sought after commodity that many were willing to die for” (p. 1). In DuBois’s *Black Reconstruction in America* (1975) and more recently, Anderson’s *The Education of Blacks in the South, 1860-1935*, (1988) we learn that African slaves and ex-slaves keenly valued formal education. Between the end of the Civil War and the late 1870s, ex-slaves spearheaded a social movement for public education in the South. In fact, “between 1900 and 1935 poor rural Blacks, not just elites, double-taxed themselves to support the ‘public’ education of their children” (Cross, 1995, pp. 186-187). According to Butchart (1980), this movement was driven by themes of protection (that is, by education that helps Blacks avoid exploitation and oppose racism), ethnicity and pride (education that teaches African and African American history), and acculturation (education that leads to greater participation in the larger social order) (see also Cross, 1995, p. 186; Weinberg, 1977). McNeill (1995) sums it all up when he writes that “throughout their history in America, Blacks have held an uncompromising faith in the value of education. They have believed that through this process, the ideals of justice, freedom, liberty and equality could be achieved” (p. 20).

In recent times, there is growing evidence of more Blacks completing high school and achieving academic excellence (Steele, 1995; *Report on Education Research*, 1996; News Wrap-Up, 1996). For example, a United States census report recently

showed that the number of African Americans with high school diplomas and bachelor's degrees increased between 1990 and 1995. The report noted that in 1995, among Blacks 25 years of age and over, 73.8% had completed high school, up from 10.7% in 1990. As well, in 1995, 13% of African Americans earned a college degree, up from, 11.3% in 1990 (*Jet Magazine*, July 1, 1996, p. 38). This goes to show that, in spite of the obstacles, there are many conscientious, high-achieving students of African origin. For example, Martin Klein, professor of history at the University of Toronto notes in a recent letter to the Editor:

Most Black students finish high school. A substantial number make it on to university. In the 25 years I have taught at the University of Toronto, the number has increased dramatically. They tend to be highly motivated, are a joy to teach, and distribute themselves along the grade spectrum about the same as White students. In some ways, the most interesting group are the dropouts who get their act together and come back to school" (*The Globe and Mail*, January 22, 1996, p. A20).

As well, in a 1995 story on "Black Students Strive to Overcome," it was reported that "some Black students are very successful, smashing the stereotype of underachievement" (Canadian Press report, July 26, 1995). A recent study at York University's Institute for Social Studies in Toronto also found that Black students perform as well as students of European, Chinese or East Indian descent. In fact, first-year Black students scored marks that were virtually identical to those obtained by students of other racial backgrounds. Paul Grayson, who directed the study was quoted as saying: "I think if you were to ask most people, they would assume that Black students are doing poorly and Chinese students are doing extremely well" (see Canadian Press Report, March 22, 1994).

Elsewhere, a 1994 study by England's Warwick University Institute of Education found that "Black children are outperforming pupils from all other races at the age of five in most important skills of reading, writing and arithmetic." This made

the Director of the Institute, Barry Troyna ask: "Why are Black kids still characterized in academic as well as popular literature as underachievers when this evidence shows they are not?" (Hymas and Cohen, 1994, p. 5). Further evidence of Black academic achievement is reported in recent issues of *The Journal of Blacks in Higher Education* (see No. 4, Summer 1994). One report indicated that, for the first time, data from the 1990 U.S. census showed that African-born residents of the United States have attained higher levels of educational attainment than any other foreign-born residents of America. The census report noted that more than 57% of all African-born immigrants living in the United States over 25 years of age are university graduates. The rate for Asian-born immigrants was 38.4% and only 18% for European-born immigrants. Moreover, African immigrants in America are twice as likely to hold a Ph.D. as are European immigrants (News and Views, 1994). In fact, African-born residents of America are far more likely to have a Ph.D. than American residents who were born in Japan, Germany, and the United Kingdom. Even more interesting is the report that: "African-born residents of the U.S. are far more likely to earn college and advanced degrees than are native-born Blacks or Whites" (News and Views, 1994, p. 11). It is also reported that "British residents of African origin have achieved the highest levels of educational attainment of any other ethnic group in the United Kingdom, including Whites and Asians." As well, "in employment, Black Africans were also more likely to have attained professional status than all other ethnic groups in the U.K." Anyway, as *The Journal of Blacks in Higher Education* poignantly notes:

The fact that these [African] Blacks have achieved educational levels even greater than Whites in the United Kingdom [and in the U.S.] is powerful evidence to rebut the persistent theory of scientific racism which claims that Blacks are intellectually inferior to Whites...The fact that these African immigrants—even if some of them are Whites—do so much better than immigrants from other continents, including the advanced industrialized nations of Germany and Japan, is yet another

nail in the coffin of the scientific racists” (News and Views, 1994, p. 10; see also Codjoe, 1996).

Not to forget, I also found out that in Canada, according to the 1991 census, African-born immigrants placed second (25.5%) to American-born immigrants (28.2%) as those with university degrees (Badets and Chui, 1994).

It is true and no one will deny that most studies of inequality present Blacks as almost overwhelmingly victimized. This includes images in the media where “Black poverty, educational failure, unemployment, teenage childbirth and crime, dominate coverage.” As Small (1994) notes,

clearly, these images have a basis in fact—a tragic and often terrifying basis as Black people find themselves at a disadvantage in almost every major social, economic and political category. But this is not the whole story and there are exceptions to these patterns—some major and notable ones—and acknowledgment of them is important for analytical purposes ... Black people may be victims but they have not been overwhelmed and they do not have a victim mentality. What this means is that while we must confront the dismal facts of inequality we must also look at the other side of the picture; we must look at the variations and nuances, some of them major; and we must look at the spirit of striving which such resistance reveals. We must examine them because they are facts too, and very relevant facts at that (pp. 41-42; emphasis added).

During the course of my research, I found out among the Black students I interviewed the desire to be heard and recognized as academically successful students. It was unbelievable. We found ourselves talking endlessly about this. When word got out about what I was doing, I received calls from many more Black students who wanted to be part of my study and talk about school success. At last, here was someone who wanted to know and document the positive side of Black school life. Unfortunately, I could not accommodate all of these students and I regret it. It

became clear though that, had I wanted to conduct my research about Black school failure, many told me they would not have participated in the research.

I am heartened by the growing attempt in recent times to focus “educational anthropology and critical theory ... on new and more hopeful perspectives, on the success stories [of Black and minority students] and the learned lessons that can help us face the educational challenges of the 21st century” (Trueba, 1994, p. 376). This means that:

Rather than centering the discussion within traditional discourse that links the educational failure of minorities to personal deficiencies or cultural deficiencies, these writings advance the discussion by employing what McLaren terms ‘a language of representation and hope.’ This language allows us to view inherent possibilities and contributions of culturally and linguistically diverse people and to hear the voices of minorities and the excluded as ‘they speak their narratives of liberation and desire’ (Ernst and Statzner, 1994, p. 202).

Similarly, Perry (1993) notes that, “Past discussions and attempts to develop an explanatory framework for the school achievement of [Blacks] have disproportionately focused on school failure.” Thus, according to Perry (1993), “The relevant question is not how to explain failure, but, given the history and experiences of [Blacks] in [North America], *what explanatory model is capable of explaining and interpreting the intellectual achievements of African-Americans*” (p. 1; emphasis added). Thus, since most of the research on Black and minority education “points to a seemingly inescapable connection between minority status and failure,” and since “findings on successful schooling experiences among minority populations” are infrequent, the primary purpose of this study is to investigate “...those instances wherein [African-Canadian] students, ... —amidst their marginality—were able to construct successful educational experiences” (Ernst and Statzner, 1994, p. 200). I believe that if we are to advance Black educational progress in Canadian schools “we can no longer afford an outmoded discourse that restricts definitions of success and

failure to traditional measures (i.e., standardized tests, grades) or in relation to how well marginal groups assimilate to educational and cultural canons. Rather success is a socially constructed and culturally embedded variable” (Ernst and Statzner, 1994, p. 202; see also Carter, 1990).

A final comment. I started this section of the chapter with the header, “Black Students and School Success: Oversight or Neglect?” Perhaps it is both. As I’ve tried to show, Blacks are almost always seen in the most negative of terms. In the process we fail to note or acknowledge some of the successes in the Black community. Racism partly explains this phenomenon, but perhaps most importantly, the Black community of scholars, activists, parents and community leaders must take the initiative and propagate Black successes in the wider society. The issue was widely discussed by the study participants and I would like to end this section with what I consider a very poignant observation by one of the students:

*The way I often explain it is that people are like ducks and a duckling that’s hatched right out of an egg, the first thing that it sees, it will imprint that image upon itself. It’s helpful if that duckling sees an adult duck then it knows what to become. If it should see a person, unfortunately it thinks it’s a person, if it thinks it sees a dog, it thinks it’s a dog. White children don’t need to be told in these words there are great White scientists or there are great White leaders or great White civilizations because the pictures and the examples are all around them so they don’t need to be told, there’s no White history month because it’s White history year. Whereas in our case, yes we still have just as many examples, but the examples are hidden or when people see the examples they don’t recognize them as examples. Every example of Black failure is an example of Black failure, but every example of Black success is an exception and that’s the way it works ... [I]n textbooks, our scientists are not shown; if their results are ever discussed or photographed it’s never attached. You know whether it’s the mundane examples of the traffic light or the gas mask or the walkie talkie, or open heart surgery or blood plasma, those things are never connected to us. Certainly in the ... ancient world, things like the development of*

*the Pyramids, mathematics and geometry and astronomy; those things are never related to us. One of the biggest problems we have is that we don't see the examples of our own success and not knowing that we did a thing means that we don't know what we can do. I would say that's probably the most important thing. It's not that the educational system is going out of its way anymore to say you're ignorant or stupid or you have no contributions, it's just, it's a sin of omission, not a sin of commission (hmcT/95/2-3).*

## **1.2 A Personal Note**

*It is impossible for the researcher to understand the 'subject' unless she/he enters into a dialogue with the 'subject' aimed at mutual understanding.*

*cited in Ronald Sultana  
Ethnography and the Politics of Absence*

As a Canadian of African origin, I believe it is important to point out that I come to this study *not* from a disinterested perspective, but as one who can relate to the issues and personal experiences that would be discussed in this study. I agree with Hall (1990) that “we all write and come from a particular place and time, from a history and a culture which is specific. What we say is always in context, *positioned*” (p. 222). I also believe that “no presentation of self is really neutral” (Frankenberg, 1993, p. 31) and so it is fitting to state some of my own credentials in the research and writing of this dissertation.

I was born in Ghana, West Africa where, I guess, judging from Ghanaian standards, I'd say I grew up in a “lower-middle class” family. I spent most of my childhood and adolescence in Ghana before emigrating to Canada in 1974 after completing my secondary school education. I have thus lived all my adult life in Canada. Just like many young Africans, the drive for an advanced education was a primary motive for my taking up residence in Canada. The value of an education was driven into me by my father from whom I acquired my love for books and reading.

But perhaps it was my grandmother (who raised me for the most part of my life when my father left Ghana for overseas) who, more than anyone else, sacrificed everything to make sure I received the best possible education. When I look back, I always wonder how an illiterate African woman could indeed see the value of an education for her children and grandchildren. Because of my father's and grandmother's efforts, the love for learning continues to remain with me—a tradition I am passing on to my children.

But it took quite a struggle and some politicization, upon my arrival in Canada, to get to the level of awareness and pride that I have today about Black and African affairs. As Dei (1994b) writes about his own experience in Canada in this regard, my studies in Canada were “very much within the established tradition of existing Euramerican hegemonic discourses” (p. 3). And, like Dei, “the learning I have acquired during various phases of my education least emphasized the achievements and contributions of African peoples. It has been an education that has, for the most part, not cultivated our self-esteem and pride as Africans” (Dei, 1994b, p. 3). In fact, I am sometimes embarrassed to admit that I learned more about myself as a Black person and an African, in Canada—a traditionally White country—than in my native Ghana. Until coming to Canada, the question of my racial identity was not something that I had thought about. After all, I grew up in an all-Black country where the issue of race or racism was not something that was on my mind. My language, culture and customs celebrated my Blackness, and I didn't see any struggle for my racial identity. I guess I first began to think about the subject of race relations in secondary school. Just like many other Black colonial territories, Ghana was affected by its British colonial experience. There was a high premium placed on things European or White, especially in schools. European culture and ideas were considered superior and had to be mastered. The *obroni* became our frame of reference. In fact, one acquired or gained social status by going to *Ablotsiri*, or the White man's country. I had therefore viewed the prospect of coming to Canada as an opportunity few of my friends or



relatives had. I was emigrating to a country that, as one India-born writer in the U.K. put it, “signified, to colonial subjects such as myself, progress, both material and intellectual” (cited in Codjoe, 1994, p. 23). According to William Cross’s model of Black racial identity development, the state of my condition at that time can be described as “pre-encounter,” which meant, according to Beverly Daniel Tatum in her essay *Talking About Race, Learning About Racism* (1992), that I had “absorbed many of the beliefs and values of the dominant ... culture, including the notion that ‘White is right’ and ‘Black is wrong’” (p. 10).

Indeed, before coming to Canada I didn’t know what it meant or felt to be discriminated against as a Black person or an African. I hadn’t developed any kind of Black consciousness or identity. I was unaware of the U.S. civil rights movement in the 1960s and other Black struggles for liberation around the world. I had not heard of Martin Luther King or Malcolm X or Marcus Garvey. Whatever I learned in school was learned in order to pass my exams and move on. It was not an attempt to, as the late Bob Marley wrote in one of his songs, “emancipate myself from mental slavery.” Coming to Canada heightened my awareness of racism. I quickly noticed how race and colour were factors in social interactions in North America. During my first few months in the country, two incidents occurred that made me think seriously for the first time about questions of race, identity, and White supremacy ideology. It was also my first experience with racial humiliation and abuse. The first related to the time I offered to help an elderly White woman carry her grocery bags. As soon as I asked if I could help, she clutched her bags close to her chest and yelled, “Get away from me, you darkie!” I was visibly shaken. For a moment I froze, clasped my hands tightly as if praying and let some distance come between me and the woman before continuing my walk home.

The second incident was more subtle, but the message was loud and clear. I had worked in the storeroom of a downtown hotel where I was in charge of supplying

produce and drinks to the staff when they produced requisitions for whatever was required. I had noticed that the kitchen helper who each morning came for the produce for the chief chef would always gaze at me in some kind of disbelief as I read and checked off the items on his order. When I finished he would swear at me in Italian and leave. I wondered why. One day after I had finished his order, he asked me where I learned to read and write. I said Africa. He then pointed his finger at me and said how come he, the White person, couldn't read and write and I, the 'Negro,' could. It shouldn't happen that way. I was shocked. I never thought I'd see a White person who was illiterate—in Canada!

Related to these incidents and others was the constant reminder of my African identity. I'd always responded to the often-asked question "Where are you from?" by saying I'm from Africa. The mere mention of Africa and I'm looked upon with some mixture of pity and bewilderment. Oh, look at this poor African—he must be hungry or something! And then of course it is followed by some of the most embarrassing and ridiculous questions: How did I get to Canada, did I fly in a plane? Are there airports in Africa? Did I live in a house or is it true that Africans lived on trees? What foods did I eat? What's my tribe? Did I play with lions? Did I come from a large family? How did I learn to speak English so well? I didn't look African! Was I sure I was an African? And more (see Codjoe, 1994b). By this time, I just couldn't stand and take the way Africa and Africans were depicted in the media. What was wrong with being Black or African? Why the daily discrimination and humiliation of Blacks? Why was I always asked what I was doing in Canada? And why wasn't I back in Africa where I belonged? I started to think more about these questions. I began to explore the whole issue of Blackness: what it means to be Black or African. Given no other choice (my colour and accent always gave me away), I felt I had to be secure in my *African-ness*. I had to affirm my sense of self, my identity.

I embarked on an intellectual journey—to, using Amilcar Cabral’s expression, “return to the source,” so to speak. What are the history and heritage of African peoples in Africa and the Diaspora? This came easily for me because of my love for books and reading. Within a few years, I had bought and read books on Black and African culture, history, politics and literature. When I graduated from university I had acquired and read books by C. L. R. James, W.E.B. DuBois, Amilcar Cabral, Marcus Garvey, Malcolm X, Richard Wright, Basil Davidson, Kwame Nkrumah, Langston Hughes, Walter Rodney, Ali Mazrui, James Baldwin, Frantz Fanon, Cheikh Anta Diop, J. A. Rogers, John Henrik Clarke, Lerone Bennett, Chancellor Williams, George Padmore and many more. I had made the transition from a “coloured intellectual” into a “Black intellectual.” I had reached the racial identity stage described by Cross as “Immersion/Emersion,” or as Tatum (1992) aptly describes, “the simultaneous desire to surround oneself with visible symbols of one’s racial identity and an active avoidance of symbols of Whiteness” (p. 11). As Thomas Parham notes in his *Cycles of Psychological Nigrescence* (1989; cited in Tatum, 1992), “At this stage, everything of value in life must be Black or relevant to Blackness” (p. 11). But nobody told me that my new-found Black pride and identity would be threatening to the dominant White culture, or that I would be called a racist for expressing my Black cultural identity.

In graduate school I had a White roommate. For a while we got along quite well. We discussed and talked about various political and current events. But as time went by, he stopped talking to me. He tried to avoid me as much as he could. I decided to find out what was the matter. When he returned from classes one evening I asked him if something was wrong. He told me he was not happy with our living arrangements and that he was considering moving out so that I could find a Black roommate. “A Black roommate?” I asked with some discomfort. “Yes, isn’t that what you want? I don’t think you like White people. You must be a racist!” His response completely took me off guard.

“What makes you say that? What makes you think I’m a racist?” Visibly upset, I demanded an answer. “Well, come and I’ll show you.” He led me to my bedroom. “Look at all these books and posters on your wall,” he said, picking some books off my bookshelves and throwing them on my bed. “Malcolm X, Walter Rodney, Marcus Garvey, Kwame Nkrumah, and all these Black radicals,” he continued as he looked for more book titles. “And look at all these posters on your wall: Great Kings of Africa, a map of Africa, Nelson Mandela, Steve Biko, Malcolm X, Walter Rodney, Kwame Nkrumah.”

“And this makes me a racist?” I asked, totally flabbergasted.

“Well, yes. All you read are these Black books, you listen to all that African music, and most of the friends that come to visit you are Africans.”

“Wait a minute,” I shot back. “Let’s go to your room.” I followed him to his bedroom. “What are these?” I pointed to some of the books in his room. “Titles by Euro-American authors and tapes and records of White musicians. And the walls of your bedroom are also covered with maps of the United States and Europe. Do these make you a racist? I don’t think so. Tell me: why is it okay for you to read books by and about Europeans and Euro-Americans and it’s not okay for me to read books by and about Blacks and Africans? How dare you call me a racist!” I left his room.

Now, as I reflect upon this incident, I’m always confounded by the charges of racism levelled against Blacks who try to assert their identity through knowledge of their culture and history. Why is it fine for peoples of European descent to know and appreciate their histories and cultures and abhorrent for peoples of African descent to do the same? And who decides whose knowledge and culture is legitimate? I remember very well when Vice President Walter Mondale chose Geraldine Ferraro as his running mate in the 1988 U.S. Presidential election. The media and commentators made many references to her as an Italian-American, and Ms. Ferraro was proud of

her Italian identity. Presidents Reagan and Bush went to the United Kingdom to affirm their Irish and British roots. But when Jesse Jackson tried to assert his African identity and said American Blacks should call themselves African-Americans, he was branded a racist and a troublemaker who wanted to divide America.

Recently I read the story of PBS television reporter Charlayne Hunter-Gault who changed the way she wore her hair by adopting what the reporter called “a tightly braided African style.” Apparently, this didn’t sit well with the White viewing audience. Ms. Hunter-Gault was said to have received “the most abusive, racist correspondence” ever. How dare she become “too Black and African?” Harry Belafonte echoed this sentiment when he told the *New York Times* that: “By and large, as [Black] people, we’ve had to be more like what White people want us to be than we’ve been able to be who we are and express ourselves openly and honestly” (quoted in Codjoe, 1994a, p. 235). When I gave all my children African names, a White colleague asked why I didn’t give them European names. I told him they were not Europeans. I then asked him if he would give his children African names. Oh no, never, he said; they are not Africans. This is what Professor Henry Giroux has called “the hegemonic notion that Eurocentric culture is superior to other cultures and traditions by virtue of its canonical status as a universal measure of Western civilization” (quoted in Codjoe, 1994a, p. 235).

It’s very clear that notions of White supremacy run very deep in North American society. The absence of Black knowledge in our schools and cultural avenues is not a simple oversight. Its absence is an instance of racism. All too often, what is considered ‘legitimate’ knowledge does not include the historical experiences of Africans and other ‘visible’ minorities. It can really be disorienting to sit in a class when a teacher describes North American society and history and you’re not in it. You’re invisible. You don’t matter. And when as a ‘visible minority’ you try to do

something about it, you become a racist. In effect, "Be Black, but not too Black" (see Codjoe, 1994a).

I find it a tragedy that many Black and African children grow up today convinced of their own inferiority. I read in a recent Canadian newspaper report about a Black student who until enrolling in a Black-oriented remedial school never knew of or read a book by a Black author. As Toronto educator Ken Alexander, who is preparing an innovative text for Black studies in high school, recently observed: "A Black kid can go through five years of high school and never read a Black author: this is an era when the 1992 Nobel prize for literature was won by Toni Morrison, and the 1993 prize for poetry by Derek Walcott" (*Toronto Star*, March 15, 1995, p. A21). Indeed, there have been recent reports in the Canadian media about how studies in Black history have been an "eye-opener for [Black] students" in Canadian high schools. One account noted that students are not taught any African or Black history in regular classes. As one student put it: "They have always taken Canadian history—prime ministers, kings, queens. Maybe some U.S. history. But they've never taken anything African" (quoted in Codjoe, 1995, p. 10). Or, as another student said at a high school in Toronto: "History, Canadian history, English or anything else, was always about White people" (quoted in Codjoe, 1995, p. 10). In a Windsor high school where a history course in African history had just begun, teachers observed how Black students were "amazed and absolutely intrigued about what they learn[ed] about the African past." Similarly, the introduction of Black history in a Toronto high school in 1993 "is part of an initiative to engage more Black students in academics, to hook in kids who come from educational jurisdictions outside Canada. Their vital interest in the course would be the means to develop their learning skills—researching, communicating, reading." Already, teachers in some Canadian schools have noticed what one called "signs of a newly informed dissent." One teacher observed that: "A few weeks ago, one of my students stood up in his Grade 11 English class and asked why there weren't any Black writers on the reading list." And

“through the influence of the Black history course, a number of ‘high-risk’ students are taking on more academically demanding courses and faring well” (quoted in Codjoe, 1995, p. 10).

I have always believed what African-American historian John Henrik Clarke said a long time ago that, to control a people you must first control what they think about themselves and how they regard their history and culture. And when your conqueror makes you ashamed of your culture and your history, he needs no prison walls and no chains to hold you. The chains on your mind are more than enough. Over time, many of us Africans have been injected with inferiority complexes, humiliation and cultural degradation as a result of the lack of knowledge of ourselves and our past. We have become caricatures and an inferior subset of the human race in the body of Western thought. Teacher, historian and educational psychologist, Asa Hilliard has said many times that no groups other than Native Americans and African Americans, in the history of the United States have undergone more defamation of character through distortion, omission, suppression of information, and genocide. African-American historian Carter Woodson (1933) wrote about how “the thought of the inferiority of the Negro is drilled into him in almost every class he enters and in almost every book he studies ... To handicap a student by teaching him that his Black face is a curse, and that his struggle to change his condition is hopeless, is the worst of lynching. It kills one’s aspirations and dooms him to vagabondage and crime” (pp. 2-3). This degradation of African peoples goes on to this day. Just witness the recent publication of Richard Herrnstein and Charles Murray’s *The Bell Curve: Intelligence and Class Structure in American Life* (1994), a book that assigns genetically inferior intelligence to African peoples everywhere. It is enough of a tragedy for colonialists and White racists to degrade Africans in this manner, but this tragedy is compounded when as Africans we join in the mockery. Therefore, to me, there can be no freedom until there is freedom of the mind. I always remember the lyric by the late Bob

Marley which said: "Emancipate yourself from mental slavery; None but ourselves can free our minds."

In his 1933 classic work, *The Miseducation of the Negro*, Woodson showed the fundamental problems concerning the education of the African person. He noted how Blacks have been educated away from their own culture and traditions and how as African peoples we have attached ourselves to European culture often to the detriment of our own heritage. Who would believe for example that, the music department of Fisk University, a traditionally Black university, concentrated on classical European music to the exclusion of the music that expressed the Black experience in America, and Black history and sociology courses were rare and exceptional until after World War I? Or that French textbooks on African history taught to African children on the African continent, even to this day, would treat French colonialism in Africa as an unqualified blessing and joy for the African? If education is ever to be substantive and meaningful within the context of North American and world history, Woodson argued, it must first address the African's historical experiences, both in Africa and the Diaspora. "No nation, no race," observed Dr. Charles Finch of the Morehouse School of Medicine "can face the future unless it knows what is capable of. This is the function of history" (cited in Codjoe, 1995, p. 12). Thus, as James Walker notes in his book, *A History of Blacks in Canada* (1980): "... the study of Black history can give Blacks a sense of the positive achievements of their people, and provide self-confidence and self-pride which are essential to any program of assertiveness" (p. 5). Martin Bernal, author of *Black Athena* (1987), has acknowledged that: "Eurocentric history as taught in schools and universities has had a very large ego-boosting, if not therapeutic, purpose for Whites ... It's in a way normal for the idea that Blacks should have some confidence building in their pedagogy" (quoted in Codjoe, 1995, p. 12).



In closing this section, I can thus say that I bring to the study some experiences and an awareness of the many issues and problems that people of African descent face in Western societies. I'm not at all immune to the conditions of Blacks. My work with Alberta Education as well as my private associations with Black youth and their parents have brought home to me the many issues facing young African-Canadians in school and the larger society. I can empathize with the concerns these students and parents have regarding the North American educational system, especially their struggles and desires for academic achievement. Over many years now, I have become very interested in the area of Black education. I am particularly interested in propagating knowledge of Black and African affairs and promoting the academic achievement of Black students. I have been very successful in producing popular literary crossword quizzes on Black and African affairs published regularly in such African and African-American magazines as *Emerge*, *QBR: The Black Book Review*, *Ghana Review International*, and *African Link*, where I also write a regular column on Black and African affairs, "Africa on My Mind." Locally, I have been involved with the Council of Black Organizations where I have served as a co-chairperson of the annual Afro-Quiz Committee for the program of Black Studies and Education, an education program sponsored by the Council and the federal Department of Canadian Heritage. The program culminates in a four-week final quiz competition during Black History Month in February and is aimed at educating children and young adults of the African Diaspora about Black and African history, politics, literature, arts and culture. In 1995, I was the chief researcher and author of *Junior Afro-Quiz: A Resource Material for Young Students, Vol. 1*. All these experiences and my formal education have enabled me to accumulate a substantial amount of first-hand knowledge of Black students' academic and social experiences and to write against a background work and interest in Black and African studies. Indeed, I acknowledge my "privileged" position in this regard and I think I can effectively provide a good interpretation of the student experiences and narratives in

this project. I believe this provides me with some credibility to see myself as the “transformative intellectual” described by Giroux and McLaren (1986) as one “who exercises forms of intellectual and pedagogical practice which attempt to insert teaching and learning directly into the political sphere by arguing that schooling represents both a struggle for meaning and a struggle over power relations. We are also referring to one whose intellectual practices are necessarily grounded in forms of moral and ethical discourse exhibiting a preferential concern for the suffering and struggles of the disadvantaged and oppressed” (p. 215).

### **1.3 A Socio-Historical Context**

#### ***1.3.1 Black/African-Canadians in the Canadian Multicultural Mosaic***

I believe it is important in the analysis of any social situation to bring a historical perspective in order to gain an understanding and appreciation of how and why certain events or situations occurred (Walker, 1985). From this, we can have some perspective about Black life and schooling in Canadian society. But before we do this, a short demographic profile of Blacks in Canada would be in order.

Compared to the United States, Canada’s Black population is fewer in absolute and relative terms. According to the 1986 census, Canada’s Black population is 355,600. This estimate excludes Blacks from Cuba, Puerto Rico, and the Dominican Republic and represents well under 2% of the Canadian population, compared to estimates of 12-14% in the United States (Christensen and Weinfeld, 1993). While Blacks in the United States are the largest non-White group, Asians are the largest non-White minority in Canada. The large majority of Canada’s Black population is of comparatively recent origin, and about 60% could be considered as foreign-born, with a much higher percentage among adults. This compares with just 3% foreign-born for the American Black population based on the 1980 U.S. census. Christensen and Weinfeld (1993) make the important point that “despite the high percentage of foreign born Blacks, slavery and its accompanying racist mythologies

have also played important roles in the unfolding condition of Canadian Blacks” (p. 29).

There is a vast literature on the history of Blacks in Canada and I’ll do my best to briefly highlight some salient points. To begin with, any examination of the history of African peoples in Canada must make the point that Canada’s African population has been drawn over a relatively long period of time from a heterogeneous geographical and cultural background. Blacks came to Canada from Africa, the United States and the Caribbean and it would therefore be both inaccurate and misleading to discuss African Canadians as if they were a monolithic group (Thakur, 1988). Secondly, it is also worth noting that from the historical evidence available, the majority of Blacks who came to Canada, except those who came through the Underground Railroad and the West Indians and Africans who arrived in the post 1960 period and later, came as a result of *involuntary migration* (see Head, 1975; Walker, 1985; Winks, 1971). And third, although the Black population in Canada has always been statistically small, it is a population which has existed in this country since the early 17th century (Head, 1975). Winks (1971) in his classic study of Blacks in Canada, points out that Blacks “have been living in Canada for nearly as long as in United States” (p. x).

Winks (1971) and others (e.g., Ashworth, 1990; Thakur, 1988) have identified a number of distinct “historical Black groups” that came to Canada in “waves” over a relatively long period of time. These distinct Black groups are identified as Slaves, Empire Loyalists, Jamaican Maroons, Refugees, Fugitive Slaves, Blacks who settled in Alberta, and Black Immigrants from the Caribbean and Africa.

It is still very difficult to convince many Canadians that slavery existed in Canada until 1833 when it was abolished throughout the British Empire (Head, 1975). Bolaria and Li (1985) note that “the most striking feature of the Black experience [in

Canada] is slavery. Blacks had been a source of 'coerced labour' under the slave system, and racism against them was a logical consequence" (p. 166). So, from the very beginning Blacks in Canada have been associated with slavery and therefore played a subordinate role in Canadian society. The record shows that the first African slave landed at Quebec in 1628, and from then until 1783 almost all Canadian Blacks were slaves whose economic function, by definition, was to serve others. Following the British conquest, more Blacks entered Canada as slaves and "enslavement became more exclusively a Black condition" (Walker, 1985, p. 8). It was from slavery, notes Walker (1985), that came "many of the stereotypical characteristics applied to Blacks, particularly notions of dependence, lack of initiative, and suitability only for service and unskilled employment. Even when slavery gradually died out in Canada, these images were nourished by the continued enslavement of Blacks in the British Empire until 1834 and in the United States until 1865" (p. 8; see also Christensen and Weinfeld, 1993, p. 30).

During the American War of Independence from 1776 through 1781, many of the Empire Loyalists fled to Canada with their slaves who became known as Black Loyalists. In 1783 some three thousand more Black Loyalists also entered Canada. They were freed by the British in order to weaken the rebel army in the South. Most settled in Nova Scotia and New Brunswick. The British failed to honour their pledge of 100-acre grants of land to each of the free Black Loyalists. And conditions in the Maritimes operated to perpetuate many of the disadvantages derived from slavery (Walker, 1985).

When slaves in Jamaica rebelled against the British plantocracies in 1734 and again in 1793, the British planters and their government in London saw Nova Scotia as a "dumping ground" for the Rebel Maroons. In 1796, 550 Maroons from Jamaica arrived in Nova Scotia and settled in areas vacated earlier by the Black Loyalists who had returned to Africa. Three years later the entire Maroon population was deported

from Nova Scotia to Sierra Leone (Krauter and Davis, 1978; Reckond, 1971; Thakur 1988). And in 1815, over 3,600 ex-slaves from the United States arrived in Canada. The ex-slaves came as a direct result of Britain's offer of freedom to every slave who would desert his or her master. These 'Black Refugees' were settled in the same socially and economically depressed areas in the Maritimes which were earlier settled by the Black Loyalists and the Maroons who had been sent to Sierra Leone (Thakur, 1988). There was also a sharp increase in the number of Blacks entering Canada after the passage in the United States of the infamous Fugitive Slave Act in 1850. The Act stated that Black free men and women, if suspected of being runaways, could be re-enslaved. Because the northern states could not provide safety for them, the Blacks saw Canada as a haven, coming through the famous underground railroad. It is estimated that by 1860 the Black population in Ontario was approximately 40,000. Others estimate the figures to be between 60,000 and 75,000 (Thakur, 1988).

Because this study focuses on Black students in Alberta, the history of the arrival and settlement of Blacks in the province would be of special interest. Just after the turn of the century, between 1907 and 1911, approximately 1,000 Black Americans, fearing persecution in the United States, immigrated to Alberta and established several small farming rural communities. The most well-known of these rural settlements were Junkins (now Wildwood), Keystone (now Breton), Campsite, near Barrhead and Amber Valley, about 20 miles from Athabasca. These isolated rural areas were selected in order to minimize contact with the wider community for fear of discrimination. But by the end of World War I, only one settlement, Amber Valley, survived despite the fact that these isolated Black communities established independent sociocultural institutions such as schools, churches, and lodges. Racial discrimination and the harsh rural conditions made it difficult for the Blacks to establish permanent settlements. Most returned to Oklahoma where they had come from. Some, especially the young men, moved to the urban centres of Edmonton and

Calgary where they found low-paying jobs as shoeshine "boys" and porters on the railroad. Others joined the army (Palmer and Palmer, 1985; Thakur, 1988).

One of the ironies of the Black settlement in Alberta was that they came at "the invitation of the railroads and the prairie government." However, as Palmer and Palmer (1985) note, by 1911 the White population became very concerned about large-scale Black immigration into the province. To allay their fears and satisfy the concerns of the province's citizens, the Commissioner of Immigration for Western Canada offered a fee to the medical officer at the border crossing for every Black rejected. Excuses such as 'Blacks did not have the physical constitution to withstand Canada's cold climate' were used to reject Blacks who applied to come to Alberta (Palmer and Palmer, 1985, p. 370; see also Winks, 1971). For example, in 1912 the Great North Railway refused to sell tickets to Blacks wanting to come to Canada and visitors, as well as settlers, were denied entry at the frontier (Head, 1975). As Shepard (1991) explains, "the Canadian reaction to the Black immigrants was plain racism" (p. 18). In fact, the institutionalized racism manifested itself in a more organized manner. For example, groups from the Edmonton area such as the Boards of Trade, the Edmonton Trades and Labour Council, women's organizations, and newspaper editors sent petitions to the federal government opposing Black immigration and advocating segregation. There were also public petitions and municipal resolutions from all three prairie provinces urging the federal government to ban further Black immigrants and to segregate those already there. An Imperial Order of the Daughters of the Empire petition, clearly reflecting stereotypes about Blacks, expressed the fear that White women would be unsafe from Black sexual aggressiveness. Newspapers in Toronto, Ottawa, and Montreal supported the Western resolutions, citing the American example as "proof" that Blacks were inferior and disruptive (Palmer and Palmer, 1985). This all culminated in an Edmonton Board of Trade petition which attracted over 3,000 signatures at a time when the city's total population was only 25,000. The petition, endorsed by the

Boards of Trade at Strathcona, Fort Saskatchewan, Calgary, and even the French-speaking village of Morinville was sent to the Prime Minister, and read as follows:

We, the undersigned residents of the city of Edmonton, respectfully urge upon your attention and upon that of the Government of which you are the head, the serious menace to the future welfare of a large portion of Western Canada, by reason of the alarming influx of Negro settlers. This influx commenced about four years ago in a very small way, only four or five families coming in the first season, followed by thirty or forty families [in the] next year. Last year several hundred Negroes arrived in Edmonton and settled in surrounding territory. Already this season nearly three hundred have arrived; and the statement is made, both by these arrivals and by press dispatches, that these are but the advanced guard of hosts to follow. We submit that the advent of such Negroes as are now here was the most unfortunate for the country, and that further arrivals in large numbers would be disastrous. We cannot admit as any factors the argument that these people may be good farmers or good citizens. It is a matter of common knowledge that Negroes and Whites cannot live in proximity without the occurrence of revolting lawlessness and the development of bitter race hatred, and the most serious question facing the United States today is the Negro problem ... There is not reason to believe that we have here a higher order of civilization, or that the introduction of a Negro problem here would have different results. We therefore respectfully urge that such steps immediately be taken by the Government of Canada as will prevent any further immigration of Negroes into Western Canada (Palmer and Palmer, 1985, p. 371-372).

As can be seen by this petition, Albertans became the major force behind the federal government's restrictions on Black immigration to Canada in 1911. Frank Oliver, Minister of the Interior and the man responsible for Canada's immigration policy, was said to be particularly susceptible to public pressure on the issue of Black immigration since many of the Blacks had taken or intended to take up farms in his home riding of Edmonton (Palmer and Palmer, 1985; see also Shepard, 1991). In September 1910, it was recommended to the government of Canada that Blacks

should be prevented from coming to Canada. The minister agreed and immediately the immigration department commenced discouraging Blacks who requested information. To be effective, the government began to apply rigorous financial and medical examinations at the border for those who did come. In the spring of 1911, when the public outcry was unbearable, the Minister of the Interior drafted an Order-in-Council to bar Black immigration. By 1912, Oklahoma Blacks seeking a new home in Alberta turned their attention to back-to-Africa movements (Palmer and Palmer, 1985).

I have made the point that the large majority of Canada's Black population is of comparatively recent origin—thanks to the British government which, in 1961, began to restrict entry into Britain for its colonial subjects. Looking for an alternative many colonial subjects, particularly many anglophone West Indians, saw Canada as a logical choice, partly because of language and culture and partly because of the Commonwealth connection. During this same period, many French West Indians, especially Haitians, went to Quebec. The West Indian immigrants were shortly joined by Blacks from Africa (Walker, 1985). Canada Manpower and Immigration statistics indicate that the Black population rose from 18,291 in 1921 to 32,127 in 1961, and between 1961 to 1981 Black population rose from 32, 127 to 144,500 (Bolaria and Li, 1985). By 1981 only 25% of the total Black population was Canadian-born. Alberta attracted its many West Indian immigrants from Trinidad who had developed a high level of technical competence in their oil-based economy. Unlike many Blacks from the U.S., the West Indians are academically and technically more highly qualified as a group (Thakur, 1988).

Walker (1985) sums up the Black historical experience in Canada as follows:

Discrimination against Blacks in Canada can be traced historically, through the interplay between imported images and Canadian events. Its roots lay in slavery, where the relationship of structured inequality was initiated ... The Black experience demonstrates that racial



discrimination in Canada has not been linked directly to numbers, cultural differences, economic depression, or prosperity. Legal reforms have restrained openly hostile behaviour, but they have not affected the essential factors leading to discrimination. The historical record reveals that the basic issue in Canada has been racial stereotyping—the assignment of personal characteristics, economic opportunity, and social acceptance on the basis of perceived attributes—and, further, that those stereotypes were founded on ignorance, hearsay, and coincidence. The problem is embedded in history, and historical understanding is essential to unlocking solutions with any promise of success (pp. 22, 24).

### ***1.3.2 Black/African-Canadians and Education in Canada***

*The segregation of many Black children in all-Black schools until the mid-1960s was one prime example of the special burden, the burden of White prejudice, discrimination and oppression that Blacks have endured.*

Royal Commission on the  
Donald Marshall, Jr., Prosecution

Since my focus in this research is on education, the history of Blacks in Canada will not be complete without a brief account of the history of the education of Blacks in Canada. I believe this overview will serve as a backdrop for our discussions about contemporary issues in the education of Blacks in Canada.

Winks (1971) has made the point that it is not widely known that the history of the education of Blacks in Canada is one of entrenched discrimination and legal segregation as that which existed in the United States. Walker (1980), for example, has referred to the education of Blacks in Ontario during the 19th century as part of a "colour line." He writes that: "By circumstance and public attitude, a colour line was drawn in Canada which affected the economic and social life of Blacks. The various attempts to give legal sanction to the line failed universally except in one important area: Blacks were denied equal use of public schools in Nova Scotia and Ontario, and

this division was recognized by law. The most important manifestation of colour prejudice in Canadian history is in education" (p. 107; see also Brathwaite, 1989, p. 198).

During the 19th century, intense prejudice directed toward Black children made it almost impossible for them to achieve equality of educational opportunity. For example, Ontario's Egerton Ryerson suggested in 1847 that Blacks have separate schools because of the intense prejudice against them. He reported that in spite of efforts he had made to change people's attitudes, "the prejudices and feelings of the people are stronger than the law" (quoted in Ashworth, 1990). To provide an alternative to the public school system and ward off the hatred towards Black children, the church in the early stages organized education for Black children (Winks, 1971). But this was not enough as Whites worked unceasingly to remove Black children from the public schools. The Black community fought back as was the case in Hamilton, Ontario, where in 1843 the Black residents of the city petitioned the Governor General, Lord Elgin, to allow their children access to the public schools. They complained that even after paying their taxes, they were denied use of the schools even after an appeal to the local board of police for help. They wrote in their petition that "[T]his kind of treatment is not in the United States [*sic*], for the children of colour go to the Public Schools together with the White children, [while in Hamilton], we are called nigger when we go out on the street" (Winks, 1971, p. 367). But all this fell on deaf ears as the pressure for segregating Blacks persisted across Canada. White residents refused to have their children attend the same schools as Black children. There were riots in Hamilton when parents tried to prevent Black students from attending the same schools as White students (Thakur, 1988; Walker, 1980). In the end it led to provincial governments creating separate school facilities for Blacks (Solomon, 1992). For example, segregated education was legalized in Ontario in 1849 by a statute which allowed local municipal councils to establish separate schools for Blacks wherever the need arose. The Separate Schools Act also

allowed local officials to establish separate schools for Black children when five or more Blacks petitioned for such schools, a device exploited by the White community to force all Blacks into separate schools in certain areas in Ontario. In 1848, the New Brunswick Legislature provided a grant for a "Negro" day school near Loch Lomond. And the Nova Scotia Education Act of 1918 allowed school inspectors to recommend separate schools for different races, but where Black schools did not exist, Black children could not be excluded from the public schools. Some Blacks resisted the attempts for school segregation by bringing court cases on behalf of their children against various boards, but often they had neither the financial resources nor sufficient knowledge of the law to bring them to successful conclusions (Ashworth, 1990).

The segregated schools established for Blacks were nothing more than dumping grounds. Writing about Nova Scotia, Winks (1971) notes that education for Blacks in that province was "mechanical, rooted in an increasingly outgrown curriculum, badly taught in unattractive buildings by only semi-literate teachers" (p. 364). As well, Pachai (Black Learners Advisory Committee [BLAC], 1994) in her *History of Black Education in Nova Scotia*, remarks that the Nova Scotia government did not provide equivalent facilities, equipment or supplies as in White-run public schools to the Black schools. Black students and their teachers had little support equipment, an insufficient number of textbooks (which were often outdated) and a constant lack of supplies, not to mention the dilapidated, unheated buildings in which the Black students were taught. Parents, teachers, and even government school inspectors complained, but nothing was done to address the glaring imbalance and uneven distribution of school equipment between Black and White schools—a condition which lasted for almost a century and a half, until the late 1970s (BLAC, 1994). Similar conditions of "inferior buildings, equipment and in the qualifications of teachers" also existed in Ontario (Head, 1975, p. 12; Solomon, 1992).

As the years passed and with changing public opinion, more and more of these segregated Black schools fell into disuse. By the end of the 19th century, the separate schools in Ontario were used less and less, and by 1917, the last remaining schools were closed. However, it took 114 years of continuous efforts to have reference of separate schools for Blacks removed from the legal statutes in Ontario, a feat accomplished by Leonard Braithwaite, a Black member of the Lower House of the Ontario Legislature in 1964. In 1965, the last segregated school in Ontario was closed. In Nova Scotia, procrastination allowed segregated schools to continue for a longer period (Ashworth, 1990; Head, 1975; Solomon, 1992).

From this historical analysis—one that paints ‘the picture of a racial group subordinated by Whites and alienated from the mainstream’—a number of conclusions can be drawn to explain contemporary Black conditions in Canada. The most important of all is that “Blacks were not only alienated from the dominant group, but from each other. They were fragmented into regional pockets from Nova Scotia in the east to British Columbia in the west with very few linkages that would help in the building of a Black national identity. [Furthermore], Black ethnicity and social class became divisive forces as such groups as the old-line Loyalists flaunted superiority to fugitive-line Blacks or descendants of the Jamaican Maroons” (Solomon, 1992, p. 20). Echoing a similar sentiment, Winks (1971) has characterized Canadian Blacks as “divided, withdrawn [and] without a substantial body of shared historical experience” or a “national heritage to fall back on for self-identification” (p. 477). With this as background, let us now turn our attention to some current issues in the education of Blacks in Canada.

### ***1.3.3 Current Issues in the Education of Black Students in Canada***

Within the context of contemporary Canadian education, Brathwaite (1989) has observed that Black students and their parents occupy an unequal position and that their interest is not served to any significant degree by the schools and

institutions which regulate their lives and their future in this country (Walker, 1991). In fact, the school is one institution in which Blacks as a group are lagging behind. Today, the educational issues and social problems facing the Black community are broad and far-reaching. Canadian Black parents and educators have begun to raise serious concerns about the plight of Black students in Canadian schools. For example, the complaints raised by the Organization of Parents of Black Children with the Associate Director, Toronto Board of Education, on November 28, 1985, are important to a discussion of the condition of Black students in Canada. Among a list of complaints and observations, they noted the following:

- the low level of teacher expectations of Black student achievement
- the high drop-out rate among Black students
- the assumptions that Black people are not part of the fabric of Canadian society
- the over-representation of Black students in non-academic schools (Brathwaite 1989; see also Ladson-Billings and Henry, 1990; O'Malley, 1992).

The following report in a 1993 *The Globe and Mail* story is typical:

[One Toronto high school with a 40% Black student population is] beset by a problem that pervades many downtown highs, namely, dismal academic performance by young Black students, particularly males. In six years since [the school's] transition from a vocational school to a secondary institute, not one Black male student has been accepted by a university on academic merit ... [A teacher remarked that], for Black students, coming to [the school] and getting into university have almost been mutually exclusive. Community college is just about the most they have been able to hope for. And the kids in the vocational programs are basically sentenced to life at the end of a broom (Joyce, 1993, p. A3).

During hearings for the recently completed Royal Commission on Learning in Ontario, "Black students, teachers, parents, and community leaders came to the Commission and expressed serious concerns about the achievement levels of their

young people. They expressed frustration over a lack of improvement over the years, during which time they have voiced their concerns to school boards and to the Ministry. They are concerned about the future of young Blacks who, without a secondary school diploma (let alone a college diploma or university degree), face limited job prospects, social marginalization, and personal defeat. These presenters argued forcefully that the education system is failing Black students, and that there is an education crisis in their community” (*Report of the Royal Commission on Learning*, 1994, p. 92). Based on these strong and passionate presentations from the Black community, the Commission agreed that “there is a crisis among Black youth with respect to education and achievement” (p. 93). Stephen Lewis, in his 1992 *Report on Racism* also sums up the problem this way: “It’s as if virtually nothing has changed for ‘visible’ minority kids in the school system over the last ten years... The lack of progress is shocking” (*Towards a New Beginning*, 1992, p. 78).

There is now a growing body of evidence which supports these complaints and points to underachievement among Black students, streaming of them in large numbers in the basic and general levels of education, a significant drop-out rate from high school among them, a low percentage of university entry and high Black youth unemployment (see *Draft Report of the Consultative Committee on the Education of Black Students in Toronto Schools*, June 1987). Studies have also shown that although Black children have shown increased performance on most standardized tests of reading and mathematics, they score significantly lower than Whites and Asians. For example, a Toronto Board of Education report (1988) notes that African Canadian students (many of whom participate in an Afro-Caribbean culture) are experiencing high dropout rates, low self-esteem, overrepresentation in low academic tracks, and lower academic achievement than other racial and ethnic groups. Black students are more likely than White students to be enrolled in general and vocational tracks and take fewer academically rigorous courses. According to Statistics Canada, only 6% of Toronto Blacks in the 1986 census were university graduates, compared with 20% of

those of Chinese or Indo-Pakistani background. The Toronto Board of Education studied the progress of Black students versus Whites and Asians in high school in 1992 and found dramatically higher percentage of Blacks in basic school programs, which emphasize vocational education rather than academic training. One out of every 33 Asian students was enrolled in a basic program, while the number for Whites was one in 10. For Blacks, it was one in five. Other data from the Board indicate that 9% of its secondary school students in 1991-92 were Black; in that year, Blacks made up only 7% of students in the advanced level, but 16% and 18% of the general and basic levels respectively. Between 1987 and 1991, there was a slight increase in the proportion of Black students studying at the advanced level. The Board of Education for the City of York has also compiled comprehensive data on the achievement levels of various subpopulations. Their data also found that Black students are less likely to be taking advanced-level English and, in particular, are less likely to take math courses. Only 44% of Black students were in the advanced math course, compared to a significantly greater percentage of other students (*Report of the Royal Commission on Learning*, 1994; see also Crichlow, 1994).

Also particularly alarming are the growing dropout figures for Black youngsters. The problem for Black students seems to begin as soon as they enter high school. While a greater percentage of Blacks than Whites make it as far as Grade 9, their numbers drop off considerably the higher they go up the education ladder. Only 6% end up with a university degree, well below the city (Toronto) average of 13%. A study completed in 1990 by Ontario's Ministry of Citizenship showed a considerably higher school dropout rate for Black students than for students of other races. Another study in 1991 by the Toronto Board of Education showed that 36% of Black students were at risk of dropping out because they had failed to accumulate enough credits, as compared with 26% of White students and 18% of Asian students (see Sarick, 1995b). In Radwanski's (1987) study, *Ontario Study of the Relevance of Education, and the Issue of Dropouts*, he found that a significant percentage of Black

students are indeed failing in school, and that they are strongly represented in the near 80% of students who dropout of the Basic level programmes into unemployment or marginal employment. In a separate analysis, the Toronto Board of Education tracked students who were in Grade 9 in 1987 and analyzed their record of achievement, based on results at the end of 1992. It found that 42% of the Black, 1987, Grade 9 students had left the system by the end of 1992 without graduating. It also found that, even among those whose parents were in semi-professional occupations, Black students were more likely to drop out (*For the Love of Learning*, 1994). Stephen Lewis sums it all when he writes in his June 1992 report to the Ontario government, *Consultative Report on Race Relations*, that: "... it is Black youth that is unemployed in excessive numbers, it is Black students who are being inappropriately streamed in schools, it is Black kids who are disproportionately dropping out" (p. 2).

And quite recently, the Toronto Board of Education released its study on student achievement in Toronto secondary schools (Grades 9 to 13), which includes comparisons of performance based on class, sex and race. By race, the data show that among Whites, achievement is almost evenly distributed across four levels of performance (about 25% in each quartile). Among Asians, 35% are in the highest group, compared with 13% of Blacks and 10% of aboriginals. The study also found that students with Portuguese or Black Caribbean backgrounds have by far the lowest expectations of going to university (*The Globe and Mail*, February 18, 1995, p. D6; *Toronto Star*, March 4, 1995, p. B5). It has also just been reported that a study by the Black Learners Advisory Committee, a government-appointed body in Nova Scotia, paints a bleak picture of the province's Black students. The report notes low achievement, low self-esteem and lower teacher expectations as major obstacles faced by Nova Scotia's 4,100 Black students. It found that Black students not only lag behind their peers academically, but are at higher risk of being suspended from school and, once they leave, are more likely to be unemployed or trapped in low-paying jobs. The report notes that "racial discrimination is one of the major reasons Black Nova



Scotians fail to complete secondary school” (*The Globe and Mail*, March 13, 1995, p. A4). Indeed, the issue of racism is quite troubling for Black students and parents. For example a year-long study in Manitoba concluded that “racism is running rampant in Winnipeg schools and is forcing many Black students to drop out of the system” (Canadian Press Newstex, December 5, 1993). About 81% of more than 200 Black students interviewed by the study authors identified racism as a major barrier blocking integration of Blacks into the Winnipeg school system. According to Jean-Joseph Isme, one of the authors of the report, “Racism is one of the major causes of dismissals and suspensions of Black youth from schools,” and notes that “the impact of racial insults on the mental health of [Black] youths cannot be ignored” (Thompson and Isme, 1993). In Ontario, a similar study also discovered that “Black students encounter discrimination daily on an individual level. They must deal with racial slurs, vicious graffiti, ostracism on the part of their fellow students. Many feel that it is no use complaining to the authorities about this, since they believe that the teachers and the administrators are themselves racist” (*Towards a New Beginning*, 1992, p. 79). Commenting on the January 1989 fights that broke out between Black and White students in a Nova Scotia high school, Bridglal Pachai, director of Nova Scotia’s Black Cultural Centre, remarked that: “They [Black students] live it every day. They receive racial taunts, they know that every day when they leave home for school it’s another day of uncertainty, another day of adventure, another day of hope and fear” (*The Globe and Mail*, January 21, 1989, p. D1).

Coupled with the issue of racism is the continuing lowering of expectations of the capabilities of Black students. In a 1992 study of *Blacks in Post-Secondary Institutions in Ontario*, Patricia Daenzer (cited in *Towards a New Beginning*, 1992) quotes students as saying that Blacks are believed to be inferior “... hence teachers have lower expectations of us ... Schools with a large population of Black students tend to have lower standards” (p. 78). The study also found that Black students are encouraged to drop courses, leave school and work part-time, abandon aspirations

about post-secondary education, or focus on basic-level courses. The fact that students can do little to correct these negative perceptions leads to a high level of frustration and 'festering tensions.' It should be noted that the perception that Black students as a group cannot achieve as highly academically as some other groups has its origins in a racism which is pervasive in the institutions in which they are educated. In what has been called the 'ideological construction of Black underachievement,' many Whites and educators still believe that Black students' school failures are related to their inferior intelligence. We cannot therefore ignore racism and the devalued position of Blacks in our society as primary contributing factors to Black underachievement. The situation demands a search for successful approaches for educating Black students in societies which claim to be democratic (Ladson-Billings and Henry, 1990; *Towards a New Beginning*, 1992; Watkins, 1993).

In recent times, dissatisfaction with mainstream educational practices has led Black educators and Black community groups to mobilize and define their own educational agenda, and to seek alternative models and approaches for educating their children. A number of approaches aimed at "combatting deculturalization of the Black child" have been suggested, developed, and implemented. These reforms and initiatives are aimed at reversing the pattern of school failure among Black students. Some of these have included the establishment of Black-focused schools (Boateng, 1990; Cummins, 1986; Dei, 1995a). For example, in Toronto a provincial committee called the African Canadian Community Working Group released a report in November 1992 that proposed that one predominantly Black junior high school in each of Toronto's six municipalities become a pilot Black-focused institution. The schools will be aimed mostly at Black students, supported by a modified Afrocentric curriculum, minority teachers and a strong link to the community. George Dei, a professor at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education and a member of the Organization of Parents of Black Children in Toronto, said in a *Globe and Mail*

report: "We need it on an experimental basis; there are kids who are having problems at school" (Lewington, 1995, p. D5; Dei, 1995a).

In Calgary, a Black Heritage School has been opened by the Black community and provides Saturday morning tutoring classes for Black students. Along with math tutoring and appreciation for Black and African cultures, students learn "to be happy about [their] colour, and how to ignore" taunting children. The school's goals are "to help kids develop a sense of pride, and to work hard at what they do" (Adams, 1993, p. C2). And in Nova Scotia, a Black studies video series and resource package aimed at fighting racism in schools was launched in 1994 as part of Black History Month. Schools across the province will have access to the material, which uses methods such as simulated racist confrontations, group discussions and exercises to promote better race relations. Video topics include Black history and culture in Nova Scotia, racism in schools, and race relations policy development. Additionally, in response to a report on education prepared by the Black Learners Advisory Committee, the Nova Scotia government will spend up to \$1 million a year on a variety of support programs for Black people, from scholarships for student teachers to after-school programs for children. Legislation will be introduced to create "an Afrocentric Learning Institute [that] will develop curriculum and conduct research on issues affecting Black learners. [As well], cross-cultural and race relations training will become a prerequisite for admission to teacher-training programs, and the [Education] department will establish a new Affirmative Action Coordinating Committee to promote equitable hiring and race relations training, [including] a new African-Canadian Services Division for the Department of Education" (see Canadian Press Report, June 29, 1995; *The Globe and Mail*, June 30, 1995, P. A3).

Quite recently, Ontario's Ministry of Education issued a directive, "Antiracism and Ethnocultural Equity in School Boards" requiring that by September 1995, boards will be required to put into place comprehensive and detailed plans to

combat bias on ethnic or racial grounds (Cumming and MacKay, 1994). For example, the policy requires drastic changes to the school curriculum to move away from the traditional focus on “the values, experiences, achievements and perspectives of White-European members of Canadian society [that] excludes or distorts those of other groups in Canada and throughout the world” (*Ottawa Citizen*, February 2, 1994, p. A4).

#### 1.4 Research Problem

*While many researchers have focused on describing and explaining the low academic performance of poor minority children, an alternative direction is more productive. That direction involves identifying minority students who are academically successful in school and determining what factors are associated with their success. In particular, there is a need to identify what Bloom calls ‘alterable variables’ which are associated with those students’ academic success.*

*Diane S. Pollard*  
Against the Odds: A Profile of  
Academic Achievers from the Urban Underclass

As previously noted, much of the literature and commentary (as seen just above) have overemphasized school failure and underachievement among Black students. Indeed, research on minority students’ academic failures has attracted more attention than research on their successes (see for example, McDermott, 1987; Ogbu, 1978; Trueba, 1988). Even more absent are studies that “point out the salience of affective variables in explaining high-school success and aspirations of Black youth” (Wilson-Sadberry et al., 1991, p. 90). When it comes to research on Black students, the situation is quite grave: there is minimal educational literature about Black students in Canada (Henry, 1993). The little research that has been conducted about Black students in Canada’s public school systems has been done mostly in Ontario.

In Alberta, I am only aware of two research reports about Black students in the province. The following is a short review of some of these research projects.

George Dei's (1996) *Black/African-Canadian Students' Perspectives on School Racism*, "examines real and perceived individual aspects of racism and sexism, as well as other oppressive and discriminatory practices that structure and organize public schooling in the Canadian context" (p. 42). Dei (1996) advances the argument that "[Black] students' views on school racism, whether real or perceived, constitute legitimate grounds and concerns for all educators to take seriously if we are to address the fundamental issues of educational equity and the 'inclusive' school environment. Educators need to interrogate the ways in which racist ideas become entrenched in the institutional structures and practices of schooling" (pp. 42-43). Early in December 1995, Dei published a new report entitled, *Drop Out Or Push Out?: The Dynamics of Black Students' Disengagement From School*, a study based on "interviews with students, drop-outs, students 'at risk' of dropping out, teachers, parents and community workers" (Dei, 1995c). Following Dei, Patricia Daenzer of McMaster University released a study in December 1995 that surveyed 334 Black dropouts in four Ontario cities for the Canadian Alliance of Black Educators (Sarick, 1995b). Also in Ontario, Patrick Solomon produced the results of his research in book *Black Resistance in High School* (1992), a case study that examined the school experiences of West Indian children in a high school in Metropolitan Toronto—mainly how minorities fail to achieve upward social mobility through education.

In Alberta, Andra Thakur has produced a research monograph on *The Impact of Schooling on Visible Minorities: A Case Study of Black Students in Alberta Secondary Schools* (1988). Using a questionnaire and a case study approach, Thakur attempted to find relationships, for example, between sports and academic performance of Black students. In 1994, a needs assessment study of immigrant youth, age 14 to 19 by the Mennonite Centre for Newcomers included Black youth in

Alberta's schools as part of its sample (Seifeddine, 1994). And quite recently, Jennifer Spencer (1995) completed an M.A. Thesis in the Department of Educational Policy Studies, University of Alberta. Titled *Under the Gaze: The Experiences of African Canadian Students in Two Edmonton High Schools*, the study is based on "research conducted in two Canadian high schools, [and] examines the experiences of African Canadian school students. It discusses how these students gain knowledge about themselves, form their identities, and interact with dominant White society's view of African Canadians" (Spencer, 1995, p. ii).

I argue that these studies rarely document and investigate the successful educational experiences of Black students. They continue to be part of the research that operates with a "deficit model," and emphasizes only the problems of minority members rather than strengths or coping mechanism (McHenry et al., 1989). I have already made the point that, although Black students score lower than White students on achievement tests, considerable numbers of Black students are high achievers. What accounts for the relative success of these students is seldom the focus of research in minority education. Pollard (1989) is correct in pointing out that:

While many researchers have focused on describing and explaining the low academic performance of poor minority children, an alternative direction is more productive. That direction involves identifying minority students who are academically successful in school and determining what factors are associated with their success. In particular, there is a need to identify what Bloom calls 'alterable variables' which are associated with those students' academic success (p. 298).

It is thus the premise of this study that, "because many are a minority in their communities insofar as academic success is concerned, understanding how [some Black students] have succeeded in spite of the odds against them is vital" (Nieto, 1994, p. 225; see also Reynolds, 1993). The project attempts "to respond to the imperative need for redirecting social-science research from the often hopeless and

stereotypical study of educational failure to the heartening exploration of new and creative ways of meeting the needs of minority ... students ... Our concern is for the attainment of a balance between what Giroux calls the *language of critique* and the *language of hope*" (Ernst and Statzner, 1994, p. 205).

In order to learn about and document the examples of success stories of minority students, I interviewed Blacks who have excelled in Alberta's educational system. Most importantly, I paid "attention ... to how these students were able to 'work the system' to achieve their goal of educational success while creating their own culture and resisting incorporation into a White cultural identity" (Henry, 1994, p. 145). Consequently, my dissertation project addressed the following research problem: *What can we learn from the narratives of Black students' academic and personal successes—shared through their perspectives regarding experiences, identity, schooling, culture, values, languages, skills, expectations and lifestyles—that can contribute to the sources and strength of factors contributing to Black educational achievement?* In other words, in spite of their marginal status, what significant factors influence Black student achievement and success? The central concept of my inquiry is resilience, defined as "exhibiting functional competence despite the presence of multiple risk factors. Inherent in this term is the ability to bounce back or recoil in the face of significant disadvantage" (Reynolds, 1993, p. 3).

As a guide to the study, I proposed the following generic issues to help explore students' thoughts and recollections. They are clustered around three major themes (major sociocultural contexts of learning).

#### *Racial/Ethnic Identity Formation*

- cultural identity and conflicts
- self-esteem/concept
- feelings of alienation

- racism/sexism
- critical incidents/events/experiences (experience related to race and difference)
- Blackness and Canadian identity
- position/viewpoint on Canadian multiculturalism/diversity
- home language
- family and cultural strengths.

#### *Home/Family/Community Factors*

- home environment
- role of parents and family
- family pressures, expectations and responsibilities
- parental involvement
- socioeconomic class/background
- extracurricular activities
- family and community support
- cultural values
- friendships
- family expectations/values
- equality of life chances
- media
- role of family/community in identity formation.
- personal responsibility.

#### *School/Schooling Experiences*

- academic program in school
- school disciplinary practices and policies
- Black representation and identity in the school curriculum
- multicultural/antiracist education programs



- role of teachers and administrators
- teacher-student relationships
- racial/ethnic make-up of the teaching/professional/administrative staff
- inter- and intra-group cultural/racial conflicts
- racial/ethnic make-up of the student body
- positive experiences
- peer group pressures and conformity
- strategies/coping and adjustment to the Alberta educational system
- role of school in identity formation
- pedagogy
- tracking
- learning styles
- classroom projects and activities
- student counselling
- social labelling and stereotyping
- equality of (educational) opportunity
- sexist and discriminatory behaviour
- fairness and equality
- racism.

Through the examination of these issues by way of an in-depth study of how family, community, and school develop environments for success, my main learning objective was to examine the cases of academically successful Black students from diverse cultural, linguistic, and economic backgrounds and how their experiences add to, and inform our understanding of the ways in which African-Canadian youth can achieve success in our schools. As Nieto (1992) notes, "their experiences provide concrete evidence that academic success defies and challenges the easy categorization and negative expectations teachers, schools, and society often have for [Black]

students. [And] even more important, their experiences point to specific factors in the home, school, and community that have contributed to their success” (p. 248). And it is “only by listening to students can we learn how they experience school, how social and educational structures affect their learning, and what we can do to provide high-quality education for all students.” I like the observation made by Nieto (1992) on this point:

Educational researchers, teachers, and policymakers have all had their say in what causes school achievement or failure. The voices of students are rarely heard in the sometimes heated debate surrounding school failure and success. The experiences of students from disempowered and dominated communities are usually even more invisible. [S]tudies [such as these] provide an important vehicle for these voices. In [these studies] young people speak freely about their schooling, their families, and their communities. They ‘think out loud,’ so to speak, about what they like and dislike about school, teachers who have made a difference in their lives, their culture and language, and what they expect to get out of school. Through [this study], it is hoped that readers will hear not only the students’ pain and conflict but also their determination and hope (p. 5).

It is hoped that the perspectives of these students would afford us an opportunity to learn about how race, gender, class, and culture interact with schooling to affect Black students’ learning and educational experiences. And it would lead to steps toward the development of a theoretical framework of Black school achievement and its consequences for how the family, community, and school support the educational achievement of their children, as well as to inform multicultural educational policy and practice (Perry, 1993). In short, this dissertation “is not simply about telling the tale of [educational] woes which currently befall Black people ... Rather it is also about the staying power of Black people, the spirit of striving” (Small, 1994, p. 44).

### **1.5 Purpose and Objectives of the Study**

The primary purpose of this study is to examine the experiences and narratives of Black/African Canadian student graduates in order to learn and document some of the significant factors that influence and contribute to Black educational achievement. The basic issue and the common concern underlying this research is the academic and personal success of Black students. It is hoped that the study will achieve the following objectives:

- to address the phenomenon of Black school success, exploring individual, family, and school factors that influence achievement—providing a model of successful Black academic achievement which hopefully can be adopted by others
- to develop a vehicle for the sharing and dissemination of a unique body of information about the Black educational experience in Alberta
- to promote and add to the growing body of research on Black education in Canada and contribute to the emerging literature on “the new and more hopeful perspectives, on the success stories and the learned lessons that can help us face the educational challenge of the 21st century” (Trueba, 1994, p. 376)
- to draw some implications for school policies, organization and practices that will help the school success of Black and minority students
- to attempt to broaden our notions of what it means to be successful in school to include cultural and sociopolitical competence as well as academic achievement (Ladson-Billings, 1995a)
- to identify promising intervention strategies for enhancing Black and minority children’s school success (Reynolds, 1993)
- to allow students themselves to communicate their perspectives, to tell their own stories and relying on their experiences, rather than on the perceptions of teachers, administrators and parents.

## 1.6 Why the Focus on Black Students

*[Race] has its own unique influence on the school experiences and outcomes of Black children and similar minorities which is not explained by reference to socioeconomic factors, or class struggle.*

*John Ogbu*

Class Stratification, Racial Stratification, and Schooling

*[E]ducation is still the primary key to improving the self-concept, self-esteem, academic performance, and economic opportunities of the African [Canadian].*

BLAC Report on Education

When I decided to exclusively focus my research on Black students, I asked myself, "What would I say if someone were to ask: 'Why the focus on Black students? Why not Asian or other minority students?'" Why am I so concerned about Black students? It should apparently be clear by now, but I thought perhaps I should spend some time to attempt to answer the question: "Why Black students?"

In reading Ruth Frankenberg's *White Women, Race Matters: The Social Construction of Whiteness* (1993) as background material for this project, I was struck by a point she made concerning a "dimension of racial discourse" which led me decide to make a note about my focus on Black students. Frankenberg (1993) correctly observes that:

Racist discourse frequently accords a hypervisibility to African Americans [Blacks] and a relative invisibility to Asian Americans and Native Americans; Latinos are also relatively less visible than African Americans in discursive terms ... Two White women [whom she interviewed for her book] explicitly singled out African Americans as "racial others," in contrast to Latinos and Asians, viewed as "culturally" but not "racially" different from White people (p. 12).

In fact, Frankenberg (1993) further notes, we all "live racially structured lives. In other words, any system of differentiation shapes those on whom it bestows privilege

as well as those it oppresses" (p. 1). She continues: "Race, like gender, is 'real' in the sense that it has real, tangible, and complex impact on individuals' sense of self, experiences, and life chances" (Frankenberg, 1993, p. 11). Or as Marable (1992b) points out, "race continues to be a decisive variable in the national structure of power, privilege, and class exploitation" (p. 292). So, despite the provocative thesis advanced by William Julius Wilson in his *The Declining Significance of Race* (1980), I'll agree with West (1993) that, undoubtedly, race still matters. For people of African descent, there is no escape, a point made eloquently by Marian Wright Edelman in her book, *The Measure of Our Success: A Letter to My Children and Yours*: "It is utterly exhausting being Black—physically, mentally, and emotionally ... There is no respite or escape from your badge of color" (quoted in Feagin and Sikes, 1994, p. 3). Canada is no different. As Bolaria and Li (1985) note, race/ethnicity and culture affects how one experiences life within Canadian society. And for Blacks, Henry (1994) remarks that, "race and the construction of racism play a powerful role in the differential incorporation of the Black community in Canada" (p. 22). Christensen and Weinfeld (1993) further add that "Blacks and Caribbean immigrants continue to be victimized more than other minority groups ... Thus racism faced by Black Canadians may well be more deeply rooted than that directed at other visible minority groups" (p. 31). Small (1994) makes a powerful argument in this regard:

The problem with a focus on Black people alone is that it conceives the Black population as a 'cause' of racialised antagonism, rather it being a consequence of White attitudes and actions. One of the most invidious outcomes of all this is that Black people continue to be the focus of the main focus of the magnifying glass in attempts to understand 'race relations': it is as if the problems inhere in 'race' or skin colour. But in fact, the problem is not 'race' but 'racisms,' not relations between 'races' but relations which have been racialised, not the physical attributes of Blacks or their presumed inferiority, but the motivations of non-Blacks, and the obstacles they impose (p. 30).

So, what's my point? First, I am trying to make the argument that "issues of race and racism are significant subject matters in the education of youths, particularly, in multiethnic societies, [and that] race continues to have much currency in contemporary society" (Dei, 1996, p. 59). Indeed, in the education of Blacks, it has been documented that "race alone is a salient factor that contributes to unequal treatment, participation, and distribution of rewards for all Black students, [and therefore] racism and the devalued position of Blacks in our society cannot be ignored as a primary contributing factor to Black underachievement" (Irvine, 1990, pp. xxii, 4; see also Christensen and Weinfeld, 1993, p. 31). When it comes to education and schooling, we often hear expressions that schools are or should be colour-blind, class-blind, gender-blind and neutral regarding differences. But in practice, as Tyack (1995) points out, "such neutrality is difficult if not impossible to achieve, for schooling is intrinsically value-laden and there are vast differences in power, wealth, and income between groups" (p. 10; see also Thakur, 1988, p. 19).

Second, because of "the persistence of racial antagonisms and the manner in which they are reflected in systems of inequality and forms of injustice," there is some justification to focus on Black students, especially given that "the majority are at risk of being pushed out or dropping out" (Dei, 1995c, p. A31) to "point to such relative success stories where race has been a significant factor ... with regards to [positive] educational [outcomes]" (Morrow and Torres, 1995, p. 378). This, in my view, is very crucial because "in a postindustrial context education has become even more important for later success in a high technology economy, and yet strong associations persist between social-class background and racial-ethnic status ... and educational achievement and attainment ... making it relatively more difficult for many [Black] citizens to take advantage of economic opportunity" (quoted in Morrow and Torres, 1995, p. 381). I believe as other concerned Black educators do that education is, after all, "the pathway most of us will travel" and it offers the most accessible route to addressing the sociocultural factors that force a disproportionate

number of Black children, especially males, to act in socially deviant ways. Black students must have academic excellence as an attainable goal. Education, especially school, has been and will continue to be the most important institution for Blacks because other major social and economic institutions which facilitate social mobility remain inaccessible for the majority of Blacks. In fact, it's been found that education and career aspirations are powerful predictors of later success among African-Americans (Boehm-Hill, 1993; Hampton, cited in Hayes, 1996; Thakur, 1988; Wilson-Sadberry et al., 1991).

Third, by focusing on Black students I am hoping to "revers[e] the historical inferiorization and marginalization of the Black youth in the public school system" (Dei, 1995a; Oliver, 1989) and to direct attention to Black students who are successful in educational terms. So often, Africans are deemed as not worthy of study, or their population as in Alberta and Canada is so small that they are not worthy of study (Thakur, 1988). I am reminded of the experience of Spencer (1995) when conducting her research on Black students in Edmonton:

I was constantly questioned as to what I meant by "Black" students and this continued to be a query for others throughout the stages of my research. For teachers, and fellow students the very fact of highlighting the "Black" population seemed controversial, as they indicated, 'There are not many in Edmonton are there?' ... The response of students and teachers to my research area perhaps reflects the narrow confines of research usually associated with Blacks, namely that as a group we are only worthy of research if we present a problem to the dominant White society (p. 3).

With my focus on Black students, I am making a *political* statement that African-Canadian students do matter and are worthy of study and to express "an undeniable aspect of the Black experience":

First, there are many examples of individuals and communities that have fought against racialized imperatives, that have gone beyond

survival to success. Their success should be an inspiration to us. Second, in general this tale is also the source of our future—the struggles and strivings, the resistance and resilience, the spirit and soul which has sustained Black people through conquest and colonization, international and internal. We can conclude that we must take spirit and inspiration from the fact that we are still here, determined, obstinate, obdurate, and that we refuse to give up (Small, 1994, pp. 43-44).

### 1.7 The Significance of Research

*Black educational theory and practice have not been a priority in mainstream Canadian education.*

*Annette Henry*  
Missing: Black Self-Representations in  
Canadian Educational Research

My decision to undertake this research was strongly motivated by the relative lack of research and studies on Black and minority students (Talbani, 1991), especially in Western Canada, as well as my desire to understand issues in Black academic success and achievement. As I stated earlier, research on Black students has disproportionately focused on school failure. Very few studies have been carried out on successful Black educational experiences (see Hymas and Cohen, 1994). I believe it would be a significant contribution to the research on Black education in North America to interpret, explore and explain what accounts for the relative success of some Black students; investigate how families, communities and activities outside of the classroom support and promote academic excellence of minority students; and explore what minority students mean by success. In this regard, Perry (1993) has for example, noted that, “discussions of [Black] school achievement need to focus on the extra-cognitive, social, and emotional competencies that [Black students] need in order to succeed in school” (p. 1). The goal is to be positive and find creative solutions to promoting academic success of Black students than is typical of research in this area (Lee et al., 1991). I agree with Henry’s (1993) observation that as “Black Canadian



scholars, we need to conduct research relevant to the lived realities of Black communities” (p. 211).

Moreover, on a much broader level, there is an urgency for an educational system that is more inclusive and is capable of responding to minority concerns about public schooling. As Giroux (1994a) correctly points out:

Within the next century, educators will not be able to ignore the hard questions that schools will have to face regarding issues of multiculturalism, race, identity, power, knowledge, ethics, and work. These issues will play a major role in defining the meaning and purpose of schooling, the relationship between teachers and students, and the critical content of their exchange in terms of how to live in a world that will be vastly globalized, high tech, and racially diverse than any other time in history (p. 280).

I believe that educational practices of ‘inclusion’ promote school success among all students, but particularly among minority groups. Thus, another significance of research projects such as these lies in the development of “ethnic knowledge—African-American[/Canadian], American Indian, Asian-American..., and Hispanic...—that takes advantage of what we already know about our respective groups and that employs the best methodologies, [and] instruments available to us to build a knowledge base about ourselves” (Padilla, 1994, 25). As well, “as we develop new pedagogies for teaching the new student population, there is much to be learned from the struggles in ethnic, women, and cultural studies.” In other words:

One of the central aims of ethnic studies, for example, has been to make visible the essential philosophies, cultures, and histories of ethnic peoples and, thus, to produce a complete scholarship that necessarily challenges prevailing Euro-centric thought and methods. From this perspective, then, ethnic studies is not the inclusion or integration of new themes or experiences into the existing curriculum; that would simply require studying new subjects through the same Eurocentric lens, rather than a process by which students, teachers, and researchers

develop new forms of agency. Instead, ethnic studies seeks to locate itself in a much broader sociocultural terrain in which groups of color and women of color are integral to the understanding of everyday life in [a North] American context (McLaren and Gutierrez, 1994, p. 335).

As Banks (1993d) adds: "Teaching students various types of knowledge can help them to better understand the perspectives of different racial, ethnic, and cultural groups as well as to develop their own versions and interpretations of issues and events" (p. 6). With increasing international immigration to Alberta and other parts of Canada shifting from primarily European countries to non-European countries, the situation demands a search for successful approaches for educating minority students in multi-ethnic societies. As Carr (1995) points out:

With the continuous mixing of races and peoples from different backgrounds, one can foresee a time when a large portion of the Canadian population may claim some share to visible minority status. The key will be to alter the balance of power, to break down systemic and institutional barriers, and to eventually place less importance on quantifiable results and more on qualitative measures that could be gained from a productive and diverse population (p. 39).

Educators and educational institutions must thus respond to growing racial and ethnic diversity in our society. We should, in the words of Sultana (1995), "deal with the politics of silence, pointing toward new ways of making that silence speak in favour of a more just and humane world" (p. 116). Minorities themselves have refused to accept the status quo and have demanded that the system uphold their rights and address their needs. But before any substantive conclusions can be reached or new initiatives taken, it will be necessary to conduct more thorough research in the area of minority education. So far, the generalizability of findings from previous studies on Black education in Canada is very limited and only just emerging—perhaps due to the relatively new impact of Black immigrants on the Canadian scene (Reynolds, 1993; Solomon, 1992).

I believe this study also is relevant to a multicultural society as it will yield valuable insights on the theory and practice of multicultural education in Canada, as well as issues of racism, interethnic relations and how well Canadian schools and society are, or should be responding to the needs of African-Canadians. It will contribute to further comparative research within the field of minority education in Canada, as well as prove useful to educational policymakers, program planners and school practitioners in Alberta. For example, it “may provide impetus for developing new interventions to enhance the academic achievement of Black students” (Bradley and Bradley, 1977, p. 401).

Finally, because the question of the significance of a research on Black school success was a topic of discussion during my interviews, I’d like to end with some of the comments provided by the students:

*I think it's important because, depending on how widespread its findings are, certainly there are going to be people who are going to sit up and take notice and say hey, these people are not really the exception, these people weren't found with this great technique of 'Let's get this radar and go across the sea and see if you can find two or three people who have done this.' But instead, it's something where they say, 'These are Black students; just the same as not all White students are going to go to University, not all Black students are.' But the ones that do aren't the exception and they're not phenomenal Black people any more than just the fact that they're doing well. I think that the study could certainly open people's eyes but also it's actual proof instead of just saying we can do well too, and we do well too (hmcT/95/8).*

*I think this would probably bring more awareness. Yes we are able, we're not the stereotype of the Black person as being some fast-talking gang member thing. It's not necessarily true, we are there, we are educated, if we go back to our own countries, we are very highly educated. Just to make people aware, not just our own community but other communities to know that yes this does happen, they do succeed once given the chance, we do succeed (hmcT/95/8).*

*I think if you look at the positive side [of Black education] you can see where some students went ahead with their lives and how they got there and show other [Black] students that haven't got there, how they can, just by taking an example from [those] that have made it (hmcT/95/8).*

*First of all, Black people as a minority, aren't that represented as much in the academic world as far as the high academic jobs. I think for young people it's a good idea for them to get role models that are in those positions and then for them to tell them to strive, to attain that goal (hmcT/95/8).*

*It's an important one because within the Black community, when they read it, it will just bring a level of awareness within the community. Yes we do have some successful youth coming up and we should look to them and see what made them do things, so perhaps we can teach our other children these same things. As well it's important for the White community in that they too will see that yes there are some successful Blacks in academics, that they're just not into sports and it will help to alleviate some of those stereotypes (hmcT/95/9).*

*Without it we are forever faded to be subjects of others. It is as simple as that. Even though a lot of the attention that's being focused on us by the media is specious. I mean clearly there are many of us who are successful, there are many of us who are doing well and there are many of us who are making extremely important contributions to North American society ... Obviously there are major problems facing us and we have to correct those problems and as I've mentioned previously it's crucial ... (inaudible); only we will solve our problems ... A rape victim would be a fool to expect her rapist to give her rape counselling. We have to solve our problems and we're ready to do that with education and training and inspiration and experience as activists and as organizers ... I would just like to compliment you on this project because it's timely and it's exactly on what we need and as a teacher, it's the kind of ammunition that I will need to be able to do my job and also to press for changes in the curriculum (hmcT/95/9).*

*It's good to see that someone is focusing on the positive aspects for once rather than why we're failing ... Let's find out why we're succeeding (hmcT/95/10).*

*It is important because it's an element of Canadian society and if you want your country to be prosperous and healthy, then you have to look at all sides and all the communities inside. So it's very relevant. It will also help Black kids ... It helps if they see studies like this being done, or if they see people taking care in figuring out why they might be doing poorly in an area ... (hmcT/95/10).*

### **1.8 Limitations of the Study**

While conducting research for this study, I had hoped to rely as much as possible on Canadian sources of information regarding Black students. However, as I have previously noted, very few studies have been carried out on Black education in Canada. Studies in this area are only just emerging. Inasmuch as I have used Canadian sources where available, I had no choice but to turn to American sources for much of my secondary and background information on Black education. It appears this is a problem for many scholars engaged in research in Black Studies outside the United States. For example, from his experience in the United Kingdom, Small (1994) found out that “scholarship, study and research about ‘racialized relations’ in the United States has impacted on such problems in England. In the academic study of ‘racialized relations’ many of the paradigms, theories, concepts and methods developed and employed in the United States have become entrenched in the approaches of scholars in England [and I’ll add Canada as well]” (p. 5). From his experience researching about Black education in Canada, Dei (1995a) also adds that “research that has been conducted within the United States must be viewed in the context of differing histories and social realities, *yet it adds insight* into the issue of [Black education in Canada]” (p. 184; emphasis added).

Another limitation to note is that given the limited scope of the study, I did not include the perspectives of parents, teachers, administrators, community organizations and others who I’m sure would have provided further insights to or supplemented student narratives. This would have been ideal; however, the scope of

this project would make such an option prohibitive. At the same time, I'd also like to point out that this is by no means an exhaustive study of Black success in school. It is not premised on the notion of a random sample whereby the Black students I talked to are, in a "part-for-whole" fashion, a microscopic representation of Black students in Canada or Alberta.

Finally, I just couldn't use all the narrative information I gathered from my research. I had a lot of interview data that I wished I could have included in the study. In the end, I used material that I thought was relevant to the discussion at hand. So, I caution that 'while readers can interpret the material I have included, they are at a disadvantage with regard to what has been left out.'

### 1.9 A Note on Terminology

It should be clear by now that I have been using the terms "Black," "African-Canadian," "African-American" and "African" interchangeably. I will continue to use them interchangeably to refer to people of African heritage, descent, or ancestry "born in Africa, Canada, the Caribbean, England, the United States or elsewhere" (Brathwaite, 1989, p. 198; see also Spencer, 1995, p. 3). The term 'Black' will also be used as synonymous with 'African-American' (as in the United States). To echo Dei (1994b): "I include all Black peoples of African descent—continental Africans and those of the African Diaspora—and their world views in my notion of 'Africanity' or 'Africanness'" (p. 4). It is based on the philosophical foundation and belief that "people of African descent share a common experience, struggle, and origin" (Asante, 1985, p. 4; see also Henry, 1993, p. 219). In this context, it is realized "that there exists an emotional, cultural, intellectual, and psychological connection between all Africans, wherever they may be" (Dei, 1994b, p. 4). Perhaps, it will be appropriate to mention that my use of the term 'Black' in this project does not include others sometimes called 'Black' in the United Kingdom (e.g., Asians) or other 'people of colour' as used in the United States to refer to all other racial/ethnic

groups other than Whites. Also, I'd like to point out that 'Blackness' or 'Black' as used in this study is less "essentialist"—for it recognizes and affirms the varied Black experiences, differences and identities (see discussion on this subject in Chapter 2).

The term preferred by the students in this study and which many used to describe themselves is "African-Canadian." For them, "the African-Canadian construct serves as a powerful internal redefinition of racial and ethnic pride—a statement of pride in being both Canadian and African."

### **1.10 Organization of the Dissertation**

The remainder of the dissertation is organized as follows. Chapter 2 introduces a review of related concepts and literature as well as the conceptual framework employed by the study. Chapter 3 reviews the research methodology of the dissertation. Chapters 4 and 5 form the major part of the study. It is in these chapters that the student narratives are probed and analyzed. Chapter 4 tells of student narratives regarding the obstacles they had to overcome to become successful Black students. It serves as a prelude to Chapter 5 where the student narratives speak to the factors that accounted for their success in school. It is an unusually large chapter as it addresses about ten themes. Chapter 6 records the implications of the study for educational policy and practice. Chapter 7 concludes the study with some concluding perspectives, a summary of the major research findings, including directions for future research, and some personal reflections.

## **CHAPTER 2. THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK**

### **2.1 Introduction**

*Theory has never fared well in educational circles. Highly pragmatic and behaviouristic in both its assumptions and practices, the field of education historically has always viewed theory as something of an unnecessary intrusion.*

*Henry A. Giroux*  
Disturbing Pleasures: Learning Popular Culture

*Education tends to be weak on theory. We have much speculation but little sound theory, i.e., theory based on evidence.*

*T. Neville Postlethwaite*  
Policy-Oriented Research in Education

This section provides a theoretical discussion on some aspects of social theory and education, particularly concerning Black and minority education. Special attention is given to issues of Black identity formation representation; theories of social reproduction in education; as well as race, class, gender and education. The section also introduces the conceptual framework employed by the study. I believe that this overview of literature will be helpful in putting into some perspective and context the ideas expressed in the student narratives.

#### *Theoretical Perspectives*

### **2.2 Black Identity Representation and Development**

The dynamics of identity and representation, especially for minority group students in Western society, are complex. As Ghosh (1995) observes, “the daily experiences which shape the identity of minority group students, the psychosocial impact of prejudice, and discrimination based on race and ethnicity, gender and class, are of great significance with increasing ethnic and racial tension in schools and



society. Key questions relate to the implications of identity for self-esteem and school achievement, and of ethnic identity for integration and relationship to the dominant culture” (p. 236). It’s no wonder that today, issues of “identity and difference have framed the theoretical structure for the contests around multiculturalism” (Goldberg, 1994, p. 12). Indeed, as Britzman et al. (1991) point out, a major project of post-modern theory and post-structuralist literature is the theoretical questioning of the concept of identity, particularly “the critique of representations and the disturbance of what is taken as stable signifiers” (p. 97). This critique embraces the assumption that “to act as if the social categories of race, class, gender, sexuality, age, and so on are stable and unchanging is to reproduce the prevailing relations of power” (Britzman et al., 1991, p. 89).

For our purposes here, Goldberg (1994) has provided us with a useful working definition when looking at the concept of identity. He conceives identity “as a bond, as the affinity and affiliation that associates those so identified, that extends to them a common sense or space of unified sameness. It is a tie that holds members of the collective together. These at least are the elements that go into what might be deemed an affirmative conception of identity” (p. 12). Conceptualized in this manner, Hall (1990) tells us that we can at least think about identity in two different ways. The essence here is “cultural identity,” and one way to think about is:

In terms of one, shared culture, a sort of collective ‘one true self,’ hiding inside the many other, more superficial or artificially imposed ‘selves,’ which people with a shared history and ancestry hold in common. Within the terms of this definition, our cultural identities reflect the common historical experiences and shared cultural codes which provide us, as ‘one people,’ with stable, unchanging and continuous frames of reference and meaning, beneath the shifting divisions and vicissitudes of our actual history (p. 223).

There is, however, another important way to think about a related, but different view of cultural identity, and this is where the post-modernist critique is instructive. Again, to cite Hall (1990):

This second position recognises that, as well as the many points of similarity, there are also critical points of deep and significant difference which constitute 'what we really are'; or rather—since history has intervened what 'we have become'. Cultural identity, in this second sense, is a matter of 'becoming' as well as of 'being.' It belongs to the future as much as to the past. Far from being eternally fixed in some essentialised past, they are subject to the continuous 'play' of history, culture and power (p. 225).

In short, our identities are not fixed and they are derived from past and present experiences. Thus for example, as Foucault (cited in Spencer, 1995) observes, in the constitution of one's identity "these practices ... are not something that the individual invents by himself. They are patterns that he finds in his culture and which are proposed, suggested, and imposed on him by his culture, his society and his social group" (p. 33). I'll agree with Weiler (1995) that this latter conceptualization of identities is a very useful "starting point to begin to view identity or subjectivity as unfinished, ongoing, and contested" (p. 131), and it will serve as my point of departure in discussing now the theoretical concepts related to Black identity development and representation.

Black scholars and theorists (e.g., Dyson, 1994; hooks, 1992; Walcott, 1996; Wallace, 1990; Merelman, 1992, 1993) and critical educational theorists (e.g., Giroux, 1996a; McCarthy and Crichlow, 1993) have expressed serious concerns about the "unfailing precedent to cast Black culture in a distorted light and to view it through the prisms of racist stereotype or racist essentialism" (Dyson, 1994, p. 218). It is that same old adage 'you've seen one, you've seen them all.' As Thakur (1988) correctly notes, this is very dangerous because it perpetuates the negative stereotypes of Blacks. No wonder that in our current vocabulary we refer to Whites from

different nationalities as “ethnic” but all Blacks are lumped together in the same category (Thakur, 1988, p. 6). Foster (1996) notes that, “we are all *Blacked out* into a common community” (p. 24; original emphasis). This, according to Giroux (1996) is “simply vulgar racial reasoning” because it assumes that “that either Blacks or Whites are unified under an absolute set of values, ideologies, and values, or that contradictory communities don’t exist among them” (p. 99). So, for Black social critics like hooks (1992) challenging this essentialism within the Black community provides the opportunity to undermine racism in the guise of the “authentic Black,” and is a way of “acknowledging how class mobility has altered collective Black experiences as well as enabling us to affirm multiple Black identities, varied Black experiences” (cited in Spencer, 1995, p. 31). It is to take into account “Black culture’s relentless evolutions and metamorphoses, [and avoid] portraying the constitutive experiences of [Black] culture in monolithic terms” (Dyson, 1994, p. 218). Contemporary Black culture, whether African American or African Canadian “is radically complex and diverse” and “any substantial investigation of the protean meanings of [Black] culture must take these factors into account” (Dyson, 1994, p. 218).

The concepts of “essentialism” and “hybridity” emerge as important points of discussion within cultural theory. Thanks to research in feminism and in recent times Afrocentric discourse, “the charge of essentialism has been leveled against the theoretical treatment of social groups as homogeneous and stable entities” (see hooks, 1984; McCarthy and Crichlow, 1993; Walcott, 1996). Carlson’s (1995) definition of “the essentialistic treatment of identity” is germane here:

To treat a category essentialistically means that we view it as ‘natural’ and ‘given’ rather than as socially constructed within the context of power dynamics. Essentializing erects rigid boundaries and borders around categories of collective identity (race, class, gender, sexual orientation, etc.) and encourages us to presume that these categories are

unified, static, and objective descriptors of natural difference. We are also more likely to unwittingly position categories of class, race, gender, and sexual identity within bipolar oppositional constructs that set high expectations for one pole (middle class, White, male, heterosexual) and low or marginalized expectations for the 'other' pole. Racial categories in the U.S. provide a good example of a socially constructed bipolar opposition (White/Black) that typically has been treated essentialistically. In fact, race as an important identity category never really appeared on the historical scene before the age of European colonization and American slavery, when races were constructed as part of the project of European colonialism with the 'White' race placed at the center of culture, 'civilization,' and 'modernization,' and various other races constructed at the margins (either nearer or farther from the center). In U.S. history, then, the identities of marginalized racial and linguistic groups have been constructed in the dominant culture as everything that Whites are not (criminal, dirty, promiscuous, etc.) and this construction of identity has been used to legitimate discriminatory and oppressive practices (p. 417).

When viewed within the context of education, neoconservative and right-wing discourses have used this essentialistic treatment of identity to support the contention that working-class, African-American, and Hispanic students should not be pushed to excel academically because they are primarily manually oriented and lack the capacity for abstract reasoning. At the same time, some mainstream multicultural education discourses have also come close to essentializing identity when arguing that racial and linguistic minority students have a preferred 'learning style' different than that of middle-class, White students (Carlson, 1995).

Bhabha (1990) further contributes to our understanding of the problems/limits of essentialism with the concept of "hybridity" when he writes that:

All forms of culture are continually in a process of hybridity. Hybridity to me is the 'third space' which enables other positions to emerge. The process of cultural hybridity gives rise to something

different, something new and unrecognisable, a new area of negotiation of meaning and representation ... The notion of hybridity is about the fact that in any particular political struggle, new sites are always being opened up, and if you keep referring those new sites to old principles, then you are not actually able to participate in them fully and productively and creatively. Hybridity is precisely about the fact that when a new situation, a new alliance formulates itself, it may demand that you should translate your principles, rethink them, extend them (pp. 211, 216).

Bhabha's (1990) point is echoed by Goldberg (1994) when he notes that "hybridities are the modalities in and through which multicultural conditions get lived out, and renewed" (Goldberg, 1994, p. 10). In discussing Black identity and the Black Diaspora experience we would therefore prefer a position which does not imply binary opposites of "either or," and one which recognizes "a necessary heterogeneity and diversity; by a conception of 'identity' which lives and through, not despite, difference; by *hybridity*. Diaspora identities are those which are constantly producing and reproducing themselves anew, through transformation and difference" (Hall, 1990, p. 235). Bhabha (1990) again is useful here when he interjects with the idea of a "third space," whereby Black identity is not essentialist, but neither is it integrationist, requiring a rejection of Black culture.

What this means is that any effort or undertaking addressing Black education issues must take into account the variations within the Black community. Such an enterprise inevitably leads to a consideration of ethnic differences within the Black population (e.g., between African-Caribbeans and African-Americans in the United States, Caribbean and African Blacks in Canada, and among the Caribbean Black themselves). Internal differences clearly exist between Blacks of various ethnic and cultural backgrounds. In Canada for example, there are important regional variations within the Black population, as among other ethnic groups. While about two-thirds live in Toronto and Montreal regions, large communities are found in other cities and

regions, notably a large Canadian-born group in Nova Scotia whose ancestors date from the 17th and 18th centuries. Furthermore, Francophone Blacks, primarily from Haiti, tend to congregate in Montreal (Christensen and Weinfeld, 1993). Commenting on his study of Black youth in Toronto, Dei (1995a) found that:

The Black student population is not a homogeneous group and students' concerns vary to some extent. For example, Continental African students have concerns about the broad issues of language, religion, and culture. Students who have been schooled in the Caribbean complain about the 'social labelling' of Black students as 'troublemakers.' There are also complaints about the attempts by schools to place students from the Caribbean in English skills development classes. Questions of identity are raised by students born here in Canada, and particularly, those born to mixed parents. Students who speak with distinctly different accents and dialects point to intragroup discrimination and prejudices among their peers (pp. 183-184; see also Walcott, 1996).

This explains Moodley's (1985c) critique of the federal government's "Report of the Special Committee on Visible Minorities in Canada" entitled *Equality Now* (March 1984), a report about "the ongoing controversy about multiculturalism, immigration policy and race relations in Canada":

From a sociological perspective the most startling shortcoming of the report lies in its treatment of visible minorities as more or less monolithic. Aboriginal people, Blacks in Nova Scotia, Chinese and Indo-Chinese in British Columbia are subsumed under the concept "visible minority communities," whose common bond lies in exclusion. However, the history of these four major visible groups in Canada is so different, their expectations and claims so varied, and their experience of a reaction to discrimination so distinct, that the common denominator of being "non-White" makes the formulation of a common policy problematic. In addition to these intergroup distinctions, there are significant intra-group differences that make the racial label meaningless, except to those who have invented it. The crucial

distinction between ethnic and racial groups is not adequately dealt with by the report (pp. 114-115).

Similarly, in the United States a study on Black students by Brown (1994) has shown that "African-American students are a heterogeneous population. The diverse individuals and subgroups that are prevalent among that population contradict a common myth that African-American college students are monolithic" (p. 1).

To sum up, what an anti-essentialist position allows us to do is "to affirm multiple Black identities, varied Black experience. It also challenges colonial imperialist paradigms of Black identity which represent Blackness one-dimensionally in ways that reinforce and sustain White supremacy. This discourse created the idea of the 'primitive' and promoted the notion of an 'authentic' experience seeing as 'natural' those expressions of Black life which conformed to a pre-existing pattern of stereotype" (hooks, 1992, p. 10). In Black education, it stops us from falling "into the danger of treating Black students as an undifferentiated Black group and thereby tending to overlook the wide range of differences, including their different responses to the education system, [that is], some excel while others fail, for example" (Yon, 1994, p. 146). Postmodern theorists have suggested a way to look at the diversity among the present-day African Canadian population. We may begin by

seeing individuals more complexly [and] to recognize that we all occupy *multiple subject positions*. That is, we have a gender, a race, ethnicity, class, sexual orientation, and so on. Because we *are* all of these 'selves,' we are embroiled in a number of different power relations and cultural struggles simultaneously, all of which influence the way we know the world and all of which interrelate in a complex, nonsynchronous, and sometimes contradictory manner in identity formation (Carlson, 1995, p. 419; original emphasis).

Following on the concepts of "essentialism" and "hybridity," Black identity can also be delineated along the general pattern of ethnic identity development, which operates across all racial/ethnic groups. Although, as Gay (1994) points out, there are

some variations by ethnic groups and age, the general pattern of ethnic identity development begins with self unawareness, denial or disaffiliation, and unconscious and unquestioning dependence upon Eurocentric, mainstream cultural values and standards of self-definition. This then progresses through increasing levels of consciousness, pride, affirmation, and acceptance of the validity and worth of one's own ethnic culture and heritage. As well, individuals within the groups do not go through the stages at the same time or in a uniform fashion.

Before we describe some models or descriptions of Black identity development, a note about what is "Blackness" or "Black identity" would be useful. Indeed, as Boykin (1986) comments, one way to capture the richness and integrity of the Black experiences is to talk about it in terms of the Black cultural experience. In noting what he calls "the divergent definitions of Black identity," and expressed within the context of North America, Marable (1992b) attempts to clarify the meaning of Blackness or Black identity:

Blackness or [Black] identity, is much more than race. It is also the traditions, rituals, values, and belief systems of [Black] people. It is our culture, history, music, art, and literature. Blackness is our sense of ethnic consciousness and pride in our heritage of resistance against racism. This [Black] identity is not something our oppressors forced upon us. It is a cultural and ethnic awareness we have collectively constructed for ourselves over hundreds of years. When [for example], African Americans think about Blackness, we are usually referring to both definitions simultaneously—racial identity, a category the Europeans created and deliberately imposed on us for the purpose of domination, and Black cultural identity, which we constantly reinvent and construct for ourselves. But for many White[s], their understanding of Blackness is basically one definition only, racial identity. They have little awareness or comprehension of [Black] history, politics, religion, or culture. Blackness to them is skin color and a person's physical features, period (pp. 295-296).



One of the most promising models for looking at Black identity formation or development is the Racial Identity Model (Cross, 1978; Helms, 1990). One of the earlier proponents of the Black identity development model is Thomas (1970), who generated a theory of racial identity development in which he described the transformational process by which Blacks become "Black." He submitted that before this transformation could occur, Blacks had to triumph over confusion of dependency on the White culture for self-validation, something he referred to as "Negromacy." Thomas hypothesized that during this process, Blacks progress through five stages in overcoming negromacy: Withdrawal, Testifying, Information Processing, Activity, and Transcendental (see Ford et al., 1994, pp. 15-16). Following Thomas, Cross (1978) also described a theory of the "Negro-to-Black" conversion to explain the essence of racial identity for Blacks. He coined the word "Nigrescence" (a French word that, literally translated, means the process of developing a Black consciousness) to hypothesize a four stage process of racial identity development for Blacks. He begins with what he calls the "Pre-Encounter" stage which is characterized by dependency on White society for definition and approval. In this instance, racial identity attitudes toward one's Blackness are negative and one views White culture and society as ideal. The next stage he calls "Encounter" and is entered when one has a personal and challenging experience with Black or White society. The encounter stage is marked by feelings of confusion about the meaning and significance of race and an increasing desire to become more aligned with one's Black identity. Following the Encounter experience is the "Immersion-Emersion," characterized by a period of idealization of Black culture. Here, one is absorbed in the Black experience and completely rejects the White world. Immersion is followed by "Internalization," during which one has grasped the fact that both Blacks and Whites have strengths and weaknesses. Moreover, one's Black identity is experienced as positive and an important and valued aspect of self; one's world view becomes Afrocentric and attitude toward Whites is one of tolerance and respect for differences (see Carter,

1990, pp. 8-9; see also Cross, 1971, 1991; Ford et al., 1994; Parnham, 1989; Thomas, 1971).

Cross (1991) in later years has elaborated on his theory and describes the functions of what a fully developed Black identity serves in a person's daily life. First, it defends the person from negative psychological stress that results from having to live in a society that is at times very racist. Secondly, it establishes a sense of purpose, meaning, and affiliation; and finally it provides a psychological mechanism that facilitates social intercourse with people, cultures, and situations located outside the boundaries of Blackness. According to Cross (1991), a person's identity may acquire these functions over the course of socialization from childhood through early adulthood, provided that this person's parents or caretakers have strong Black identities themselves; otherwise, the functions may unfold as part of one's resocialization during Nigrescence.

A resulting part of the Black identity development is what Boykin (cited in Gonzales and Cauce, 1995) has referred to as the 'triple quandary'—the fact that Blacks are exposed not only to the Black experience and the mainstream Anglo experience but also to the 'minority' experience as well. The latter refers to the discrimination, social injustice, and oppression that are shared by many people of color, though to varying extents (p. 145). Indeed, in education circles, the pressures of adapting to two cultures simultaneously are most pronounced for Blacks and other immigrant minority youths. As Gonzales and Cauce (1995) observe, "these youths may experience daily conflict and stress as they discover that their cultural values and behaviours at home are not necessarily recognized or valued among peers or at school, and as they encounter among their peers a wide range of values and cultural orientations that may conflict with and challenge the values and expectations of their families" (pp. 141-142).

The concept of “Biculturality” has been used to describe this phenomenon.

Darder (1991) provides a useful definition:

*Biculturalism* refers to a process wherein individuals learn to function in two distinct sociocultural environments: their primary culture, and that of the dominant mainstream culture of the society in which they live. It represents the process by which bicultural human beings mediate between the dominant discourse of educational institutions and the realities that they must face as members of subordinate cultures. More specifically, the *process of biculturalism* incorporates the different ways in which bicultural human beings respond to cultural conflicts and the daily struggle with racism and other forms of cultural invasion. It is essential that educators recognize that, just as racism constitutes a concrete form of domination directly experienced only by people of color, biculturalism specifically addresses the different strategies of survival adopted by people of color in response to the dynamics of living in constant tension between conflicting cultural values and conditions of cultural subordination (pp. 48-49).

Biculturality, then, is a way of life for all distinct racial/ethnic groups in North America. It has been argued, however, that when it comes to Blacks it is given a different dimension and manifests itself in a special way, as described by Prager (cited in Boykin, 1986):

It is not the mere fact that Blacks hold a dual identity which has constrained achievement; to one degree or another, every ethnic and racial group has faced a similar challenge. The Black experience in [North] America is distinguished by the fact that the qualities attributed to Blackness are in opposition to the qualities rewarded by society. The specific features of Blackness, as cultural imagery, are almost by definition those qualities which the dominant society has attempted to deny in itself, and it is the difference between Blackness and Whiteness that defines, in many respects, [North] American cultural self-understanding. For Blacks, then, the effort to reconcile into one personality images which are diametrically opposed poses an extraordinary difficult challenge. To succeed in [North] America raises the risk of being told—either by Whites or Blacks—that one is not

'really Black.' No other group ... has been so acutely confronted with this dilemma, for no other group has been simultaneously so systematically ostracized while remaining so culturally significant (pp. 62-63).

Perhaps this is an appropriate place to introduce the concept of "oppositional identities"—a concept used to describe rejection by some Black and minority group students of dominant culture, knowledge, and norms (Ghosh, 1995). In fact, Solomon (1992) concluded from his study of Black youth in Toronto that "a major obstacle to unity within predominantly Black student populations has been the growth of a Black oppositional identity and culture." This follows an earlier study by Fordham and Ogbu (1986) of Black high school students on the west coast of the United States, suggesting that the minority or Black experience leads to the development of an "oppositional identity," a pattern that has also been referred to as *cultural inversion*. They note that many African-American youths appear to base their identity in opposition to the mainstream Anglo culture, and for these youths "acting White" has very negative connotations and consequences. Unfortunately, doing well in school is usually one of the things associated with "acting White"—a disturbing turn of events given the point we made earlier that for Black students, education still represents one of the few viable means of overcoming socioeconomic disadvantage (see Gonzales and Cauce, 1995).

But Fordham and Ogbu's (1986) thesis is now being challenged by some Black scholars as untenable because "this new form of oppositional identity is not a method for overcoming obstacles that impede one's entrance into or existence and functioning within the society. It is a strategy that achieves protection by rejecting involvement" (Cross, 1995, p. 191). It is one also rejected by the students in my study. They don't believe that excelling in school is associated with Whiteness. In their view, Whites do not have a monopoly on learning. Cross (1995) is especially effective in debunking the Fordham and Ogbu (1986) thesis. In a recent essay he differentiates

“Black defensive oppositional identity” from “Black alienated oppositional identity” (p. 185). His argument is that:

Defensive oppositional identity is a protective filter employed by Blacks who are, or who seek to become, functional within the larger society. Its themes are protection and engagement, revealing a bicultural strategy that results in personal efficacy within both the Black and White ‘worlds.’ Defensive oppositional identity has a long history in the Black community and, until recently, was the normative type of protective strategy found in Black America. *The general term oppositional identity, as originally defined by Fordham and Ogbu (1986), captures a modern variation of the defensive form and, on close analysis, seems to be a corruption of the traditional stance*” (p. 185; emphasis added).

Instead of Fordham and Ogbu’s (1986) view (“Black alienated oppositional identity”), Cross’s (1995) “defensive oppositional identity” provides “a psychological buffer at times when the person encounters racist circumstances, especially those of a psychological nature.” As well, it “helps one to deal with the ‘hassle’ of being Black. It operates to minimize the pain, imposition, and stigma that come when one is treated with disrespect, rudeness, and insensitivity” (Cross, 1995, pp. 196-197). I agree with Cross that Fordham and Ogbu’s oppositional identity is at variance not only with White culture but with traditional Black culture as well. The claim, for example, that “it is White to study mathematics, at the same time that Afrocentric scholars are demonstrating the African origins of Western Mathematics and science, reveals an identity grounded in a lack of knowledge about the true history and development of Black culture” (Cross, 1995, p. 191). I accept and so do the students in my study that the defensive oppositional identity as adopted by Cross is “a fundamentally bicultural dynamic because protection from racism is a prelude to engagement and attempts at inclusion ... It is an identity pattern still very much in evidence today, even among the most successful of Blacks, who despite their educational and material advantages, must protect themselves against daily swipes at

their personhood" (Cross, 1995, p. 200; see also Cose, 1993; Feagin and Sikes, 1994; Payne, 1984).

What can we deduce from the above discussion? First, it is clear that when the dominant group in a society holds a low opinion of a particular ethnic group, the members of that group are potentially faced with a negative social identity. Constantly reminded of their negative image, minority youth are indeed faced with the very difficult task of trying to derive a positive self-image (Gonzales and Cauce, 1995). The implication, according to Gay (1994) is that, if ethnic identity development is understood as part of the natural "coming of age" process during early adolescence, and if middle level education is to be genuinely client-centred for students of color, then ethnic sensitivity must be incorporated into school policies, programs, and practices. Contextualizing the major principles of middle level education within the framework of ethnic and cultural diversity is a means for making academic achievement, self-esteem, interracial relations, and psycho-social adjustment more effective for Blacks and other minority students (see also Ford et al., 1994). Second, it would appear that any comprehensive understanding of minority students' responses to school must include the power and status relations between minority and majority groups, as well as the variability and diversity among different minority groups (Deyhle, 1995; Ogbu, 1978). Finally, positive identity formation, especially for minority youth "provides a sense of meaning and personal continuity through time, a set of guidelines in making lifestyle and value choices, and the basis upon which personality integration and psychological well-being are established. Identity choices also circumscribe the possibilities of one's roles throughout life, thus providing a framework within which to prepare for one's potential place in society" (Gonzales and Cauce, 1995, p. 133).

### **2.3 Education and Cultural Reproduction**

There is considerable research data to suggest that, for dominated minorities, the extent to which students' language and culture are incorporated into the school program constitutes a significant predictor of academic success (Cummins, 1983). For example, Hale-Benson (1986) has shown evidence that indicates that the underrepresentation of Black culture in the curriculum and the resulting curricular and instructional inequalities, foster mediocre classroom experiences for Black children and erect barriers to their academic achievement. Yet, larger and larger numbers of minority students are being socialized in an institutional context which reflects values, beliefs, and experiences not their own. As James Banks (1981) has argued, "the assumption that all children can learn equally well from teaching materials that only reflect the cultural experiences of the majority group is questionable and possibly detrimental to those minority group children who have strong ethnic identities and attachment" (p. 64). Thus, the "cultural deficit" hypothesis emerged to explain the continuing gap in minority and majority achievement. The monocultural curriculum content, testing and grouping practices, and the expectations of educators for minority children came to be seen as the major barriers to educational achievement and equality (King, 1993).

This sociocultural 'skewing' towards a White, majority population operates at many levels within the educational hierarchy, from teaching to research about teaching and schooling. Critical pedagogical discourse derives in part from an academic tradition created and shaped by Western European and Anglo-American thinkers (Estrada and McLaren, 1993). For instance, "the language in which we discuss our issues is a language permeated with ideas, beliefs, values, and positionings that have been formulated by the dominant majority. Terms such as 'multiculturalism,' 'diversity,' 'ethnicity,' 'race,' and more have been defined and discussed by White, upper-middle-class, male academicians and politicians. Women and minorities who

engage in this discourse must do so using a language formed by those who, historically and currently, occupy power positions in our society” (Estrada and McLaren, 1993, p. 28). Minnich (1990) puts it this way:

There is a *root problem* underlying the dominant meaning system that informs our curricula. It is visible in the false universalization that has taken a very few privileged men from a particular tradition to be the inclusive term, the norm, and the ideal for all. The faultiness, or partiality, of that universalization has been hidden from us in part because we too often tend to express ourselves in singular terms (especially “man” and “mankind,” but also, for example, “the citizen,” “the philosopher,” “the poet,” “the student”). Singular universals, even adequate ones, make thinking of plurality, let alone diversity, very difficult (pp. 2-3; original emphasis).

We are reminded, for example, that in a history of the curriculum in the United States, neither Black people nor White women have been included in the curricula even of institutions designed for them:

By 1900 ... curricula directions of colleges and universities for Blacks had been established basically in imitation of the institutions that served the dominant caste. Acceptance of segregation as the defining practice in the relations between the races required of the southern colleges for Blacks the education of trained, vocationally prepared graduates in many diverse fields. The curriculum of the Black colleges was shaped by a policy of apartheid in a society sufficiently democratic in the abstract to encourage the development of a class of responsible professional leaders ... But the models for these institutions were those of the dominant caste: Fisk University’s music department concentrated on classical European music to the exclusion of the music that expressed the Black experience in America, and Black history and sociology courses were rare and exceptional until after World War I (quoted in Minnich, 1990, p. 17).

This embodies what has been called the *selective tradition*: “Someone’s selection, someone’s vision of legitimate knowledge and culture, one that in the



process of enfranchising one group's cultural capital disenfranchises another's" (Apple, 1992, p. 5). The point here is that, all too often, "legitimate" knowledge does not include the historical experiences and cultural expressions of labour, people of colour, and others who have been less powerful (Roman and Christian-Smith with Ellsworth, 1988). The absence of Black knowledge in many school curricula is not a simple oversight. Its absence represents an academic instance of racism, or what has been described as "willful ignorance and aggression toward Blacks" (Pinar, 1993, p. 62). Indeed, Apple (1990) has argued that the selection and organization of knowledge for schools is an ideological process, one that serves the interests of particular classes and social groups. At the same time, he also notes that this does not mean that the entire corpus of school knowledge is "a mirror reflection of ruling class ideas, imposed in an unmediated and coercive manner." Instead, "the processes of cultural incorporation are dynamic, reflecting both continuities and contradictions of that dominant culture and the continual remaking and relegitimizing of that culture's plausibility system." This important point is also echoed by Ghosh (1995) when she writes that:

Contemporary theories have uncovered the relationship between knowledge and power. They point to the highly political and subjective nature of knowledge because it serves the interests of the group in power and represents a world-view which is predominantly Eurocentric, Judeo-Christian, middle-class, White, and male-oriented. Knowledge is now seen increasingly as being historically located and socially constructed. The recognition that school knowledge is far from neutral provides a significant explanation as to how it serves students of different groups unequally. If knowledge is politically based, historically embedded, and socially constructed, and therefore, subjective, then questions arise as to what constitutes acceptable "knowledge" (p. 234; see also Ghosh, 1996, p. 9).

In this regard, postmodernist skepticism as to whether anyone has or ought to have the authority to speak in the name of social change is thus not altogether misguided. As Alcoff states:

The impetus to speak must be carefully analyzed, and in many cases, fought against ... If one's immediate impulse is to teach rather than to listen to a less-privileged speaker, one should resist that impulse long enough to interrogate it carefully. Some of us have been taught that by right of gender, class, or race, letters after our name, or some criterion we are more likely to have the truth (cited in Roman, 1993, p. 79).

Central to the above discussion and pertinent to this project is the failure of the schools to effectively address the cultural, social, psychological, and educational needs of Black students (see Brathwaite and James, 1996). Takaki (1993) puts it better when he observes: "What happens when someone with the authority of a teacher describes our society, and you are not in it? Such an experience can be disorienting—a moment of psychic disequilibrium, as if you looked into a mirror and saw nothing" (p. 16). As a recent report on Black education in Ontario notes:

Often schools in which the student population is predominantly Black have only one or two Black teachers or administrators, and sometimes none. The school curriculum is also largely reflective of European presence, settlement and development of Canada and as such provides little or no incentive for Black Canadians to develop their African heritage. Courses in Black history, a spotlight on Black achievements, an appreciation of Black culture—these are things for which the African Canadian student hungers, often in vain (*Towards a New Beginning*, 1992, p. 78).

Writing about the experience of 'Darren,' an African-Canadian student in an Ontario school, Carl James (1994) found that the curricular materials to be found in his classroom are textbooks that have been used since the 1960s and 70s. One of these, a reading comprehension book, presents "Canadian history" as a collision of White Europeans with "primitive native tribes" who do such things as "dance

ceremoniously.” Nowhere in this book, or in the social studies text, *They Went Exploring*, is the history of ethnic groups other than White Europeans acknowledged (see also Pratt, 1984; Alladin, 1996)

The dominating belief is that the acquisition of the majority (Anglo-American) culture is a necessary means of gaining access to economic and political power. Significantly, the schools have been viewed as the place where minorities could acquire the essential knowledge, values, attitudes, and behaviours which would provide this access. Thus for instance, “both the dominant majority and most minorities have been schooled to believe that conformity to Anglo-American cultural patterns is an essential part of being an American [or Canadian] ... The popular rhetoric of the ‘melting pot’ has only thinly disguised the fact that minorities, not the majority group, have been the ones expected to do the melting” (Cheng et al., 1979, p. 269). Assimilation and integration and becoming absorbed in the ‘melting pot’ were considered the only viable paths for various racial and ethnic groups. As Bolaria (1983) aptly notes, this type of argument did not take into account the aspirations of the minority groups in developing their own culture and institutions. Implicit in this view is the assumption that the cultural traditions of minority groups are either nonexistent or inferior to those of the dominant society. Indeed, the assimilationist argument provides a justification for social inequality: the low achievement of some groups is attributed to the difficulty or unwillingness of these groups to assimilate. In particular, non-White minority groups are easily singled out as non-assimilable because of their apparent physical traits and alleged cultural distinctiveness. The unfounded belief that non-Whites are more difficult to assimilate provides the explanation for the economic and social deprivations of non-Whites, and the justification for exploitation of Black labour (Li, 1988).

Another explanatory theory to examine dominant culture and the minority student is Bourdieu’s (1977) concept of “cultural capital.” This cultural capital

consists of “literature, science, religion, art, language and all symbolic systems falling within the widest interpretation of the term.” Linguistic and cultural “competence” are aspects of cultural capital that facilitate academic achievement for students. For Bourdieu then, the educational system discriminates in favour of those who are the inheritors of cultural capital. The reproduction of culture of the dominant classes of society is best presented by Bourdieu:

In a stratified social order, dominant groups and classes control the most socially valued and legitimate cultural meanings. When inculcated through education, these meanings tend to elicit assent and encourage respect by subordinate groups for the social order. Thus, symbolic meanings mediate power relations among social groups and classes; culture, at its most fundamental level, is not devoid of political content but is an expression of it (cited in Swartz, 1977, p. 547).

Indeed, as Bourdieu (1977) has argued, exclusion of lower classes or “popular” culture from the “academic” culture of the school can be seen as a political act. The schools, in Bourdieu’s analysis, however, do not function to impart this cultural capital to those children who do not acquire it in their families. Instead, schools use cultural capital as a sorting mechanism for the distribution of children into their future societal roles. Schools function as though all children have equal access to cultural capital. In other words, as Apple (1978) aptly puts it, the school is not simply “a passive mirror but an active force, one that also serves to give legitimacy to the economic and social forms and ideologies so intimately connected to it” (p. 386).

The foregoing analyses leads us to the following neglected questions: How has certain knowledge come to be more appropriate for school curriculum content than other knowledge? By what mechanisms have certain realms of knowledge been given higher status than others? Whose class and social interests have been served by the form and content of schools? Why are the views and concerns of Black people so often ignored in the school curriculum? (Apple, 1978; Minnich, 1990; Sarup, 1991).

These questions suggest an alternative perspective on why minority students do not achieve in our schools. Essentially, this alternative argument set forth three main propositions:

- North American society is fundamentally unequal and this inequality is perpetuated by limiting the access of subordinate groups to political, economic, and social power;
- the content and structure of schooling are not neutral, but actively reproduce this societal inequality through the knowledge and cultural mode by which have been designated as high status and through mechanisms by which groups are sorted and treated differentially; and
- that schools are but a part of the larger societal dynamic which functions to perpetuate structural and cultural inequality (Apple, 1990; Cheng et al., 1979; Ghosh, 1995; Morrow and Torres, 1995; Ogbu, 1991a).

Within the context of critical multiculturalism, Giroux's (1994a) theory of *cultural studies* also helps us to understand some of the fundamental issues and challenges confronting education in multi-ethnic societies, especially as they relate to questions of power, knowledge, ideology and culture. For Giroux, the conceptual and theoretical energies of the field of cultural studies are mainly "focused on interdisciplinary issues, such as textuality and representation refracted through the dynamics of gender, sexuality, *subordinated youth*, national identity, colonialism, race, ethnicity, and popular culture" (p. 280, emphasis added). As well, cultural studies sheds light on "the importance of comprehending schooling as a mechanism of culture and politics, embedded in competing relations of power that attempt to regulate and order how students think, act, and live" (p. 280). It is also concerned "with critical relationship among culture, knowledge, and power" and "how education generates a privileged narrative space for some social groups and a space of inequality and subordination for others" (p. 279). And it is also useful, "particularly [in] its insistence on generating new questions, models, and contexts in order to address the central and most urgent dilemmas of our age" (p. 278).

Giroux is among many mainstream and radical curriculum theorists and sociologists of education that have provided contrasting explanations for the complex interactions between culture, curriculum and pedagogy and how they affect minority education. These debates have been analyzed in a variety of critical or oppositional discourses such as neo-Marxism, critical theory and post-modernism. They have also centred on what has been called the "cultural reproduction theory." This attaches considerable importance to schooling and the curriculum as a major vehicle for hegemony by the dominant class in society (Aronowitz and Giroux, 1985). In other words: "How a society selects, classifies, distributes, transmits and evaluates the educational knowledge it considers to be public, reflects both the distribution of power and the principles of social control" (quoted in Bullivant, 1983, p. 227). For example, Banks (1993a) points out that, in the past, the school has paid scant attention to the personal and cultural knowledge of students and has concentrated on teaching them what he calls "school knowledge" (p. 11). According to Banks:

This practice has had different results for most White middle-class students, for most low-income students, and for most African American and Latino students. Because school knowledge is more consistent with the cultural experiences of most White middle-class students than for most other groups of students, these students have generally found the school a more comfortable place than have low-income students and most students of color...A number of writers have described the ways in which many African American, American Indian and Latino students find the school culture alienating and inconsistent with their cultural experiences, hopes, dreams, and struggles (p. 8).

Similarly, Ng (1993a) points out that: "Sexism and racism are systemic in that, routinized in institutions, they have become ways of thinking about and treating groups of people unequally as if these ideas and treatments are "normal"; they are 'common sense' and thus not open to interrogation. These ways of doing things keep certain individuals and groups in dominant and subordinate positions, producing the

structural inequality we see both in the education system and in the workplace” (p. 195).

Indeed, there is a continuing ideological contest in North industrialized societies over how situations are to be defined and through what ‘discursive logic’ they are to be understood. As Shapiro (1992) notes, “the power of the enormously successful conservative public discourse of recent years has been its ability to make sense of a whole range of human and social concerns in ideological terms that support its own economic, political, cultural and moral logics” (p. 16). In this context, McLaren and Estrada (1993) note for example that: “New Right mavens have attempted to coordinate efforts in conservative political, educational, cultural circles to define for [us] a narrow, monolithic vision of what it means to be a citizen, an educated citizen” (p. 28). The power of the conservative initiative, note Giroux and McLaren (1988), “resides, in part, in its ability to link schooling to the ideology of the marketplace and to successfully champion the so-called virtues of Western civilization” (p. xiii). In what Walters (1994) has called “selective inclusion,” this interpretation condones and perpetuates marginalization and supremacy because its advocates overtly and covertly believe the postures of the White ‘majority’ should determine what ‘minority’ group members must be like in order to be universally accepted (p. 47).

As Apple (1992) has also noted, the changing ideological climate in the West has had a major impact on debates over what should be taught in schools and on how it should be taught and evaluated. In the United States, dominant groups have attempted to create what Apple calls “an ideological consensus around the return to traditional knowledge” (p. 9). What is troubling for me about this has been *the ways in which current curriculum and pedagogical practices militate against minority success and alienate minority students from an academic core curriculum*. For example, studies by Fordham (1988, 1996), Grant (1984), Ogbu and Matute-Bianchi

(1986) have shown that: minority girls and boys are more likely than their White peers to be placed in low or non-academic tracks; that teachers' encouragement and expectations of academic performance are considerably lower for Black and Latino students than for White students; that Black students have access to fewer instructional opportunities than White students; and that ultimately Black, Latino and Native American youth are more likely to drop out of school than White youth. McCarthy (1993) adds that these racial factors are also complicated by the dynamics of gender and class.

Fundamentally, then, mainstream educators and policy makers have failed to engage teachers and students in a sustained examination of the sociological and racial dimensions of current curriculum and pedagogical practices of tracking and ability grouping. I believe that all students should have access to an academic curriculum. The fact that disproportionate numbers of racial minority youth are now alienated from such a curriculum in the public schools is both intolerable and indefensible, and it really shows the complex interactions between culture, curriculum and pedagogy (McCarthy, 1993; Macedo, 1993).

Undoubtedly, the changing ethnic composition of Northern societies has political, philosophical and pedagogical ramifications as the various shifting segments of society impinge their opinions on the democratic process, possibly even redefining its traditionally revered essence. Minority voices are beginning to challenge and struggle for democratic renewal in their political, cultural, and economic life, and with it the quest for a more just and inclusive social order (Pincus and Ehrlich, 1994). As Livingstone (1987) aptly observes:

Collective reflection by subordinate groups leads to recognition not only of the roles of dominant groups in constructing established beliefs and practices, but also of their own roles in that process and of their own potential power to reconstruct such beliefs and practices. Their own emergent collective critiques of the status quo lead directly to



some manner of engagement of alternative possibilities in both conceptual and practical terms (pp. 8-9).

Minority youth and women have begun to offer a more systematic challenge to the structure of existing school knowledge and the assumptions and practices that undergird the curricula of schools and universities in North industrialized societies. Questions are being raised about what Sarup (1986) calls "traditional dichotomies such as the division between the hard 'masculine' subjects like mathematics and the sciences, and the soft 'feminine' arts subjects" (p. 17). Minority students are once again mounting "new" demands for democratization and diversity in the curriculum and course offerings of dominant educational institutions. As Sarup and others have argued, the school curriculum for minority and majority youth should have an organic link to other experiences and struggles within the society. Wood (1988) points out that such a new critical approach to the curriculum would "celebrate the contributions of working people, women, and minorities to our general cultural pool and would be the point of departure for providing students with their own cultural capital" (p. 107). It is a strategy that aims at reconstructing the dominant curriculum by bringing the "*uninstitutionalized experiences of marginalized minorities and working—class women and men to the 'centre' of the organization and arrangement of the school curriculum.*" Giroux (1990) places the debate in proper perspective with this summary:

We live at a time in which a strong challenge is being waged against modernist discourse in which knowledge is legitimized almost exclusively from a European model of culture and civilization. In part, the struggle for democracy can be seen in the context of a broader struggle against certain features of modernism that represent the worst legacies of the Enlightenment tradition. And it is against these features that a variety of oppositional movements have emerged in an attempt to rewrite the relationship between modernism and democracy (p. 2).

#### **2.4 Race and Social/Educational Reproduction**

Multicultural and critical education theorists are increasingly interested in how the interaction of race, class, and gender influence education (Banks, 1989; Sleeter, 1991; Hall, 1981; Kowalczewski, 1982; Troyna, 1987). Morrow and Torres (1995) aptly notes that this “interplay among class, race, and gender and its contribution to social reproduction has emerged...as an *integrated* research endeavor in the sociology of education” and perhaps the result of “system-threatening social movements oriented toward inclusion of multiple voices, narratives, and experiences, and the redressing of inequities” (pp. 372, 374).

Indeed, events in the past decade in education and society in the West have made the study of questions concerning the persistence of racial inequality in schooling particularly urgent. McCarthy (1990) attributes this to three factors. First and most ominous is the looming specter of racial conflagration and recrimination in schools and university campuses. A second major issue of concern is the persistent evidence of intolerable levels of minority failure and alienation from schooling. In fact, minority levels of achievement and rates of graduation are declining at the same time that these educational institutions have become battlegrounds for racial strife and the vilification and harassment of minority youth. Third, these intolerable levels of minority underachievement are occurring precisely at a time when school populations in the West are becoming more ethnically diverse. For example, in Canada, since the removal of racial barriers in immigration policy in the late 1960s, the origin of Canada’s immigrants has shifted from Europe, particularly the United Kingdom and Italy to Asia, Latin America, and the Caribbean. This has changed the face of Canada particularly in large urban centres. Over 50% of the immigrant population has settled in Toronto, Montreal, and Vancouver. For many people, this change is an uncomfortable one (Lyons and Farrell, 1994). And according to recent demographic

projections in the United States, Blacks and Hispanics will constitute a decided majority in nearly one-third of America's largest cities (Giroux, 1992).

These developments in schools and in the general population are themselves part of a larger historical processes of socioeconomic and demographic change which have accelerated during the postwar period and whose consequences have become particularly pronounced in recent years. The most evident of these dynamics include: a general shift in the economy from goods-producing to service-intensive industries; an increasing bifurcation of the labour market into low-wage/high-wage sectors; technological innovation; the relocation out and/or de-industrialization of the manufacturing sectors of major cities; and a reconstitution of the social composition of the workforce, which now consists mainly of women and minorities. These developments have helped to define the nature of race relations in the 1980s in the West, and have set the tone for the 1990s as well. The current recession had once again provided the scene for the re-emergence of race as salient issue in political and public debate (Gundara et al., 1986; McCarthy, 1990; McCarthy and Crichlow, 1993; Rizvi, 1986; Troyna, 1993; Wilson, 1987). For example, in the United Kingdom, the appointment of Margaret Thatcher as Prime Minister in 1979 brought with it what has been called 'the new racism,' meaning that "the subsequent political rhetoric and action of Conservative governments were keyed to the notion of 'a way of life' that was threatened by 'outsiders'" (Cashmore and Troyna, 1990, p. 5). This concept acted as a supporting structure for both political philosophies and actions, including education policy (Troyna, 1993).

Over the years, mainstream and radical curriculum theorists and sociologists of education have provided contrasting explanations for the persistence of racial inequality in schooling and society in Western industrial countries. On the one hand, mainstream educators have tended to reduce the complexities associated with racial inequality to one overwhelming concern: *the issue of the educability of minorities*. In

these accounts the central task has been to explain perceived differences between Black and White students as reflected in differential achievement scores on standardized tests, high school drop-out rates, and so on. Explanations of Black 'underachievement' are consequently situated within pathological constructions of minority cognitive capacities, child-rearing practices, family structures, and linguistic styles. Mainstream theorists have, in this sense, tended to 'blame the victim.' Curriculum practices and interventions predicated on these approaches attempt to influence positive changes in minority school performance through the manipulation of specific variables, such as teacher behaviour, methods of testing, placement, and counselling (Henriques, 1984; McCarthy, 1988; Ogbu, 1978, 1992; Ogbu and Matute-Bianchi, 1986; Troyna, 1987, 1993).

In contrast to mainstream emphasis on values and behaviour, radical and neo-Marxist sociologists locate the roots of racial inequality within the structural properties of capitalism and its elaboration as a world system. Racial inequality in these accounts is something of a by-product of the major class contradiction between labour and capital. These theorists have thus sought to explain minority failure by reference to the role the education system plays in producing and supplying the passive, trainable recruits required in the secondary labour market. Here, schools follow the pattern of the economy (Bowles and Gintis, 1976; McCarthy, 1988; Sarup, 1991).

I agree with the criticism that both the mainstream and radical conceptualization of racial inequality are "essentialist," that is, they tend to rely too heavily on linear, single-causal models or explanations that retreat from the exploration of the historical, political, cultural and economic contexts in which racial groups encounter each other in school and social life. The point is that, without an examination of institutional and social context it is difficult to understand how racial inequality operates in education (Cortes, 1986; McCarthy, 1988; Omi and Winant,

1986). So, despite comprehensive evidence of the glaring disparities in education in Western societies, theorists have been slow in developing rigorous, durable, or compelling explanations of the reproduction and persistence of racial/ethnic inequality in schooling and society. As McCarthy (1990) notes, "current mainstream educational theories do not adequately address or account for the persistence of racial inequality in schooling" (p. 2). Sarup (1986) made the same point that both mainstream and radical educational researchers have tended to undertheorize and marginalize phenomena associated with racial inequality.

It is important to also note here that these concerns of racial/ethnic instability and inequality come at a critical juncture in debates over racial identity and curriculum reform in the educational field in Western nations. For example, there has been a significant increase in interest concerning multicultural/ethnic education in recent years. This is particularly true in the United States and Western Europe, where as we mentioned above, the populations are becoming increasingly more heterogeneous. This renewed interest in multicultural/ethnic education was triggered by a proliferation of publications and studies showing that subordinate groups tend to have poorer academic performance and higher dropout rates (Clark, 1993). It also underscores the point that the chronic problems of ethnic minority education have led to a growing recognition of this as one of the most critical issues today (Macias, 1993). It has thus become obvious among educators that a multicultural and anti-racist approach to education is needed to counter the prevalence of ethnic bias and stereotyping, and to help students adjust to an ethnically diverse society.

The above discussion suggests that issues of race and racism and other forms of intolerance have become a growing problem in contemporary society. Racism, sexism, anti-Semitism, homophobia and other forms of discrimination are widespread in society today (Lyons and Farrell, 1994; Pincus and Ehrlich, 1994; Steinberg, 1981; Henry et al., 1995). In fact, as Omi and Winant (1993) point out, our society is so

thoroughly racialized that to be without racial identity is to be in danger of having no identity. Smedley (1993) also makes the point that "race is a pervasive element in the cognitive patterning of Western thought and experience. It has been so fundamental, so intrinsic to our perceptual and explanatory framework that we almost never question its meaning or its reality" (p. 1). It is virtually impossible to live in contemporary North American society and not be exposed to some aspect of the personal, cultural, and/or institutional manifestations of racism in our society (Tatum, 1992). Race is seen as a part of the natural order of things, and the existence of races is believed to have been confirmed as part of nature by science and scientists. Yet the scientific record has shown enormous ambiguity on the matter of race, as well as much confusion and little common agreement among experts on its meaning (Smedley, 1993). As Cashmore and Troyna (1990) note:

On closer examination, we can see there is far from universal agreement on exactly what race means. The concept is notoriously fragile when subjected to biological analysis, but is incredibly powerful as a force in history. Or rather, the belief in race has been—and still is—a powerful force. What we argue is that race is real and it is part of our stock of knowledge (p. 32).

The sociologist/educator has to follow the debate about what race *is*, but he/she must concentrate upon how the idea of race has been *used*. Racial theories became important historically as a mode of increasing and institutionalizing distances between peoples of different physical appearance. They attracted attention to, and magnified the differences between populations. They rationalized the advantageous position of those nations which had been the first to develop capitalist institutions and undergo industrialization. In effect, as a way of imposing order on and understanding about complex realities in which one group asserted dominance over others, some Europeans chose race as the option in their creation of identities for those populations encountered and exploited in the New World, Asia, and Africa (Smedley, 1993; Banton, 1979; Rex and Mason, 1986). Racism then, defined as a

'system of advantage based on race' is a pervasive aspect of Western socialization. In this context, the system of advantage clearly operates to benefit Whites as a group.

Cashmore and Troyna (1990) argue that issues of race and racism are not as random as we might think. Unlike a game of Russian roulette in which the fate of the player is decided by sheer chance, the victim of racism is selected and designated according to specific requirements. They make the point that "there are no natural or self-evident answers. Groups aren't targeted as 'races' and treated accordingly because they *are*. Alleged biological differences are either pretexts or justifications for other, often sinister reasons. Racial bullets can be fired at White groups as well as Blacks" (pp. 3-4).

The study of group differences has been dominated by a behavioral and social science school of thought based on biological inheritance, namely, racial or genetic theories. During the 19th century, 'race theories' that rested on assumptions of race superiority and inferiority dominated scientific thought on the European and American continents. This racial school of thought was influential through the early part of the 20th century when it was first seriously challenged by behavioral and social scientists who questioned the idea that group differences in mental ability could be explained by race (Rex and Mason, 1986; Smedley, 1993)<sup>1</sup>.

Porter's (1965) study describing Canada as a 'vertical mosaic' is one important work on the question of group or racial differences. According to his analysis, the country has been dominated in socioeconomic and political terms by the 'charter groups,' made up of anglophones and francophones. Beneath these groups, in a stratified arrangement, were those of other racial and ethnic backgrounds. Those that were most similar to the charter groups enjoyed higher status, whereas those more distant were allocated lower ones. As a result, non-Whites were seen as the

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<sup>1</sup> I realize how easily 'the literature' can be misread when concepts of 'race' and 'ethnicity' are used. As I shall later show, I recognize the 'social construction' of these concepts and shifts in meaning.

most distant, foreign, and less desirable citizens, fit only to do the most degrading types of work. Blacks and Asians were not accepted as real Canadians, regardless of how many generations they were here. This was reflected in Canada's immigration policy until the 1960s. Race thus can be examined as a consequence of unequal relationships, produced and maintained by differential power between dominant and subordinate groups (Li, 1988). From this view, racial groups are constructed on the basis of social relationships and are not based on genetic differences or primordial features. The focus is on the institutional framework within which groups are defined as racial and how social interactions are organized accordingly. Physical and cultural traits are the basis of defining social groups only in so far as they are socially recognized as important. The dominant group has the power, and therefore capacity, to define socially what constitutes a subordinate group using physical and social features (Bolaria and Li, 1985). So, we can define 'racism' or 'racialism' as: "The action of discriminating against particular others by using the belief that they are racially different, and usually inferior. It is the practical element of the race concept" (Cashmore and Troyna, 1990, p. 44).

I think the crucial point to be made here is that race and "racism is a modern conception, for prior to the 16th century there was virtually nothing in the life and thought of the West that can be described as racist" (Smedley, 1993, p.15). In fact, race is cultural construct invented by human beings. As Banton (1979) points out, until at least the 1820s, race was a literary and not a scientific term. Race then should not be seen as something tangible that exists in the outside world, which has to be discovered, described, and defined, but as a cultural creation, a product of human invention. Historical sources show that race has never been an objective scientific classification of human group variation. It is essential that we comprehend race as a sociocultural phenomenon conceptually separable from biophysical variations (Omi and Winant, 1993). Serious methodological errors result from attempts to define human groups as unitary or discrete biological entities of 'races.' As Troyna and



Williams (1986) have also argued, 'races' are social entities—the products of historical, cultural and political struggles and forces rather than biological or genetic endowments.

For example, it is only through developed social practices and the particular elaboration of historical and material relations in the U.S. that 'White consciousness,' with its associated category 'White people,' emerged (see Ignatiev, 1995). Likewise, it is only through similar historical and social practices that racial 'others' emerged under the definition of 'Black,' 'Asian,' etc. In this sense, racial categories and the meaning of race and the "definitions of specific racial groups have varied significantly over time and between different societies" (Omi and Winant, 1986, p. 61). As an illustration, Omi and Winant (1996) point out that in the United States, the racial classification 'White' evolved with the consolidation of slavery in the 17th century. Moreover, racial categories vary contemporaneously between societies. For instance, while the racial designation 'Black' in the United States refers only to people of African descent, in the U.K., oppressed Asian and Afro-Caribbean minorities have appropriated 'Black' as a counterhegemonic identity. And in Latin America, racial categories are used and appropriated with a higher degree of flexibility than in the United States. The point here is that divisions between groups are arbitrary and changeable. Just consider that a hundred years ago, White Protestants in the U.K. and the U.S. were calling Irish Catholics a 'race apart' and attributing all manner of evil to them. They were described as 'White chimpanzees.' But as anti-Catholicism and the Irish ceased to be recognized in racist terms, their position came to be occupied by Blacks, as Whites saw a new rising threat (Cashmore and Troyna, 1990; Ignatiev, 1995).

There is indeed a tendency within mainstream and radical frameworks to treat racial definitions ('Black,' 'White,' etc.) as immutable, *a priori* categories. Racial categories such as Black and White are taken for granted within popular common

sense as well as in writings of scholars in education. Associated with this tendency are tacit or explicit propositions about the origins of races and racism. Mainstream theorists identify the origin of the races in physical and psychological traits, geography, climate, patterns of ancient migrations, etc. Radical theorists, on the other hand, link race and racism to the specific event of the emergence of capitalism and its 'need' to rationalize the super-exploitation of African labour and the segmented division of labour (Cox, 1948). Race as a concept and the inequality that it entailed was thus given a massive boost by slavery, which was thought to prove the existence of natural inequality. As McCarthy (1990) rightfully points out:

The major methodological problem of all these 'origins' arguments is that they presume the external existence of racial distinctions and incorporate them into the analysis of racial antagonism as though such distinctions were functional social categories that have remained stable throughout history. In both mainstream and radical writings, then, 'race' is historically given (p. 75).

In short, as Apple (1993) points out, "the complex issues surrounding race, identity, and representation cannot be understood through the lenses of only one discursive tradition. Rather, our approach must be multidisciplinary. It needs to draw from studies of popular culture, literature, the role of the state in struggles over race, class, and gender relations, national and international economic structures, and the cultural politics of imperialism and postcolonialism" (p. vii). The same point is made by McCarthy and Crichlow (1993) when they state that "the theoretical, methodological, and practical issues concerning race are complex, and that paradoxically, one cannot understand racial inequality by studying race alone; ... the study of race in education must engage with the variables of class, gender, sexuality, and nation and their material expression in the discursive practices of social life" (p. xxvii).

Ethnicity is one of those relatively modern terms that has sometimes been hailed as a suitable substitution for race but that has taken on a confusing plethora of meanings and nuances. As employed in sociology and social anthropology, the term ethnicity is not easy to define as it is used in a number of social contexts. As a theoretical concept, 'ethnicity' remains quite vague. Sociologists, for example, have taken different positions and definitions with respect to what is ethnicity (Rex and Mason, 1986). For example, ethnicity refers to "racial, linguistic, and cultural ties with a specific group" (Smedley, 1993, p. 30). Sociologists have thus generally focused on the question of subjective identity as a basis for their definition of ethnicity. An important aspect of an ethnic group is that its members share a sense of peoplehood or identity and is based in part on descent, race, language, religion, culture, tradition, and other common experiences. According to this view, ethnic identity provides a basis for members of an ethnic group to develop closures or boundaries, within which ethnic institutions, neighbourhoods, beliefs and cultures are developed and maintained (Li, 1988; Rex and Mason, 1986; Weber, 1968). Driedger (1978) has also identified six factors of ethnic identification which form the components of an ethnic community: identification with an ecological territory, an ethnic culture, ethnic institutions, historical symbols, an ideology, and charismatic leadership.

Consequently, ethnicity theory assigned to Blacks and other racial minority groups takes on the roles which earlier generations of European immigrants had played in the great waves of the 'Atlantic migration' of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In this respect, the theory denies the significance of visible, physiological marks of ancestry and of the history of colonization and harsh subjugation that Europeans and Euroamericans extended over other peoples. In doing so it denies White social institutions any complicity in the subordinate status of people of colour. As Omi and Winant (1986, 1993) have pointed out, there is a tendency within modern social theories of race relations to collapse the race category

into the broader category of ethnicity. Race is thus understood as one of a number of determinants of ethnic group identity. 'Ethnicity' is defined by reference to concepts such as 'common culture,' 'ancestry,' 'language' and 'interests.' This definition of ethnicity is primarily based on the experiences, patterns of association and mobilization historically relevant to White European immigrants to the United States. On the other hand, the concept of 'race' invokes physical differences as markers for designating 'the great divisions of mankind.' This problematizes the commonsense categories of the race/ethnic distinction (McCarthy, 1988).

For example, in the United States, the point has been made that ethnic studies treats race and ethnicity as an "add-on" to the traditional study of White, Anglo-American culture. In a lot of ways, the experience of people of colour is still seen as marginal or outside the main story. Too much of the research in American studies emphasizes White attitudes toward members of minority groups; it views them as victims, rather than as active participants in historical processes; and it paints minority and White cultures as separate and unequal (Winkler, 1992). Indeed, the knowledge perpetuated by the schools tend to reinforce the culture of the dominant group while degrading the other cultures. This has negatively influenced intra-racial perceptions as well as how Black and minority youth see themselves. For instance, in a comparative study of grade five and six students in schools with a high and low density of 'visible minorities' (30% and 10% respectively) in Scarborough, Ontario, it was found that White students in both schools had a highly negative opinion of Blacks and East Indians (Ijaz and Ijaz, 1981). And evidence from the U.K. indicates that young Blacks in British schools do have problems of identity, which are the result of oppressive forces in a largely racist society (Verma and Bagley, 1993). In a study of Black students in a Washington high school, Fordham (1990) sought to understand why so many African-American children appeared to be failing in school. The African-Americans students that she examined, Fordham concluded, often did poorly in school because they could not reconcile being academically successful with

being Black. Just when such students gained in terms of academic achievement, they feared losing in terms of racial identity. They did not believe academic success would gain them acceptance by White Americans, but they did believe it would alienate them from other Blacks. According to Fordham, success, especially academic success, was extremely costly for these Black students. Students say, 'I wonder how important it is to transform my identity as a Black person in order to achieve success.'

The historical tradition of racial grouping, as well as race and ethnic theories to explain differences continues to have its effect on mainstream thinking in the social and behavioral sciences (Macias, 1993). The views of scientific racists—that Blacks are, on average, more stupid than Whites, and that this stupidity is due to biological rather than social factors is still prevalent in our schools and society. The work of Philippe Rushton in sociobiology serves as a recent example of this approach. Rushton claims that there is a biological human hierarchy of natural selection in which Mongoloids rank highest on the evolutionary scale, followed by Caucasoids, and Negroids. Attracting controversial attention, Rushton's work has been widely criticized for having a number of theoretical, methodological, empirical, and political-ideological problems (Fairchild, 1991). This prevalence of discrimination in society has a direct bearing upon the development of attitudes and beliefs among children. Research studies have shown that awareness of racial and ethnic differences begin to develop in children at the age of three or four, and that attitudes towards these differences mirror those of adults by the age of eight (see Hatcher and Troyna, 1993)<sup>2</sup>. In the last three decades researchers trying to explain ethnic group differences in education and society have taken into greater account the 'nurture' side of the argument—that influences beyond genetic inheritance place a greater role in individuals' behaviour and their group manifestations. This shift has been particularly

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<sup>2</sup> The reference to children adopting racial categories here is not presented as universal, but rather in association with the categories available to children in a given socio-cultural context.

marked in educational studies that place the learning and experiences gained in a variety of settings—at home, school, and society—as central to the debate.

In Australia, Bullivant (1987) has looked into the 'differential academic performance' of students from 'Asian,' non-English speaking background and Anglo-Australians in a 'culturalist framework.' He asserts that the 'ethnic-success-ethic' of the Asian students must be contrasted with the 'shirk-work-ethic' of Anglo-Australian cultures in order to account for the relatively more successful performance of 'Asians' students in school. Similarly, in the U.K., culture is conceived as a robust variable in analyses of the performance in public examinations of White indigenous pupils and those of South Asian and Afro-Caribbean origin. Here, culture is seen as both the cause of and the solution to the apparent tendency for Afro-Caribbean origin to leave school with relatively fewer or less prestigious qualifications. Thus in attempts to explain 'the reasons for the very different school performances of Asian and West Indians,' Lord Swann and his colleagues on the committee of enquiry into the education of children from ethnic minority groups looked into their 'respective cultures.' The result: Asians, we're informed, "are given to 'keeping their heads down' and adopting a 'low profile,' thereby making it easier to succeed in a hostile environment." West Indians, on the other hand, are given to 'protest' and 'a high profile' with the reverse effect (Cashmore and Troyna, 1990, p. 12). The illogical relationship between diagnosis and prescription is plain to see. Diagnosis: Afro-Caribbean culture contributes largely to educational failure. Prescription: include all cultures in the curriculum and organization of schools (Troyna, 1993).

So, despite the historical evidence, a commonsense view that insists that minorities are mentally inferior to Whites still prevail in some conservative mainstream accounts of racial inequality in schooling. The adoption of a 'biological perspective' by these educators has led to the advocacy of curriculum and educational policies which emphasize social control and regulation of minority youth. These

advocates of biological explanations of educational differences suggest little can be done to remove or assuage the achievement differences between minority and majority groups. Educators and curriculum practitioners must content themselves with the fact that they can only help minority youth to 'meet whatever potentials are dictated by nature.' Other more contemporary thinkers recommend a separate curriculum for minority students that would emphasize vocational studies rather than abstract academic subject matter (McCarthy, 1988, 1990; Ogbu, 1978; Ogbu and Matute-Bianchi, 1986; Troyna, 1993).

As well, within the last decade or so, some conservative educators and social theorists have introduced new and powerful interpretations to traditional biological perspectives on racial inequality. Proponents of neo-conservative approaches to race and education such as Bloom (1987), Steele (1989) and Sowell (1981), have sought to rearticulate traditional conservative discourses over social control and efficiency to more cultural and attitudinal explanations of minority failure. At the same time, these neo-conservative educators have also effectively rearticulated liberal concerns with equality of opportunity to more conservative themes of 'individual responsibility,' 'individual effort,' and the need to build a 'colour-blind' society (McCarthy, 1990). However, while rejecting conservative emphasis on the defective innate capacities of children from minority and low socioeconomic groups, some liberal educators sought to explain minority failure by an equally damning theory. These educators claimed that minority youth were 'culturally deprived.' According to this theory, children are culturally deprived when they come from home environments that do not provide the kind of organized stimulation that fosters 'normal' development. As a consequence, "they are retarded in linguistic, cognitive, and social development, which is why they fail in school" (Ogbu, 1978, p. 44).

The discussions above have touched on many issues and ideas concerning social theory and education. To put all that in some kind of context and meaning, I

proposed for this study a conceptual framework that inextricably places *Multicultural/Anti-Racist Education* within a sociopolitical context. I believe that this provides us with a way to look forward to the study of minority educational experiences and use these experiences—in addition to the cultural and education reproduction theories—in “an analysis of resistance and social movements capable of grasping the range of potential sources of transformative action [in education]” (Morrow and Torres, 1995, p. 309). This is because a multicultural/anti-racist conceptual framework

... represents a way of rethinking school reform because it responds to many of the problematic factors leading to school underachievement and failure. When implemented comprehensively, multicultural education can provide an alternative that is equitable and capable of transforming the schooling of young people so that it is meaningful and responsive to their needs. Furthermore, because multicultural education is an educational process that takes into account the culture, language, and experiences of all students, it can go beyond the simple transfer of skills to include those attitudes and critical skills that have the potential to empower students for productive and meaningful lives within our democratic institutions...In the final analysis, multicultural education as defined here is simply good pedagogy. That is, all good education takes students seriously, uses their experiences as a basis for further learning, and helps them develop into critical and empowered citizens (Nieto, 1992, p. 222).

With this prelude, let us now further expound on the multicultural/anti-racist conceptual framework.



## *Conceptual Framework*

### **2.5 Multicultural/Anti-Racist Education**

*Multiculturalism Canada encourages initiatives that promote an educational system that reflects Canada's diversity, eliminates stereotyping and assures students of all backgrounds equal access to educational opportunity.*

Report of the Secretary of State, Canada, cited in  
*Augie Fleras and Jean Leonard Elliot*  
The Challenge of Diversity: Multiculturalism in Canada

#### *Introduction*

In the preface to their book, *The Challenge of Diversity: Multiculturalism in Canada*, Fleras and Elliot (1992) make the observation that "The principles, policies, and practices of multiculturalism have catapulted Canada into the front ranks of societies in the management of diversity" (p. xiii). For them, "the overriding theme, 'managing diversity,' reinforces our belief that the evolving realities of Canadian race and ethnic relations are properly understood from a multicultural perspective. The challenge of multiculturalism in Canada is nothing less than the fair, just, and equitable treatment of minorities of all colours and cultures" (pp. xiii-xiv). In fact, because of Canada's changing demographic composition, the political status of multiculturalism as a prominent part of government policy and activity has been firmly established in Canada since Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau's 1971 pronouncement in the House of Commons (Fleras and Elliot, 1992; Lawson and Ghosh, 1986; Magsino, 1995). It is now acknowledged that "Canada was the first of immigrant societies in the West to have a policy of multiculturalism at the federal level (1971) which was followed by an Act eighteen years later" (Ghosh, 1995, p. 231). Multiculturalism in this context is defined as "an official doctrine and corresponding set of policies and practices in which ethnoracial differences are formally promoted and incorporated as an integral component of the political, social, and symbolic order" (Fleras and Elliot, 1992, p. 22;

see also Lawson and Ghosh, 1986, p. 449). As a matter of fact, the emergence of multiculturalism in Canada as a formal instrument for managing ethnoracial diversity is widely recognized as this country's significant contribution to the field of race and ethnic relations (Fleras and Elliot, 1992, p. 2).

As a consequence of Canada's policy on multiculturalism, multicultural education, as Magsino (1995) notes, "has undoubtedly been one of the most prominent phenomena in Canadian education in the last fifteen years. Its inclusion in one form or another in school systems is widespread" (p. 253). Solomon (1992) further adds that "Canada's policy on multiculturalism has led racial minority immigrants to expect an open opportunity structure with equal access to education and other life opportunities" (p. 14). A report by the Canadian Education Association also notes that "multiculturalism is a fact in Canadian society and in Canadian schools" (Roe, 1982, p. 5), making Mansfield and Kehoe (1994) to argue that "multicultural education should be retained in Canada" (p. 419). So, while multiculturalism policy in Canada is aimed at a "just" society, multicultural education programs are an attempt at reducing the school-performance and achievement gap between the dominant group and minority ethno-cultural groups (Ghosh, 1995, 1996). In this Canadian context, multicultural education is thus defined as:

encompass[ing] a variety of policies, programs, and practices that entail the management of diversity within the school setting. It includes processes associated with the formation of a healthy identity, cultural preservation, intercultural sensitivity, awareness of racism, and cross-cultural communication. Issues related to social equality and equity are also recognized, and often subsumed under the concept of antiracist education ... The introduction of multicultural education has redefined minority status within schools. It has likewise raised questions about the form, function, and processes of formal education in a racially and culturally plural society (Fleras and Elliot, 1992, pp. 183-184).

The impetus for this emphasis on multicultural education stems from the Canadian social reality that demographic trends suggest that in the years ahead, students and educators will be drawn from an increasingly diverse, cultural, ethnic, and racial populations, and as one of society's main institutions of socialization, Canadian schools will continue to be challenged by the necessity to educate future citizens to be able to live in a multicultural society even while they attempt to arrive at a viable definition of this multicultural society (Christensen, 1995; Roe, 1982; Ramcharan, 1987). Canadian schools appear to be facing that challenge. Today, many school boards across Canada, including Alberta have introduced policies and programs to address the increasingly pluralistic character of our society. Fleras and Elliot (1992) note to the effect that:

This ideological shift has appeared in a variety of domains, including textbooks, teachers, resource personnel, curricula, boards of trustees, and supervisors and administrators. Reforms in areas such as these have emboldened educational institutions to combat racism, overcome discriminatory barriers, foster an appreciation for ethnocultural diversity, improve intercultural understanding and communication, and enforce the equality of minority students (p. 183; see also Henry and Tator, 1991).

In recent years, multicultural education has been expanded somewhat in response to what has been seen as a "logical alternative to shortcomings within multicultural education," that is, "the notion of race and racial discrimination as systemic and embedded within the policies and practices of institutional structures" (Fleras and Elliot, 1992, p. 195). Thus the emergence of a variant of multicultural education known as *antiracist education* (Cummins, 1988; Thomas, 1984). It measures up with multicultural education in certain ways but it "encompasses a distinctive orientation along with a unique set of objectives that sets it apart from multicultural education, in large degree by conferring a 'radical cutting edge' to the whole concept of managing diversity within the school system" (Fleras and Elliot,

1992, p. 195). So, for example, working on the assumption that racism is the problem and antiracist education is the antidote, Carole Tator writes that: "The goal of antiracist education is to change institutional, organizational policies and practices which have a discriminatory impact; and to change individual behaviours and attitudes that reinforce racism. The primary thrust however is on the behaviour and practice rather than on perceptions and attitudes" (quoted in Fleras and Elliot, 1992, p. 195). This is based on the following premise:

It should be noted that a multicultural curriculum can be taught in a traditional and racist way. The way out of this dilemma is through the intervention of anti-racist teaching. Anti-racist teaching would incorporate "education" which is multicultural while the "teaching" would be anti-racist. In this context, anti-racist teaching is seen as coming about through a teacher with the "right" attitude, the appropriate knowledge, and the necessary skills to bring about learning that will challenge racism and change the bias of the traditional ethnocentric and biased education to which we are accustomed in Canada (BLAC Report on Education, 1994, p. 43).

I shall say more about multicultural and antiracist education later in the chapter.

I should point out briefly, though, that there are critics and detractors to the ideas of multiculturalism, multicultural and antiracist education in Canada. For all its popularity and support, some Canadians denounce official multiculturalism as irrelevant, divisive, counterproductive, or unworkable (see, for example, writings by Bissoondath, 1994 and Bibby, 1990; see also Abu-Laban and Stasiulis, 1992; Ghosh, 1995; Moodley, 1984). A major criticism is that it is exclusively concerned "with the Other, i.e., those who are different." And concerning antiracist education, some have argued that "anti-racist education carries too much left-wing baggage to gain widespread public support" (Mansfield and Kehoe, 1994, p. 420). For these critics, "anti-racism is too polemical, rhetorical and political." It's true that the concept is usually placed in the context of words such as 'struggle,' 'power,' 'conflict,' which

are viewed by some as divisive. But as Henry and Tator (1991) correctly note, "as school boards begin to seriously engage issues of racism a certain amount of conflict is inevitable." In the final analysis, I'll agree with Thakur's (1988) poignant observation that:

Multiculturalism [and its related concepts of multicultural and antiracist education] will remain a concept until such time as the dominant groups are prepared to share with the rest of society—visible minorities as well as society's underclass—the power, privilege, status and life chances normally reserved for themselves (p. 19).

This section will not be complete without mentioning or putting in some context some of these criticisms of multiculturalism and multicultural education in North America. According to Giroux (1994b):

Multiculturalism, especially its more critical and insurgent versions, explores how dominant views of national identity have been developed around cultural differences constructed within hierarchical relations of power...The discourse of multiculturalism represents in part the emergence of new voices that have been excluded from the histories that have defined our national identity. Far from being a threat to social order, multiculturalism in its various forms has challenged notions of national identity that equate cultural differences with deviance and disruption (p. 341).

This is further elaborated by McLaren and Gutierrez (1994):

Multiculturalism is a new paradigm of race relations; a new concept of the proper relations between ethnic groups and races and is a reflection of the post World War II challenge by the people who have been marginalized and colonized. The ethnic and discriminated races have challenged the assumption of the inherent superiority of European cultures and have demanded the elevation of their cultures to equal those of Europe or White [North] America. Thus despite its limited impact, multiculturalism has already begun to challenge monocultural beliefs and practices and has begun to destabilize Eurocultural

strongholds. We need to understand that monoculturalism requires a hierarchy of cultures and particular power relations. Multiculturalism requires a transformation of these hierarchies and the accompanying social relations among diverse populations (p. 334).

In this regard, Carlson (1995) is correct to point out that:

In the nineties, as the economic, cultural, and educational terrain is being reshaped, and as we move into an unstable and unsettling age, multicultural education is under increasing attack from a number of political directions ... [Thus], multicultural education may be understood as emerging from, and related to, broad-based settlement between dominant and oppositional power blocs and social movements. As such it provides one of the primary terrains of struggle over the cultural construction of identity and community (pp. 409, 425).

#### *Multicultural/Antiracist Conceptual Framework*

I have made the point earlier that the movement towards multicultural and antiracist education is based on the goal of changing the education system to be more responsive to the needs of minority students. As Banks (1993c) for example, notes: "Multicultural education incorporates the idea that all students—regardless of their gender and social class and ethnic, racial, or cultural characteristics—should have an equal opportunity to learn in school" (p. 3). It has thus far provided more opportunities for serious and critical discussion outside the dominant discourse described by Banks (1993a) as occupied by "the Western traditionalists" (p. 4). Multicultural education has also offered both a critical account of the difficulties faced by disadvantaged students in our schools and society, and an emancipatory and transformative educational model that can be applied, in practice, to making a difference for these students (Banks, 1993a). In fact, according to Carlson (1995), a major accomplishment of multicultural education has been "making the 'other' visible in the curriculum" and providing "an important 'space' within the school program to

explicitly address the issues of race, class, and gender identity, [and] helping marginalized students construct empowering identities” (p. 408).

The term ‘multicultural/antiracist education’ is used here to denote a more critical and *holistic* framework to multicultural education. Indeed, as May (1994) points out, the somewhat artificial divide and debate between antiracist and multicultural education has been brought increasingly into question, and like him “I do not share the necessary corollary of antiracist education literature that multicultural education is completely irredeemable” (p. 40). As Figueroa observes:

It is sometimes said that multiculturalism and antiracism are at opposite ends of a continuum ... This metaphor, however, is oversimple and distorting. Admittedly *prima facie* multiculturalism does not *necessarily* imply antiracism ... But neither is there any inherent opposition between multicultural and antiracist education (quoted in May, 1994, p. 43).

Rejecting assimilationist and ethnocentric philosophies of the 1960s, many have argued for a form of education that is pluralist in orientation and positively embraces a multiethnic perspective that improves the academic achievement of minority groups. Speaking of the United States, Banks (1988) argues that:

As long as the achievement gap between Blacks and Whites and Anglos and Hispanics is wide, ethnic conflicts and tensions in schools will continue. Improving the academic achievement of ethnic minority students and developing and implementing a multicultural curriculum that reflects the cultures, experiences, and perspectives of diverse ethnic groups will help reduce the racial conflict and tension in U.S. schools (p. 12).

Similarly, in her book *Affirming Diversity* (1992), Sonia Nieto notes that:

Multicultural education, conceptualized as broad-based school reform, can offer hope for change. By focusing on the major factors contributing to school failure and underachievement, a broadly

conceptualized multicultural education permits educators to explore alternatives to a system that leads to failure for too many of its students. Such an explanation can lead to the creation of richer and more productive learning environments, diverse instructional strategies, and a more profound awareness of the role culture and language can play in education. In this way, educational success can be a realistic goal rather than an impossible ideal. Multicultural education in a sociopolitical context becomes both richer and more complex than simple lessons on getting along or units on ethnic festivals (pp. 207-208).

Based on this conceptual framework, Nieto (1992) goes on to define multicultural education in a sociopolitical context as follows:

Multicultural education is a process of comprehensive school reform and basic education for all students. It challenges and rejects racism and other forms of discrimination in schools and society and accepts and affirms the pluralism (ethnic, racial, linguistic, religious, economic, and gender, among others) that students, their communities, and teachers represent. Multicultural education permeates the curriculum and instructional strategies used in schools, as well as the interactions among teachers, students and parents, and the very way that schools conceptualize the nature of teaching and learning. Because it uses critical pedagogy as its underlying philosophy and focuses on knowledge, reflection, and action (praxis) as the basis for social change, multicultural education furthers the democratic principles of social justice (p. 208).

The resulting model of multicultural education she suggests includes the following characteristics:

- Multicultural education is *antiracist education*.
- Multicultural education is *basic education*.
- Multicultural education is *important for all students*.
- Multicultural education is *pervasive*.
- Multicultural education is *education for social justice*.
- Multicultural education is a *process*.
- Multicultural education is *critical pedagogy*. (p. 208)



Building on these assumptions, Suzuki (1984) has provided this working definition of multicultural education:

Multicultural education is a multidisciplinary educational program that provides multiple learning environments matching the academic, social, and linguistic needs of students. These needs may vary widely due to differences in the race, sex, ethnicity, or sociolinguistic backgrounds of the students. In addition to enhancing the development of their basic academic skills, the program should help students develop a better understanding of their own backgrounds and other groups that compose our society. Through this process, the program should help students learn to respect and appreciate cultural diversity, overcome ethnocentric and prejudicial attitudes, and understand the sociohistorical, economic, and psychological factors that have produced the contemporary conditions of ethnic polarization, inequality, and alienation. It should also foster their ability to analyze critically and make intelligent decisions about real-life problems and issues through a process of democratic, dialogical inquiry. Finally, it should help them conceptualize a vision of a better society and acquire the necessary knowledge, understanding, and skills to enable them to move the society toward greater equality and freedom, the eradication of degrading poverty and dehumanizing dependency, and the development of meaningful identity for all people (p. 305; see also Gay, 1988; Sleeter and Grant, 1993; Merelman, 1992).

Further to Nieto's and Suzuki's analyses, I also believe it is very important to point out "for the sake of balance, scholarly integrity, and accuracy ... the truth about multicultural education [by] identify[ing] and debunk[ing] some of the widespread myths and conceptions about it." This, I think, is crucial because of "the bitter [ongoing] debate over the literary and historical canon that has been carried on in the popular press, [and which] has, consequently, heightened racial and ethnic tension and trivialized the field's remarkable accomplishments in theory, research, and curriculum development" (Banks, 1993b, p. 22). But perhaps even more important is the need to *demonstrate* in some form and to reassure the larger population that multicultural

education is not an attempt by advocates and minority groups to threaten the “social, political and cultural stability of the [West]” (McLaren and Gutierrez, 1994, p. 333). Rather than “viewing cultural differences only as a problem,” multicultural education is “in its various forms [a means to] challenge notions of national identity that equate cultural differences with deviance and disruption” (Giroux, 1994b, p. 341). So, far from being a threat to social order, it should be seen as “grounded in a vision of equality” (Sleeter, 1989, p. 59), human dignity and mutual respect and thus “an education for functioning effectively in a pluralistic democratic society” (Banks, 1993a, p. 5).

According to Banks (1993b), one of the misconceptions about multicultural education is that it is an “education for the others,” meaning “an entitlement program and curriculum movement for African Americans, Hispanics, the poor, women, and other victimized groups” (p. 23). This I think is misleading and dangerous. I would agree with Banks and others that multicultural education, as conceived here, is “designed to restructure educational institutions so that *all* students, including middle-class White males, will acquire the knowledge, skills, and attitudes needed to function effectively in a culturally and ethnically diverse nation and world.” Moreover and most important, it “is not an ethnic— or gender-specific movement. *It is a movement designed to empower all students to become knowledgeable, caring, and active citizens in a deeply troubled and ethnically polarized nation and world*” (p. 23; emphasis added).

Another misconception of multicultural education identified by Banks (1993b) is “the claim that [it] is a movement that is opposed to the West and to Western civilization” (p. 23). Indeed, conservative critics see multicultural education as antagonistic to European civilization. It is foreign and must be done away with. For example, George Will writes that “Our country [the United States] is a branch of European civilization...‘Eurocentricity’ is right, in American curricula and

consciousness, because it accords with the facts of our history, and we—and Europe—are fortunate for that” (quoted in McCarthy and Crichlow 1993, p. xiv). And conservative columnist and Republican presidential hopeful Patrick Buchanan deplores the fact that public life in the United States has deteriorated because “a flood tide of immigration has rolled in from the Third World, legal and illegal, as our institutions of assimilation...disintegrated.” Thus, Buchanan asks rhetorically: “Who speaks for the Euro-Americans? Is it not time to take America back?” (quoted in Giroux, 1994b, p. 339). To people like Buchanan and Will, multicultural education is a threat to the “Western way of life.” But as Banks (1993b) forcefully notes, “multicultural education is not anti-West, because most writers of color [e.g., Maya Angelou, Maxine Hong Kingston, Rudolfo Anaya] are Western writers. Multicultural education itself is a thoroughly Western movement. It grew out of the civil rights movement grounded in such democratic ideals of the West as freedom, justice, and equality. [It] seeks to extend to all people the ideals that were meant only for an elite few at the nation’s birth” (p. 23). A final misconception noted by Banks (1993b) is the view that “multicultural education will divide the nation.” He points out that titles like Arthur Schlesinger’s book, *The Disuniting of America: Reflections on a Multicultural Society* is typical of this view. This misconception, Banks notes, “is based on questionable assumptions about the nature of U.S. society and partly on a mistaken understanding of multicultural education. The claim that multicultural education will divide the nation assumes that the nation is already united. While we are one nation politically, sociologically our nation is deeply divided along lines of race, gender, and class ... Multicultural education is designed to help unify a deeply divided nation rather than to divide a highly cohesive one” (p. 23).

As a result of these myths and misconceptions, Banks has conceptualized the dimensions of multicultural education as follows:

- *Content Integration* deals with the extent to which teachers use examples, data, and information from a variety of cultures and groups to illustrate the key concepts, principles, generalizations, and theories in their subject area or discipline.
- *Knowledge Construction* encompasses the procedures by which social, behavioural, and natural scientists create knowledge in their discipline. A multicultural focus on knowledge construction includes discussion of the ways in which the implicit cultural assumptions, frames of reference, perspectives, and biases within a discipline influence the construction of knowledge. An examination of the knowledge construction process is an important part of multicultural teaching.
- The *Prejudice Reduction* dimension focuses on the characteristics of children's racial attitudes and on strategies that can be used to help students develop more positive racial and ethnic attitudes ... Involving students in various experiences and in cooperative learning activities with students of other racial groups will also help them to develop more positive racial attitudes and behaviours. An *equity pedagogy* [thus] exists when teachers use techniques and teaching methods that facilitate the academic achievement of students from diverse racial and ethnic groups and from all social classes ... [And] an *empowering school culture and social structure* will require the restructuring of the culture and organization of the school so that students from diverse racial, ethnic, and social—class groups will experience educational equality and a sense of empowerment. This dimension of multicultural education involves conceptualizing the school as the unit of change and making structural changes within the school environment (pp. 25-27).
- An *Equity Pedagogy* exists when teachers use techniques and methods that facilitate the academic achievement of students from diverse racial, ethnic, and social-class groups. This dimension focuses on research studies, approaches, theories, and interventions that are designed to help both male and female students who are members of low-status population groups to increase their academic achievement (Banks, 1995b).
- *Empowering School Culture and Social Structure* concerns the process of restructuring the culture and organization of school so that students from diverse racial, ethnic, and social-class groups will experience educational equality and cultural empowerment. For students of colour as well as low-income students, creation of an empowering school culture involves restructuring the culture and organization of the school. Toward this end, the variables that need to be examined are grouping practices, labeling practices, the social climate of the school, and the expectations that the staff has for student achievement (Banks, 1995, p. 318; see also Banks, 1993d; Merelman, 1993; Payne, 1984).

Indeed, popular conceptions of multicultural education have tended to undertheorize the structural constraints which operate within schooling and attribute too much to attitudinal and even curriculum change. It is not surprising then that the increasing popularity of multicultural education has drawn criticisms from both conservatives and radical theorists. Conservatives worry that a multicultural approach to education is too 'political' and simply panders to minorities, while also detracting from the 'basics' of education. Radical critics, on the other hand, think it is not political enough, and see it as merely an attempt to placate minorities while leaving unchanged the wider social issues (like racism) which continue to disadvantage them, both in schools and in society. Like assimilation and integration, they suggest that multicultural education has done little to change the position of minority groups within education (May, 1994). I lean towards this radical analysis approach because "the field of multicultural education, *as it is popularly conceived and practiced*, is, like its predecessors, riven with theoretical inconsistencies and a seemingly terminal inability to translate its emancipatory intentions into actual practice" (May, 1994, p. 35; original emphasis). For example, Carlson (1995) has argued that currently, multicultural education is limited by its "marginalization ... in a highly differentiated curriculum, an essentialistic treatment of identity that fails to see identity as a historical and cultural production, the treatment of discrimination and bias as an individual psychological phenomenon, and a failure to ground multicultural education within the context of a critical pedagogy" (p. 408). And writing about the reality of multicultural education in Canada, Alladin (1992) also notes that:

Multicultural education has had only a marginal effect on curricular practices and schools, which continue to function largely as assimilationist agencies. The limitations stem primarily from multiculturalism which, as an ideology portrays ethnicity as a reified static category divorced from political concerns. It has been instrumental in diffusing and masking the more fundamental questions

of class inequality and current advantages Anglophones and Francophones enjoy in Canada (p. 80).

Furthermore, Sarup (1991) has described multicultural education as largely consisting “of looking at the quaintness of other people’s cultural habits, their food, clothes and music” (p. 30). He sees this approach as focusing on “life *styles*—the appreciation of other cultures—and not on political processes and economic structures” (p. 30; original emphasis). This means that:

Multicultural education ignores issues such as the economic position of Black people in relation to White people; differences in access to resources; discrimination in employment, housing and education; relations with the police. This approach disregards the issue of racism. Multiculturalism excludes discussion of power; it takes no note of the power relations between White people and Black, both past and present. It also takes no account of the forms of resistance to the dominant power bloc. Indeed some Black writers believe that Multiculturalism is a conscious strategy to contain the challenge presented by disaffected Black youth (Sarup, 1991, p. 31).

Cameron McCarthy (1990) elaborates on three broad models adopted by multiculturalists in his critique of multicultural education. These are the “cultural understanding,” “cultural competence,” and “cultural emancipation” models of multicultural education. The cultural understanding model approaches multicultural education via cultural relativism. It aims for racial harmony by emphasizing reciprocity and consensus and places enormous influence on changing the attitudes of students and teachers. On the other hand, the cultural competence model argues that attitudinal change is not a sufficient basis for contesting the marginalisation of ethnic minority students. Along with developing ethnic identity and knowledge about other ethnic groups, proponents of this model advocate a competence in the ‘public culture’ for minority students. Finally, the cultural emancipation model argues that minority students’ educational achievement (and thus their position(s) in society) will be improved by restructuring the curriculum. In this view, the scope of current school

knowledge will be enlarged and diversified by incorporating the knowledge(s), histories and experiences of marginalized ethnic groups within the curriculum (May, 1994). McCarthy offers compelling critiques of each of these approaches to the popular conception of multicultural education. In the end, he offers the elements of a new critical approach to multicultural education. First, such a new approach must begin with a more systematic critique of the construction of school knowledge and the privileging of Eurocentrism and Westernness in the school curriculum. Second, a critical approach to multiculturalism must insist not only on the cultural diversity of school knowledge but on its inherent relationality. School knowledge is socially produced, deeply imbued with human interests, and deeply implicated in the unequal social relations outside the school door. Third, a critical approach to multicultural education requires a far more nuanced discussion of the racial identities of minority and majority groups than currently exists in the multicultural literature. This critical approach would call attention to the contradictory interests that inform minority social and political behaviour and that define minority encounters with majority Whites in educational settings and in society. And just as important, because of the issue of gender, minority women and girls have a radically different experiences of racial inequality from those of their male counterparts. A non-essentialist approach to the discussion of racial identities thus allows for a more complex understanding of the educational and political behaviour of minority groups (McCarthy, 1993).

Useful for our purposes here and building on the above elements, Ellen Swartz argues for the construction of a framework of knowledge for multicultural education “that has the capacity to produce non-hegemonic emancipatory narratives built upon a scholarly foundation” (quoted in May, 1994, p. 43). She goes on to describe what multicultural education might be like within such a conceptual framework:

Multicultural education is an education that uses methodologies and instructional materials which promote equity of information and high standards of academic scholarship in an environment that respects the

potential of each student. An education that is multicultural conforms to the highest standards of educational practice: the use of well researched content that is accurate and up-to-date; the presentation of diverse indigenous accounts and perspectives that encourage critical thinking; the avoidance of dated terminologies, stereotypes, and demeaning, distorting characterizations; the use of intellectually challenging materials presented in an environment of free and open discussion. *In short, multicultural education is a restatement of sound educational pedagogy and practice that requires the representation of all cultures and groups as significant to the production of knowledge* (quoted in May, 1994, p. 44; emphasis added).

In conclusion, this analysis brings us much closer to combining critical theory and practice in multicultural education using “an anti-racist theoretical framework to understanding the processes of public schooling [and] acknowledg[ing] the role the educational system [plays] in producing and reproducing racial, gender, and class-based inequalities in society.” The anti-racist theoretical framework “also acknowledges the pedagogic need to confront the challenge of diversity and difference in Canadian society and the urgency for an educational system that is more inclusive and is capable of responding to minority concerns about public schooling” (Dei, 1993a, p. 49; see also Dei, 1993b; Thomas, 1984; Henry et al., 1995). Anti-racist education now reflects the concerns of many parents, educators and community members who believe that the fundamental problems affecting the educational achievement of many Black and minority students are more the result of discrimination by race than the diversity of culture. As one parent put it: “the issues facing the colour of my skin are more pressing than those facing my culture” (cited in Henry and Tator, 1991, p. 146). Antiracism then acknowledges the reality of Canadian racism and other forms of social oppression (e.g., class, gender, sexual orientation) in the organizational life of the school and the potential for change (Dei, 1995a; Thornhill, 1984). Dei (1994a) further expounds:



In pursuing the goals and ideals of anti-racist education, teachers and students must be prepared to cross boundaries into different territories and create spaces for engaging one another in dialogue. Within our schools, we must engage in relational terms. We must critically question ourselves and our societies...Anti-racist education is more than a discourse. In practical terms, it is an action-oriented educational strategy for addressing issues of racism and other types of social oppression. It is a call to make the theoretical discourse of 'empowerment' real, a call for a fundamental restructuring of power relations in the schools and in the wider society. It is also about educators acknowledging their relative power and privileged positions in the schools and a preparedness to question this power and privilege. Anti-racism theory cannot be separated from anti-racism practice. To be an anti-racist educator is to be a theorist and a practitioner. *This means grounding our theoretical discussions about oppression in the harsh realities of lived experiences of the students in our classrooms* (p. 1; emphasis added; see also Dei, 1993b; Maharah-Sandhu, 1995).

### CHAPTER 3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

*The real promise of ethnography as a transformative tool is fulfilled when it becomes theoretically embedded and when it, therefore, tries to recover the silenced context, the conditions and the relations in the light of which phenomena need to be apprehended.*

*Ronald Sultana*  
Ethnography and the Politics of Absence

#### 3.1 Qualitative/Narrative Research Paradigm

To seek answers to the questions posed by the research, I utilized a qualitative research method. The use of qualitative methodology as a research tool in the social sciences has increasingly grown in recent years, thanks to critical and feminist approaches in education research which are raising questions and suggesting theoretical new directions for research in a number of fields (Weiler, 1995). A qualitative method of inquiry refers to those research strategies that allow the researcher to acquire first-hand knowledge of a social situation or problem. It includes strategies such as in-depth interviewing, participant observation, oral history, and total participation in the activity of research. These approaches, according to Weiler (1995) now lie “at the intersection of life history, biography, and narrative studies” (p. 127). And they are intended to know how people develop their definition of the world and how an individual or a group interprets subjective experiences and develops meanings (Filstead, 1977; Bogdon and Taylor, 1975). As Filstead (1979) notes: “The qualitative paradigm perceives social life as the shared creativity of individuals. It is this sharedness which produces a reality perceived to be objective, extant, and knowable to all participants in social interaction” (p. 34). In this approach, according to Filstead, individuals are considered *active agents* who define the nature of reality for themselves and the meaning that it generates through interaction and contacts with respective objects and people. It is based on the premise that people respond and

react to the meanings they associate with particular things or people. These meanings are modified and articulated through an *interpretative* process (Blumer, 1969). Peshkin (1993) further elaborates on this form of qualitative research when he notes that the *interpretation* methodology “contains the nonexhaustive subcategories of good research outcomes that *explain or create generalizations, develop new concepts, elaborate existing concepts, provide insights [that change behaviour, refine knowledge, and identify problems], clarify complexity, and develop theory*” (p. 25, emphasis added). Ladson-Billings (1994) also adds that this method of inquiry is a “mixture of scholarship and story that captures *lived reality*” (p. x). This in effect suggests that the human actor does not have a fixed pattern of responses to newly arising situations. On the contrary, the paradigm holds that people develop patterns of interaction through the mechanisms of negotiation and interpretation. Thus, qualitative methodology emphasizes the subject’s viewpoint in order to understand interaction, process, and social change. It allows the researcher to “get close to the data” (Filstead 1979, p.6), and focuses “on what the ethnographic text leaves unsaid” (Sultana, 1995, p. 113).

In general, unlike quantitative analysis, the goal of qualitative research methodology is “often to isolate and define categories during the process of research. The qualitative investigator expects the nature and definition of analytic categories to change in the course of a project. [And] still more strikingly, the qualitative research normally looks for patterns of interrelationship between many categories rather than the sharply delineated relationship between a limited set of them” (McCracken, 1988, p. 16.) In describing the merits of the qualitative approach, Erickson (1977) also notes that:

What qualitative research does best and most essentially is to describe key incidents in functionally relevant descriptive terms and place them in some relation to the wider social context, using the key incident as a

concrete instance of the workings of abstract principles of social organization (p. 50).

This statement goes to show the salient characteristics of qualitative methods. It indicates how the principles of social interaction and organization are derived from individual and collective experiences manifested in incidents, and how the researcher, using various methods, selects those experiences that have relevant social significance and constructs from it the theory and patterns of social organization. It is an approach that is constructed in such a fashion as to yield verifiable knowledge and insights about the empirical social world and to give access to ample information in the construction of social and individual situations. The researcher has "to get to know well the persons involved and to see and hear what they do and say" (Filstead, 1979, p. 7). I'll agree with Sultana (1995) that this type of qualitative approach is "characterized by a reflexivity that enables us to understand the possibility of a multiplicity of viewpoints and 'respond to opposing arguments by a reflection which deliberately places us in the perspective of the other'" (p. 117).

As a result of its obvious advantages over quantitative methods, this study primarily used qualitative methodology to record the experiences of academically successful Black students in Alberta's educational system. It was based on the premise that "students' voices have been least highlighted in the discourse on public schooling in Canada, so the initial and most significant phase of this research foregrounded Black students' narratives of their school experiences" (Dei, 1995a, p. 182). We view this type of qualitative inquiry as part of "the resurgence of life history research as a legitimate form of inquiry ... by many theorists and practitioners concerned with teaching practices and the ways in which social difference is lived within educational contexts ... It is an attempt to come to "a better understanding of how gender, race and class intersect with schooling and how life history research might better facilitate ways of interpreting the past that can lead to changes in ways difference gets constructed in educational settings" (Norquay, 1990, p. 291). Such a

synthesis, notes Sultana (1995), is particularly promising because it “make[s] sense of the gaps in narratives that are to be found within institutions such as schools” (p. 119).

It’s not surprising then that, lately, there has been a proliferation of narratives (biography, autobiography, stories, life histories, use of memory) as a form of inquiry in social science research. Taken together, these narratives have been seen as “*enhancing qualitative research* by opening new roots into the social sciences, and perhaps even into people’s heads (what it means, how it feels, to be a teacher, a [student], a mother) ... It is an oppositional strategy of *reclamation, emancipation, empowerment*, a way of rescuing experience and identity from the abstractions and reductions of bureaucrats, of researchers, of men” (Editorial, *Cambridge Journal of Education*, 1990, p. 203; original emphasis). It is what Morrow and Torres (1995) have called “system-threatening social movements oriented toward inclusion of multiple voices, narratives, and experiences, and the redressing of inequities” (p. 372). Sultana (1995) would add that these narratives also “deal with the politics of silence, pointing toward new ways of making that silence speak in favour of a more just and humane world” (p. 116). Finally, for others, “it is a path to *self—understanding and professional development*; a search for self—knowledge through discovery, reflection or reappraisal” (Editorial, *Cambridge Journal of Education*, 1990, p. 203; original emphasis).

Connelly and Clandinin (1990) define narrative as:

[A] temporal past, present and future, and, as in all storytelling, ... a reconstruction of experience. It is a putting of ‘the mind in the body’ and ‘the body in the mind.’ The whole, for us, is the narrative that each person tells of herself/himself; or that is told through processes of inquiry...In narrative inquiry,...there are multiple possible narratives and/or narrative threads and the judgment of whether or not one is

'telling the truth' has to do with criteria such as adequacy, possibility, depth, and sense of integrity (p. 245).

Ayers (1990) suggests three ways in which this type of inquiry can contribute to a greater understanding of the "out of school curriculum." First, "it may challenge educators to know more about the perspectives being fashioned in [students'] lives and in their own worlds. It may cause policy-makers to reflect seriously on the social changes that have affected children." Second, "the process of life-history, of creating an autobiography, can be a powerful, transformative experience because it is in a small way an act of self-discovery and self creation. In this self-creation, this act of meaning-making, people are often surprised by their own memories, actions, and goals, and find that surprise becomes the occasion to change directions, to redouble efforts, to surpass themselves." And third, "[it would] allow educators to uncover and examine their own assumptions about school, about teaching, as they view things through the lens of these particular [students]" (p. 273). For example, in her study of "Successful Teachers of African American Children," Ladson-Billings (1994) relies "heavily on 'story' as a means of conveying the excellent pedagogical practice of the teachers studied" (p. x). And she notes that "increasingly, in fields such as law, education, ethnic studies, and feminist studies, story has gained credence as an appropriate methodology for transmitting the richness and complexity of cultural and social phenomena" (p. x). Sultana (1995) sums all this up with the following observation:

Ideology is present...in the form of its eloquent silences. In other words, hegemony is possible because silence is privileged in a reactionary manner, and *ethnography attains its radical promise when, rather than dancing to the music it hears, it listens intently to that silence, making that silence speak volumes in favour of the powerless and oppressed* (p. 119; emphasis added).

### **3.2 Sample Selection/Population**

The sample for my study was drawn from a population of Black students in the metropolitan area of greater Edmonton. It was not a random sample, but rather, I sought—with the help of Black youth, community and student groups—Black students for this purpose. I did this because, unlike cities like Toronto, Halifax or perhaps Montreal, there is no concentration of Black students in specific areas of Edmonton. I think this selective method—perhaps best described as a *purposive* sample—provides me with an opportunity for an in-depth and comprehensive study of Black students. It addresses “questions and illustrate approaches that are new, or perhaps underutilized, in this area of [Black] studies” (Macias, 1996, p. 146).

I chose the students from an extensive list of individuals supplied to me by a Black community group. There were thirty students on the list and later more responded to requests to take part in the project. Since I couldn't involve all thirty and more students, my first task was to make a selection of the required number of students needed for the study. After some discussions with a number of the students and advice from my dissertation supervisor, I selected twelve students from the pool. The major reason or rationale for choosing these students is that they are those who show more awareness of the issues concerning Black education and can articulate their feelings, experiences and thoughts as compared to the other students.

### **3.3 Criteria for Sample Selection**

As it might be now clear, the focus of the study is a group of academically successful Black/African-Canadian high school graduates of the Alberta public school system from the Edmonton metropolis. So, in this regard, one could say participants were mainly chosen on the basis of race, academic success and urban experience (Edmonton). But there were other important criteria. Chief among them were (1) successful graduation from an Alberta high school and entry into one of Alberta's

colleges or universities; (2) gender; (3) place of birth or country of origin; (4) student availability and willingness to participate in study; and (5) conversant with Black educational and other social issues. My primary aim here was to ensure a wide range of the Black student experience in Edmonton, as well as keep the study at a manageable size making in-depth inquiry possible.

The sample selected four students born or have origins in Continental Africa, four born in the Caribbean region, and four born in Canada. They are young men and women who have had a variety of experiences in schools in Canada and, in some cases, in other countries as well. About half graduated from high school in the last two years, the other half graduating in the last three or more years. The participants represent a number of linguistic and social class groups, as well as both sexes. In fact, there are an equal number of men and women. They are also first-, second-, or third-generation Canadians and come from a variety of socio-economic backgrounds. Some of the students come from single-parent families, although the majority are in two-parent families. In this way, I can argue that my student sample provide important dimensions of the diversity within the Black community.

For the purposes and intent of this study, I would like to stress again the one shared common characteristic of my student sample—which may not be true of many of their peers: They can be considered “successful” students. As Nieto (1992, 1994) points out in a similar study, although there may be disagreements about what it means to be successful, the students in my sample have been able to develop both academic skills and positive attitudes about themselves and about the value of education. They generally had excellent grades, graduated and enrolled in Alberta’s post-secondary institutions. In fact, all but two enrolled at the University of Alberta. Two have actually completed a first degree. I agree with Nieto’s (1992) observation that “on closer reflection it seemed logical that students who are successful in school are more likely to want to talk about their experiences than those who are not” (p.



11). Their perspectives would give us an opportunity to "explore what it was about these specific students' experiences that helped them become successful in school, focusing on home, school, and community resources, attitudes, and activities ... By focusing on successful students, we can gain a clearer understanding of the conditions, experiences, and resources in their schools, homes, communities that have helped them succeed" (Nieto, 1992, p. 11).

### **3.4 Research Instruments and Data Collection**

To address the questions to be posed by the research, *in-depth personal interviews* was conducted with the twelve informants. The long interview has been favored by a number of social scientists as an effective method to collect data (Hochschild, 1981; McCracken, 1988; Patton, 1985). For example, according to McCracken (1988):

The long interview is one of the most powerful methods in the qualitative armory. For certain descriptive and analytic purposes, no instrument of inquiry is more revealing. The method can take us into the mental world of the individual, to glimpse the categories and logic by which he or she sees the world. It can also take us into the lifeworld of the individual, to see the content and pattern of daily experience. The long interview gives us the opportunity to step into the mind of another person, to see and experience the world as they do themselves (p. 9).

Hochschild (1981) also adds that:

They [long interviews] can fill in gaps left by opinion research through providing data that surveys are unable to produce. In opinion polling, the researcher infers the links between variables; in intensive interviewing, the researcher induces the respondent to create links between variables as he or she sees them (p. 24).

In fact, according to Brown (1994), "interviews, observations, and document analysis are qualitative methods that serve as effective investigative tools for researchers to use

in drawing inferences about social phenomena in a particular context or setting" (p. 91). To assist my study and serve as a point of departure, I prepared an Interview Guide (see Appendix A). My questions were not necessarily structured as interview questions as I permitted questions to emerge from my discussions and interactions with the participants. Indeed, I gave informants the opportunity to introduce new and other themes that would throw light on the Black experience in Alberta schools.

I'd also like to note that in carrying out the research for this study, I viewed myself, as much as the students I interviewed. As Frankenberg (1993) remarks, "an advantage of qualitative research in this regard is that it presents greater possibilities for multiple interpretation" (p. 30). Central to this task was my development of what Frankenberg has again described as "a dialogical approach" to the interviews. This means that, "rather than maintaining the traditionally distant, apparently objective, and so-called blank-faced research persona, I positioned myself as explicitly involved in the questions, at times sharing with interviewees either information about my own life or elements of my own analysis ... as it developed through the research process" (Frankenberg, 1993, p. 30). This, according to Frankenberg (1993) serves "to democratize the research process, reducing the extent to which I was positioned as an invisible presence" (p. 31).

I conducted my interviews between May and September 1995. There were both individual and focus group interviews. In the former, each student participated in about an hour-long semi-structured interview. In the latter, I used the interviews to encourage students to build on and react to comments of their peers, creating a dialogue around each question (see Jacob, 1995). Patton (cited in Jacob, 1995) notes that, for this reason, focus-group interviews tend to centre on the most important issues and identify extreme views. All the interviews, except for three, took place at the University of Alberta campus. We found the university setting to be convenient for all of us. One interview was conducted at a student's home and two at my

Alberta Education office. I used open-ended questions in both the individual and focus group interviews because they are “important when you want to determine the salience or importance of opinions to people, since people tend to mention those matters that are important to them” (cited in Spencer, 1995, p. 17). Data from the individual and focus group interviews were further supplemented and corroborated by secondary data to give a holistic picture of the Black school experience.

In both the individual and group interviews, I explained the research project and assured students that the interviews were completely confidential. I also assured them that secondary school names and specific locations would not be revealed. With the permission of the students, I audio-taped all the interviews, which I later transcribed into readable transcripts (I ended up with more than 100 typed pages of transcripts). According to Goode (cited in Spencer, 1995) “the tape recorded interview is a liberating influence on the interviewer because it permits [the interviewer] to devote full attention to the respondent” (p.17). I must say that there was so much interest in the subject matter that it led to many hours of non-structured, informal conversations and discussions after the structured interviews. Because some of these informal conversations contained important information which was not recorded during the structured interviews, I wrote and kept a notebook for later use.

Each of the interviews I conducted can be viewed as a “case-study” in itself. The case study approach, as Nieto (1992) points out, “should be understood within the framework of qualitative research, defined as ‘an intensive, holistic, description and analysis of a bounded phenomenon such as a program, an institution, a person, a process, or a social unit’” (p. 7). The purpose of using this particular methodology, Nieto continues, “is to gain a deeper understanding of specific issues and problems related to educational practice. Case studies can help us look at particular situations so that solutions for more general situations can be hypothesized and developed” (p. 7). The point is also made that “practitioners can learn from a case study even if

the circumstances of the case do not match those of their own situation.” Furthermore and most importantly, the use of case studies is not meant to provide a representative *sample*, as might be the case with quantitative research, but rather *examples* of a wide variety of experiences. This kind of research provides the possibility of generating sound hypotheses from even a small number of case studies such as this one (Nieto, 1992).

In the end, the study used four distinct sources of data: (1) twelve individual students interviews; (2) two focus groups interviews with students; (3) personal notes based on informal conversations and discussions; and (4) summary and reading notes from a variety of secondary published written material. All these personal memos, observer comments, conversations and students’ interview transcripts make up what Yin (1984) has referred to as the case study data base.

Again for our purposes, the primary goal here of this research was to help voice the rarely expressed Black student realities using a richness of student narratives. Because “there is the need for classroom teaching to recognize the power of lived experience, *experiences of differences*,” the intention of this research project was “to uncover school practices which will illuminate the adaptation and resistance of Black/African-Canadian students in the [Alberta] public school system.” This means “centering the experiences, histories and cultures of minority groups in the Canadian school setting” (Dei, 1996, p. 42). It captures what Sultana (1995) has called “ethnography and the politics of absence” or “about the silences that often are registered but not so often highlighted and analyzed with the anthropological tools of the ethnographer” (p. 113). I believe this kind of focus “open[s] the way for the valuing of silence” (Sultana, 1995, p. 115), and it is a starting point from which the educational needs of Black/African-Canadian students can begin to be addressed. My role and priority here was to portray the experiences of the students’ experiences as accurately and authentically as possible, while of course realizing that “no inquiry is

ever without initial values, beliefs, conceptions, and driving assumptions regarding the matter under investigation” (Ladson-Billings, 1994, p. 146). Indeed, Frankenberg (1993) makes the point that “no presentation of self is really neutral” (p. 31).

Finally one cannot discuss qualitative research methodology without addressing the issues of validity and reliability. Indeed, qualitative research methodology has been the focus of intense controversy among social scientists (Greenfield, 1980; Wolcott, 1985). It had been criticized for its lack of precision in analysis and its ambiguity regarding the tools used to verify validity and reliability (Lecompte and Goetz, 1982; Miles and Huberman, 1984). This controversy has compelled the proponents of qualitative methodology to deal with issue of reliability and validity with some seriousness. Validity and reliability refer to those procedures and strategies which a researcher uses to verify information and establish accuracy. In this study, I used several strategies to ensure validity and reliability. For example, to ensure reliability and consistency, I opted for a loosely structured interview guide, and tried not to phrase questions in advance, but rather allow questions to emerge spontaneously during the discussions. I believed that the spontaneity removed the possibility of prejudgment and brought some credibility to the information acquired.

Furthermore, to reduce the risk of misinformation and other contradictions, I explored certain aspects of the issues under discussion through some form of cross examinations and probes. This, I did, by verifying ‘facts’ or ‘events’ from the information I received from the students (Patton, 1985). In this instance, one sought validity by discovering inherent contradictions, and questioning them further. I also verified information by further asking questions or seeking clarifications to answers within a specific time period (i.e., date and place), and comparing it with other pieces of similar information. So in this case, to find various contradictions in students’ statements, I asked the same question differently to see if it would yield the same answers. And of course, I enhanced the reliability of my data by assuring all

participants from the beginning that they would be assured of complete anonymity and that all the information obtained from them in the course of the interviews would be kept strictly confidential. Their names and addresses would not be mentioned in any written or oral report that is developed as a part of the study (see Talbani, 1991).

### **3.5 The Analysis of Data**

The student interviews generated perceptions about ethnic and racial identity, self-esteem, personal academic expectations and achievements, home-cultural expectations, multiculturalism, racism, parental influence, knowledge of Black culture and history, school experiences, peer groups, extracurricular activities and more. The data were analyzed according to a methodology referred to as “grounded theory,” whereby insights, themes, and theories are based on and grounded in the data itself (Jacob, 1995, p. 346; see also Glaser and Strauss, 1967). Here, instead of approaching analysis with preconceived themes, the researcher proceeds from the bottom up, systematically analyzing the data to generate initial concepts. The advantage of such a grounded theory approach is that it allows the researcher to identify critical ideas, themes, and relationships that may not have been addressed by previous theory. Indeed, Merriam (1988) recommends that developing categories, typologies, or themes involves looking for recurring regularities in the data.

The first stage of the data analysis consisted of open coding. Each interview transcript was read and analyzed to generate initial categories and themes. In the second stage, the coding then identified consistent themes and relationships in each of the two sources: student interviews and focus groups. Once these general categories had been constructed, each source was reviewed again to locate additional evidence in the data. Strauss and Corbin (1990) describe this process as “axial coding” because it involves analysis focused around the axis of one category at a time. The third stage of coding compared the general themes across all the data sources, establishing even broader, more consistent themes. This “triangulation” of several data sources not

only increases the validity of specific findings but also assures a comprehensive perspective of the data. Finally, the themes and categories identified were analyzed (Jacob, 1995).

My overall data analysis draws on the student narratives as well as relevant secondary sources and my own experiences. My theoretical and empirical support for my study came from the broader theoretical framework of schooling, education and social reproduction theories, multicultural education, race/class and social conflict, sociology of education, international and global education, Black sociology, and sociological/political analysis of the experiences of racial and cultural minorities in the West. Here, I drew on the works of Apple, Giroux, Banks, Ogbu, Morrow and Torres, Marable, Bourdieu, Bowles and Gintis, Cummins, Dei, Omi and Winant, Delpit, Darder, McLaren, Gay, Asante, Ladson-Billings, McCarthy and Crichlow, Nieto, Sleeter and Grant, and many more (see full references in study for others).

**PART TWO:  
FACTORS THAT ACCOUNT FOR THE ACADEMIC SUCCESS OF  
BLACK/AFRICAN-CANADIAN STUDENTS**

**CHAPTER 4. SUCCEEDING AGAINST THE ODDS: BARRIERS TO  
OVERCOME ON THE ROAD TO SCHOOL SUCCESS**

*The most important issues facing [Black] students and that present enormous difficulties in adaptation are the structural and attitudinal barriers within the education system itself. Systemic racism and the differential treatment of [Black] students by teachers, administrators, and other students is a significant problem that directly contributes to the lack of achievement.*

*Daniel Yon*  
The Educational Experiences of Caribbean Youth

*The thought of the inferiority of the Negro is drilled into him in almost every class he enters and in almost every book he studies ... to handicap a student by teaching him that his Black face is a curse and that his struggle to change his condition is hopeless is the worst sort of lynching. It kills one's aspirations and dooms him to vagabondage and crime."*

*Carter Woodson*  
Miseducation of the Negro

**4.1 Introduction**

In this part of the dissertation (Chapters 4 and 5), the student narratives serve as the primary data for analysis, although secondary sources are drawn upon where relevant to enrich the discussions that follow. While variation in responses occurred, by and large there was a consistency of narrative expression by the students. Consequently, certain themes and concerns emerged from the analyses of the narratives from which conclusions could be drawn. This chapter focuses on the student accounts and narratives that provide "clear evidence of the persistence of racialized barriers, boundaries and identities of both an individual and institutional nature" (Small, 1994, p. 7), as well as the efforts and obstacles to overcoming



racialized hostility and achieving school success. From my in-depth interviews, it became clear that the lives of these twelve academically successful Black students were “one[s] not only of determination and hard work but also of frustration and rage over persisting discrimination” (Feagin and Sikes, 1994, p. viii). Theirs were “struggles to construct self and group cultural identities in a school environment that does not adequately highlight their cultural presence, heritage and history in both the official and hidden school curriculum. The students thus powerfully link issues of identity and representation with schooling” (Dei, 1995b, p. A31). Nonetheless, as will be shown in Chapter 5, these Black students remain committed to conventional educational goals despite the occasional, but sometimes major, obstacles they encounter. In fact, the students in the study would desperately like to convey the message that *they are succeeding and they would like to be recognized by society*.

In this chapter, five primary concerns pervade the student narratives about school experiences: differential treatment by race; negative racial stereotyping; the lack of representation of Black/African perspectives, histories and experiences (alienating curricula and textbooks); low teacher expectations; and what can be described as a hostile school environment (e.g., the absence of Black and minority teachers in the school system). Before we go into the student narratives, it would be appropriate here to give readers a profile of these students who succeeded against the odds.

#### **4.2 Characteristics of Study Participants**

The young men and women selected for this study come from a variety of backgrounds, a testimony to the fact that the Black population in Alberta and Canada are a diversity of cultural backgrounds from varied economic and social backgrounds. The participants, now in their early to mid-twenties, identify themselves as Blacks of African descent, or as African-Canadians. At the time of the study, they had all graduated from secondary schools in Edmonton and successfully gained entrance into Alberta’s postsecondary institutions. Of the twelve, ten were attending or had

graduated from the University of Alberta in the last year or so. The other two were attending other postsecondary institutions in the city. Their programs of study consisted of science, business, education and literature. They aspire to careers in business, medicine, journalism, academia, psychology, pharmacy, law and music. All but one were unmarried.

Three of the students were born in west and east Africa to African-born parents. Three were born in the Caribbean/South American regions to parents also born in that region. The rest were born in Canada but of varying backgrounds: of the six, two were born to African-born fathers and Canadian-born mothers; two were born to Caribbean-born parents; and one was born to parents both born in Canada. The African-born students have lived in Canada for over ten years, and have English as a second language. Their African tongues are still used at home. The Canadian- and Caribbean/South American-born students have English as a first language, although one with an African-born father makes an effort to learn his father's native language. Concerning their family structure, eight come from two-parent households and the remaining four from one-parent households.

These are students whose stories challenge stereotypes about Black academic achievement, and also point to the influence of family in school success. In fact, these students have really supportive parents—parents who stressed the importance of education, especially for Black children. It appears their parents' academic and career successes were very influential factors in their development as academically successful students. Their parents were educated and were employed in professional-managerial, technical, and clerical occupations.

A common trait found was their striving for academic success. From the interviews and conversations, one gets the impression that these students want to prove that, despite being Black, they can be as good as anyone else. The desire to

avoid living up to White society's expectations partially motivated them to push themselves and excel beyond expectations. Coupled with their parents' support and expectations, they set educational and personal goals for themselves and achieved them. In the process, they built a strong sense of academic competence, self-worth, perseverance, good coping skills, and lots of self-discipline. This helped them in their school-related behaviours ("education habits") such as regular attendance, doing school work and homework, academic course enrollments, paying attention in class, getting good grades, reading voraciously and a motivation for further learning. For these students, it all boils down to liking and wanting to go to school. As one of them related:

*...I liked school, even when I was sick, I pretended I was not sick and I'd be at school until something happened and I had to be home. I liked school, school is for us to learn, to grow really, it's not just to become rich, ... It's just for us to grow as people, for us to learn more about ourselves, just sort of focus us as to what we want to do and stuff. It's never a lost time whenever you learn something..., my mother always said, you always have to do your Math (hmcT/95/18).*

As we shall later see, their home environments played a significant role in acquiring these important "education habits" skills. For example, one student remembers that:

*My dad is very pro education and when we were young, I remember...he would have a rule that every week you'd have to summarize a little story you read for him. I hated it then, cause I couldn't go outside and play. At least that instilled that love for reading, for education, doing stuff like that. Going to school a good thing, it was a fun thing, they didn't make it seem like such a horrible thing (hmcT/95/18).*

In addition, they all involved themselves in extracurricular and community activities. They made friends who shared similar academic and social interests, and although there were White friends, most of their friends are Black. Because of what they told me when I asked them why they thought education was important or why

they wanted to succeed in school, I can safely say that they did not view education as purely instrumental but, for minority students, a means to contribute and “put something back to the community.” As one of them puts it:

*Education makes a human being. It conditions you to really know who you are and to live a more fulfilling life. People think education is just living at school; it's not. Education, it is school, but it's also taking the initiative to teach yourself how to live and to help your community (hmcT/95/31).*

Another notable characteristic of the students was their relatively strong sense of racial/ethnic identity. They are proud of being Black or African Canadian and have consciously worked hard to develop positive Black identities. In fact, these are young men and women who are “providing much of the impetus for maintaining a sense of Black identity, a pride in being Black” (Head, 1975, p. 55). As one said, “*I was never ashamed of who I am, and I don't ever want to give up of being Black*” (hmcT/95/76). They identify with the Black experience and have acquired a deeper understanding of Black history and culture. They have not developed a “raceless identity” in order to succeed academically. Here is how one of them described himself:

*I prefer to be called African Canadian...For myself, knowing who I am and how I present myself to society, I know I am somebody positive, someone you can look at in a positive way. If the term African can be associated with me, well, I see that in a positive term. For that reason I prefer to be called African Canadian (hmcT/95/74).*

And one more point of significance here: although they played various sports regularly, they did not cement their identities around sports. In fact, they rejected the supposedly Black identity formation “based primarily on the belief that Blacks are superior to other racial groups in sports, and have such personal attributes as aptitude, physical characteristics, and personality dispositions to be outstanding athletes” (Solomon, 1992, p. 76).

Furthermore, theirs is a story on how to ‘work the system’ to achieve their goal of educational success. As previously noted, Black and minority students have to adopt bicultural orientations in order to function successfully in multiple cultural contexts. The students in the study are no exception. To cite Clark (1991), “they are socialized into mainstream society, do well academically, and maintain a strong identification with their ethnic group” (p. 42). Despite experiences with racism and the daunting tasks of preparing for racial slights and obstacles, they succeeded—to use Ogbu’s term—“by practicing accommodation without assimilation” (Ogbu in Foreword to Solomon, 1992, p. xi). These students know well what playwright August Wilson wrote about this condition of being Black: “Blacks know more about Whites and White culture and White life than Whites know about Blacks. We [Blacks] have to know because our survival depends on it. White people’s survival does not depend on knowing Blacks” (quoted in Feagin and Sikes, 1994, p. 311). They are very conscious about the world around them and have no illusions about “equal opportunity” for all. They see, in the words of Dei (1995a), “conflict between professed egalitarian values and the reality of sharp inequities in society” (p. 191). As one of them noted:

*I know it's hard, being Black and trying to fit in a White society. All those negative and bad things they say about us. I know some friends who are having a hard time, not sure who they are or how to fit. But for me, I'm trying, and I thank my parents for that. I know who I am and what I want to do. It's not easy for Blacks to get ahead, but that doesn't mean we shouldn't try. It reminds me of Jimmy Cliff's song, "It's a hard road to travel"... (hmcT/95/93).*

Indeed, their experiences “summon us to understand the great tension between conforming to White standards and trying to maintain personal integrity and Black identity” (Feagin and Sikes, 1994, p. vii). Their experiences also speak to what Delpit (1995) has identified as a “culture of power” that operates in schools and supports the dominant society: “I prefer to be honest with my students. I tell them

that their language and cultural style is unique and wonderful but there is a political power game that they too must play ... When I speak, therefore, of the culture of power, I don't speak of how I wish things to be but of how they are" (pp. 39-40). This reminds one of what Du Bois described more than a century ago. Writing in *The Souls of Black Folk*, Du Bois (1903) described a troubled Black consciousness that is created by White racism: "It is a peculiar sensation, this double consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others ... One feels his two-ness—an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder. The history of the American Negro is the history of this strife—this longing to attain self-conscious manhood, to merge his double self into a better and truer self" (p. 3).

Accordingly, I would characterize these students, to use Ogbu's (1978, 1991a) terminology, as "voluntary minorities," although on the surface it might appear one or two of them can be described as "involuntary immigrants." "Involuntary racial minorities" (i.e., those minorities who were incorporated into a society against their will through slavery, colonization, or conquest) have usually developed "an oppositional group identity and an oppositional cultural frame of reference vis-à-vis the group identity and cultural frame of reference of the dominant group" (Ogbu in Solomon, 1992, p. ix). Ogbu further points out that "all minority groups go to school with some degree of cultural and language differences, including differences in cultural frames of reference. However, it is the involuntary minorities who have greater difficulty crossing cultural and language boundaries at school and are generally less successful. The reason appears to lie in the way the two types of minorities, voluntary and involuntary, interpret their cultural and language differences. Voluntary minorities interpret these differences as something to be overcome in order to achieve their social and economic goals. These minorities selectively learn the language and other cultural features or practices of the school, without imagining that this requires

them to give up their own minority language and culture. That is, they don't perceive a threat to their minority language or cultural identity. [But] racial minorities who are involuntary minorities understand that school success and good credentials are necessary for getting jobs with decent pay" (see Ogbu in Foreword to Solomon, 1992, pp. ix-x).

### *The Racialized Barriers*

#### **4.3 Racism and Racist Attitudes**

*One of the most invidious outcomes of all this is that Black people continue to be the main focus of the magnifying glass in attempts to understand 'race relations': it is as if the problems inhere in 'race' or skin colour. But in fact, the problem is not 'race' but 'racisms,' not relations between 'races' but relations which have been racialised, not the physical attributes of Blacks or their presumed inferiority, but the motivations of non-Blacks, and the obstacles they impose.*

*Stephen Small*

**Racialised Barriers: The Black Experience in the United States and England in the 1980s**

*No matter whether the dimension is time, place, or social class, racism has been endemic in Canada. It has stretched from the early slavery at the nation's dawn down through the Fascist phase prior to the Second World War to the Paki-bashing of recent years. It has reached from the Pacific to the Atlantic, taking different forms according to the local ethnic composition, targeting Asians in Vancouver, Blacks in Nova Scotia, and Jews everywhere. It has been represented in corporate and government boards and among manual labourers at construction sites. And it has appeared both visibly in the form of violent attacks and covertly in the form of variations in wages and employment opportunities based on racial criteria.*

*Stanley R. Barrett*

**Is God a Racist? The Right Wing in Canada**

In this section of the study, I begin to use the student narratives to discuss themes and thoughts expressed by the study participants regarding what I have called “racialized barriers.” Although the primary focus of the study is successful student experiences, it became clear during the interviews that these students had to contend with, cope with and overcome what might be described as ‘obstacles’ or ‘barriers.’ To put their successful experiences in some kind of context, I thought it would be appropriate to discuss these obstacles and barriers, which I have previously noted as ‘racialized.’ Again, ‘racialized barriers’ is used here to refer to “the pervasive incidence of discrimination and demarcation predicated on assumptions of ‘race’ ... often embraced by groups which we call ‘Black’ and ‘White’” (Small, 1994, p. 36).

All the students in the study said they experienced racism (both subtle and overt) in one form or another. Their experiences show racism and racist attitudes in school and out of school, the impact of racism on them, and how they coped with it. Ama (I have used pseudonyms to ensure anonymity of participants, and as can be seen from the previous chapters, I have italicized the student narratives throughout the dissertation) recalled the difficulty of dealing with racism for the first time. Having been born in West Africa and remembering “how so nice we’re to White people,” she couldn’t believe when she came to Canada “there’s just a reverse and you think, ‘how can anybody be so mean?’”:

*When we first came to Canada, when I was going to school I’d see these three kids walking way down the road, and then I’d hear nigger, then they’d run away. I was hurt, I can’t believe it. I’ve never done anything wrong to these people, I can’t believe this is happening. I came home, and again it’s usually through the parents; my parents talking to me, going, ‘well, you can’t always take these things and internalize it, you have to get over it. These people just don’t know. They are going to act that way to you, they just don’t know anything about anything and just leave it at that.’ That really helped me. I still need it today. I try not to take it personally (hmcT/95/25-26).*



For Abena, born and raised in Alberta, racism started very early for her in Grade 1. She recalls the experience:

*I was just minding my own business and there was a boy a few grades older than me. Every day he would come and harass me, call me nigger, etc. And so from day one, I kind of knew that I wasn't going to be accepted. I found the older I got the less overt it was. I found that people were just used to me, I guess, and so I didn't have to go through all the hassles of it. I had a close group of friends that I was always with. That group was there for me (hmcT/95/27).*

Racism also started young for Alberta-born Kwadjo and his brother, who were the only Black kids in the school. He sadly remembers how *"people would stick their tongue out at me; and I've been spit on the forehead and I've been called liver lips"* (hmcT/95/29). What was especially galling for him was that one of the name-callers was *"a kid that was Black too. He was kind of light-skinned Black and one of his parents was White so maybe he had perception problems or something of who he was"* (hmcT/95/27).

These incidences of racism did not only happen at the elementary school level. Kweku, born in the Caribbean and coming to Alberta in his high school years, found *"a lot of racism and racist attitude."* He offers this glimpse of what he perceived to be *"quiet racism"*:

*Even in high school, walking home one day, they drive by and yell 'nigger.' You have to understand in Alberta, there's a lot of quiet racism. I discovered racism more often when I went for jobs than anything else. They'd look at my resume, phone me up because my name sounds European: 'Mr. [says given surname], you seem to be really qualified; we're only calling a few people for an interview, would you come down for an interview?' As soon as I went there, the lady asked me when I walked in, 'Oh, are you here for the garbage bags?' Then [when she finds out I was the applicant], you'd get the run-around and everything, we'll call you back and so forth. I know I was*

*qualified or they wouldn't call me. It's just really hard to get a good job out there. I think that's where in school, everyone is educated enough and especially at the College level, you won't see open racism because it's not politically correct, especially with a lot of liberally oriented students and university students. So there's a lot of quiet racism. There are people in the classroom, they won't really talk to you all year, they sort of disassociate themselves from you. They won't say, 'Hi, how's it going?' I just ignore it, it's no big deal. You won't see too much outlandish racist remarks or anything 'cause everyone is educated. Once you step out into the world where there's people who have it inbred in them, who are still older, it's really hard to get a job. It's more of who you know than what you can do. That's when you really find the racism (hmcT/95/29-30).*

Sometimes, though, the racism outside of school is more open and overt. Abena, whom we met earlier, tells of this experience as a part-time employee (interestingly she recalled this experience during a discussion on multiculturalism and who is, or what it means to be, a Canadian):

*I work for this drugstore and it's a Black-owned drugstore; and so the majority of employees ended up being Black. One day, this White lady came in and she goes, 'Don't any Canadians work here?' Should I respond or should I just let it lie? I said, 'I was born here.' Then she kind of looked mad that I would say that. 'Don't any other races work here?' That's what she ended up saying. I said, 'Yes, in fact they do; if you come in you can see them all the time.' Some days I find that I just, I'm fed up but then some other days I'm just so used to it, it's like 'If that's the way you want to, fine, but I'm still going to do what I want to do and you're not going to stop me' (hmcT/95/27).*

In some other ways, the racist attitudes take on dimensions which are least expected, as illustrated in this personal narrative by Kwabena, an African immigrant:

*What I always did, especially in class, was I'd always want to be the best or do the best in the classroom, disprove all those beliefs that Blacks can't do this, can't do that. A lot of cases, I'd come up with the top mark and a lot of students would be surprised. I remember in one*

*of my math classes, I had one of the highest marks, and this one girl came up to me and she goes, 'You got the highest mark.' I'd go, 'Yes I did. She goes, 'I didn't think that was right.' 'Why not?' She says, 'I thought you were dumb originally, and stupid.' I just laughed but I just brushed it off. [These incidents] always make me try to do my best and disprove that Blacks can't be smart like Whites (hmcT/95/26-27).*

Kofi, another African-born student, also tells about his experience in an English class in high school. He prided himself on his command of the English language because of the rigours he underwent in his native country before coming to Canada. He was always arguing with his teacher. In the end, he believed it was because *"I think she had a problem with someone from Africa challenging her in class."* Having an African student excel in English in her class was just too much. It was just unthinkable. Echoing this experience, Kwesi, born and schooled in Alberta, makes the important point that sometimes it's that "silent treatment" that is at the heart of racism for Black students in the secondary school system. He emphasizes:

*I don't think most of the teachers that I had would ever have thought of themselves as bigots. None of them would have said 'Oh, I hate this group,' except as a joke. They would have all thought of themselves as very enlightened people who believed in social justice and equality. Now whether they truly did or not is a different matter. So I didn't ever have a teacher say to me, 'You can't do this,' or 'You won't be any good at this.' But I look at the difference between what I do as a teacher and what they did. I don't think in the twelve years that I was in public school I had a single teacher tell me that I should pursue an English degree or I should pursue a History degree or I should become a doctorate of such and such. Not one of them encouraged me. I'm always telling students, 'You should go into this in university' or 'You'd be really good at that, you have talent here, or you have ability, apply yourself, you'll be great.' I don't remember one teacher ever telling me that or that I should be a writer—none of them (hmcT/95/28).*

Words cannot describe the psychological damage, emotional pain, and the personal humiliation conveyed in these student narratives. Indeed, most of the students

interviewed expressed the impact of racism on them. For example, Kwame, born in Alberta, described how

*to this day, it [racism] still affects me. It was a big hindrance. I dropped out twice as a direct result of that and other stuff, like problems in high school with security guards and principals, and when one Black person does something the whole Black population in the school gets to go to the principal's office and stuff like that. You get fed up and want to quit (hmcT/95/28-29).*

Another student, Kwadjo, also states how racism affected him:

*It [name-calling] affected me, but then I got past it. It made me angry because in the beginning I heard it so much. So I thought the majority of people must think that I'm like this and I know I'm not like this but nobody will listen to me. Then it got to the point where I realized that my overt concern for what they were saying in a way represented my actually caring about what they thought, which I didn't. So my realization of the fact that I didn't really care what they thought helped me sort of push them back into the corner and get on with whatever I wanted to do (hmcT/95/29).*

In all these instances, the students described how they coped with the racism they faced and how it did not stop them from achieving academic success. This is how Akosua, born in Canada and adopted by White parents, described how she coped:

*When I was younger, basically I tried to pretend I didn't hear it. I actually wrote poetry and that kind of thing and humour has always been a big part of my life. I always had my nose in a joke book or something so I think part of it I responded to with humour and part of it I sort of pretended I didn't hear it but I would write poetry and I've got quite a bit of poetry written. I think at first I just pretended I didn't hear it and I would be suffering inside but not say anything and then when I got older I think I dealt with it with humour and I think because my parents really tried to give us the confidence [to cope with it]. I think, I don't know when the big revolution of 'Black is Beautiful' was, but I know our parents really tried to make that a big point to us. I think we*

*felt beautiful even though we didn't necessarily look it, we felt it because I think that they gave us that, they helped us to get that confidence and so even when somebody was saying something to me, like even when I got older, it really just started to roll off my back (hmcT/95/24-25).*

The role played by parents was particularly effective in coping with racism. Just like Akosua, Ekua (born in Alberta of mixed African and Canadian parentage) noted how her mother, a teacher,

*always helped me, especially in elementary school, because I had to deal with a lot of name calling: 'Nigger,' 'Blacks are coming,' 'What did your mom do, did she stick you in an oven, cooked you too long?,' and all that kind of stuff. I'd come home crying and she'd be the one saying, 'Oh don't listen to them, you are way better than any of them could possibly be, just keep your head up.' My dad would always share information with us and he'd explain it [racism] to us so we could understand. So I think that [parental support] helped (hmcT/95/30).*

In addition to parental support, the determination to succeed and prove Blacks are capable of academic success also helped students to cope with racism. Ama explains:

*I think it just helped me be stronger in determining that no, this was not going to make me go the other way, I'm going to show them that I can do this and I'm better than anything they are (hmcT/95/26).*

This point of view is also supported by another student who said:

*I hated it when people would tell you that you can't do well and you initially never did well in the first place either because they told you you weren't able to do well or just because you had no reason for doing well in the first place. Personally, I've always had that inspiration or motive to be the best I can and do the best I can no matter what was involved. What I always did was to be the best or do the best in the classroom. I always have that desire to do as good as I can" (hmcT/95/27).*

Others said they coped by being “very anti-social” and being with Black friends for emotional support.

### *Discussion*

These research findings are echoed in other Canadian studies (see for example, Dei, 1995a; Talbani, 1991; Walker, 1991; Henry et al., 1995; Lewington, 1993; Oake, 1991). In fact, one picks up similar concerns in interviews with other Black students about their school experiences (see Spencer, 1995). For example, in his study of “Perception and the Practice of Discrimination Against Blacks in Metropolitan Toronto,” Head (1975) found that respondents viewed the school system as “degrading and racist.” The teaching process “leads Black youth to despise their own families, their hairstyles, colour, etc.” This, in turn, leads to “broken ambitions and initiative. Then the Blacks are blamed for not achieving” (pp. 60-61). As well, a year-long study in Manitoba concluded that “racism is running rampant in Winnipeg schools and is forcing many Black students to drop out of the system.” About 81 percent of more than 200 Black students interviewed by the study authors identified racism as a major barrier blocking integration of Blacks into the Winnipeg school system. According to Jean-Joseph Isme, one of the authors of the report, “Racism is one of the major causes of dismissals and suspensions of Black youth from schools,” and notes that “the impact of racial insults on the mental health of [Black] youths cannot be ignored” (Canadian Press Newstex, December 5, 1993). A similar study in Ontario discovered that “Black students encounter discrimination daily on an individual level. They must deal with racial slurs, vicious graffiti, [and] ostracism on the part of their fellow students. Many feel that it is no use complaining to the authorities about this, since they believe that the teachers and the administrators are themselves racist” (Towards a New Beginning, 1992, p. 79). Not so long ago I read a report in the *Edmonton Sun* about a Black girl, six years old, who attended an elementary school and was called a “Black whore” or a “Black bitch.” Her mother

says as a result her child is "an emotional wreck." Sometimes she says she is at a loss for words. "How do you explain to a child what a 'Black whore' is? She gets called that damn near everyday," she told the reporter. The girl has developed a very low sense of self-esteem (Slobodian, 1991, p. 4). Writing about this incident reminds me of the day my six-year-old son came home from his grade one class and told me his classmates called him names and there were times when no kid would want to play with him. As the only Black child in his class, he had no one else to play with. I felt for my son and understood how he felt. I told him to channel that loneliness and use it productively by reading a book or doing something challenging by himself. Not to let the matter rest, I spoke to my son's teacher about this. She was surprised that kids at that tender age could harbour racist sentiments. I told her that there is research to show children as young as three know and can express intolerant views. I offered to send some materials to help her teach tolerance in her class. She agreed, and also suggested that my son share with his class periodically anything about Africa during their "show and tell" sessions in school. This, in fact, relates to a more general issue about how minority parents respond to racism and discriminatory practices in schools. The issue becomes how parents can be empowered to respond to intolerance.

It has been observed that the psychological effects of racism on Black youths remain greatly underestimated (see Walters, 1994). Studies point out numerous ways in which racism and other forms of discrimination affect Black students and their learning. For example, Taylor (1991) found out that, to the extent that teachers harbour negative racial stereotypes, the Black student's race *alone* is probably sufficient to place him or her at risk for negative school outcomes. Teachers who harbour racist attitudes can affect students in a more personal way as low expectations, hostility, and differential treatment can adversely affect Blacks in the classroom.

Secondly, results of experiments have confirmed that racism creates what has been described as an “environmental stressor” for Black students that can adversely affect their academic performance. It has been found that racial prejudice increases emotional stress of Blacks over and above that experienced by other groups in North America, and that, “that stress is likely to adversely affect students’ daily academic performance by reducing their willingness to persist at academic tasks and interfering with the cognitive processes involved in learning. As this process continues over a long period, Blacks do not develop the cognitive skills that are necessary for high academic achievement” (Gougis, 1986, p. 147). Furthermore, according to this study, “recurring thoughts and feelings associated with race prejudice contribute to a reduction in their [Black students’] motivation to learn and to increased interference with the cognitive processes involved in learning. As this process continues over the years, its effects are cumulative. On the average, Blacks will have spent less time trying to learn academic material and will have made less efficient use of their cognitive skills (attention, rehearsal, recall) in doing so” (Gougis, 1986, p. 149). Stress here is defined as “a combination of emotions, such as distress, disgust, and anger” (Izard, cited in Gougis, 1986, p. 148). Gougis thus concludes that, although “the academic performance of both Blacks and Whites is affected by stress, Blacks are burdened with the added stress of [racial] prejudice throughout their academic careers. Their academic performance is more impaired” (Gougis, 1986, p. 148). Irvine (1990) also adds that “racism and the devalued position of Blacks in our society cannot be ignored as a primary contributing factor to Black underachievement” (p. 4).

Consequently, it is now argued that since racism permeates every aspect of our lives, race must be taken into account in developing a meaningful theory of social reproduction through schooling (see Solomon, 1992). Educators must play an important role in engaging students in discussions about racism. As James (1995) puts it, “our aim must be to provide an educational climate where difficult issues can be taken up, and all students can voice how they see the issues that affect their



aspirations” (p. 53). Most particularly, Roman (1993) suggests that “White educators have a responsibility to challenge and work with racially privileged students to help them understand that their (our) attempts to assume the positions of the racially oppressed are also the result of our contradictory desires to misrecognize and recognize the collective shame of *facing* those who have been *effaced* in the dominant texts of culture, history, and curricular knowledge” (p. 84; original emphasis). I believe, therefore, as suggested by our conceptual framework, that by exploring such issues as racism and discrimination and raising awareness to the impact of racism on the educational opportunities of Black students, we can develop an understanding of multicultural education as anti-racist, comprehensive, pervasive, and rooted in social justice. That’s why I made the point earlier that multicultural education should be basic for all students, pervasive in the curriculum and pedagogy, grounded in social justice, and based on critical pedagogy (see Nieto, 1992, 1994). This also has implications for school policy and administration as the attitudes, expectations, and actions of school personnel are key factors in the academic success or failure of Black students. To improve the life chances of Black youth, school and board policies must address these factors (Solomon, 1992). There is no point for educators to deny the existence of racism and adopt so-called “colour-blind” or “everyone is the same” attitudes. Race and ethnicity does affect the way in which students receive and perceive their schooling and must be recognized and addressed in our educational system.

To close this section, it would be appropriate to address the issue of racism in the larger Canadian socio-political context. Here, it is important to note right from the beginning that there is much documentation on the existence of widespread discrimination against Blacks and other visible minorities in Canada (see, for example, Alladin, 1996; Barrett, 1987; Cannon, 1995; Government of Canada, 1985; Hill, 1981; House of Commons, 1984; James and Shadd, 1994; Lewis, 1992; McKague, 1991; Reitz and Bretton, 1994; Sher, 1983; Sunahara, 1981; Henry et al., 1995). In most of

these reports, there is a general agreement that Blacks face prejudice and discrimination in social, economic and political institutions, as well as in the education system (BLAC Report on Education, 1994, p. 35).

What is interesting about the discussion of race relations and racism in Canada is its denial. This “conceptual confusion,” as Moodley (1985c) calls it, is the result of a unique Canadian political tradition. This tradition, which became part of the folk wisdom in Canada, holds the view that “we do not have a Black problem” (Moodley, 1985c, p. 115), or what Henry and Tator (1991) have called the “‘we have no problems here’ approach” (p. 150; see also Adam, 1985). This has led to the observation that: “It remains puzzling how Canadians have been able to maintain a reputation for tolerance and harmony. What has characterized Canada has been an ostrich-like denial that a significant problem of racial hostility exists at all” (cited in Spencer, 1995, p. 5). Even quite recently, the Economic Council of Canada, in one of their last studies published before its closure in June 1992 (entitled, “Economic and Social Impacts of Immigration” [1991]), concluded—to the surprise of many academics, policy analysts and members of the larger public—that “there is no significant discrimination against immigrants in general or coloured immigrants in particular” (cited in Reitz, 1993, p. 32).

However, as Reitz and Bretton (1994) say in the Foreword to their book, *The Illusion of Difference: Realities of Ethnicity in Canada and the United States*, “Canadians think of themselves as being more tolerant of racial minorities, more welcoming of newcomers, more respectful of cultural differences than are their neighbours to the south” (p. v). But this is more illusion than reality. As Barrett (1987) notes, “racism in Canada has been institutionalized ... racism in this country is as deeply rooted as that in the United States.” Indeed, as Reitz and Bretton (1994) contend, there may be only an illusion of difference between Canada and the United States when it comes to race relations. As they put it in their conclusion:

The general cultural differences between Canada and the United States imply differences of tone in ethnic and race relations in the two countries. The Canadian style is more low-key than the American; moreover, Canadians have a conscious tradition of 'tolerance' that Americans do not have. *In terms of their effects on the experiences of minority groups, however, these differences are more apparent than real*" (p. vi; emphasis added).

There are numerous studies that refute the common denial of racism in Canada. For example, in 1979, Frances Henry, a professor of Anthropology at Toronto's York University, made headlines with a survey in which 51 percent of White Torontonians revealed racist tendencies toward Blacks and East Indians. Ten years later, a new survey by Professor Joseph Fletcher of the University of Toronto found that only 27 percent of police surveyed think it is very important to make a special effort to protect racial minorities, compared to 41 percent for the general public and 62 percent of federal and provincial legislators. Asked whether immigrants often bring discrimination upon themselves by their attitudes and habits, 73 percent of police and 70 percent of the general public said yes (Campbell, 1989, p. D2). Furthermore, in an October 1993 poll conducted by Decima Research for the Canadian Council of Christians and Jews, half of the 1,200 respondents admitted that they harbour negative views of some minorities. In a separate survey conducted a month later for *Maclean's* and CTV, 26 percent of Albertans considered themselves racially intolerant. Surveys conducted over the past year by Canada's immigration department reveal 50 percent of Canadians harbour intolerant or openly hostile views towards immigrants (see Alberta Community Development, "Multiculturalism: The Next Step," Edmonton, 1994). These perspectives have led Adam (1985) to conclude that "while we celebrate *ideological* multiculturalism in Canada we do not practice what I would call *structural multiculturalism*. Structural multiculturalism denotes the equal access to critical resources and positions of power by all segments of Canadian society. Ideological multiculturalism focuses on different *life-styles*,

structural multiculturalism on equal *life-chances*" (p. 59; original emphasis; see also Henry et al., 1995).

#### 4.4 Negative Racial Stereotypes

*Society is preconditioned to see the worst in [Black students]. The devalued status of his race devalues him and his work in the classroom. Blacks risk devaluation for a particular incompetence, such as a failed test. But they further risk that such performances will confirm the broader, racial inferiority they are suspected of. Thus, from grade through graduate school, Blacks have the extra fear that in the eyes of those around them their full humanity could fall with a poor answer or a mistaken stroke of the pen.*

*Claude Steele*

Race and the Schooling of Black Americans

In addition to experiencing racism, the students interviewed for this study believe that part of the barriers they have to deal with as Black youth in Alberta's school system is negative societal labelling and stereotyping of Black people. The student narratives and discussions—both during the individual and focus group interviews—confirm that there was a general and deep concern about how Black students were viewed by society in general. As this excerpt from one of the students interviewed indicates, the stereotypes and their consequences on Black students disturbed them:

*I am bothered by the stereotypes but I think that one of the greatest weapons we have against that is continuing to encourage our youth to go into school and to strive for the things that they want. I've noticed that Black youth, a lot of them have fallen into the, 'Well, I have big plans but I may as well not bother because I'm still not going to go as far as the person beside me.' Right there they're cutting themselves down further and further and I think that if we can encourage them ... and get more Black role models (and I'm trying to work actually with CBO [Council of Black Organizations] to get them to do a conference this fall) so that they can see role models of their own background,*

*[then] ... I think ... the stereotypes will eventually change (hmcT/95/31).*

There was the sentiment expressed that “to a certain extent, society as a whole has placed us [Black students] in a position [that makes] some of us feel like we weren’t supposed to be able to make it because that’s the way it is” (hmcT/95/32-33). During the focus group discussions, many of the students felt that the media has contributed to the negative stereotyping of Black students. It was the view of some that images of Black people from the United States broadcast into Canadian homes have compounded an already serious situation. As one of the students noted in this regard:

*I think Black people here are deriving an identity from what they see in a lot of the media from the States and because they don’t see that they have their own identity, they think they have to do the [inaudible] thing or whatever. A lot of it I think is just not having your own identity and you get into what’s been created before you. I’m glad that I sort of grew up before this whole popular phase came up because who know which of us would have been caught in that too. I think we were lucky enough either through parents or mentors or teachers or whatever, able to get our own sense of self before we got to the stage of paying attention to music or videos or whatever as our prime source of information (hmcT/9537).*

The narratives also showed “how everyday interactions are loaded with assumptions made by educators and mainstream society about the capabilities, motivations, and integrity of low-income children and children of color” (Book Notes, *Harvard Educational Review*, 1995, p. 510). For example, Akosua recalls the time when her teacher asked her to leave the class because the class wanted to discuss slavery and wouldn’t want to offend her by that discussion:

*I know when I was in elementary school here [Alberta] in grade 5, it was I think the second year I was here, we had to do school reports and someone did a report on slavery and the teacher asked me if I wanted to leave while they discussed it so I wouldn’t have to hear it. At*

*that time I really didn't have much of a Black identity and I don't think I had a lot of confidence in myself. I was the only Black student for miles. I don't even remember at this point whether I stayed or whether I left. It seems to me I was in the Library when they did do it and I think I sort of had a confused look and he [teacher] said maybe you'd feel better if you did leave and I think I did end up going to the Library while they discussed it (hmcT/95/31).*

Furthermore, I noted a conversation I had with one of the students, Ekua, whose experience again shows how teachers steer Blacks into roles best suited to their 'natural ability.' According to Ekua, she had mentioned to her science teacher that she would like to study medicine. Sounding incredulous, the teacher suggested she look to another career as he wasn't sure a Black could study to become a doctor. Lucky for Ekua, her parents helped her overcome the hurt the teacher's expression conveyed about her academic abilities. I am pleased to say that Ekua is completing her first degree in science and on her way to becoming a doctor. This anecdote brings to mind another point raised by the students in their narratives. As I previously noted, almost all the participants are now students at the University of Alberta. Time and time again some expressed the view that people are shocked to see Black students in university. It just does not fit the prevailing stereotype about Black academic success. According to one such narrative:

*To this day, people are shocked [to see Black students on campus]. There are a lot of Black students in University and we all hang out in one section ... They're shocked that we're all here. They still to this day don't think we all go to university, but we do and most of the Black students here are not the bottom level. At the University [grade] level, they're not just passing, most of them are getting 7s and 8s and going into Law, Medicine and stuff like that. They're succeeding well and this is from all backgrounds not just the African nations, but the Caribbean and students born in Canada and stuff like that (hmcT/95/36).*

Another student also recalls the incident in his senior high years when some of his schoolmates expressed amazement to see Black students enrolled in math and science classes:

*I think I was with another Black student and we saw that we were being followed by some students. They were wondering what we were doing or where we were going. So they walked around and still followed us into the math class. Then they confronted us in person. We were told we're not supposed to be doing math and science. We are supposed to be [inaudible] big and playing sports and stuff like that. We were absolutely shocked by this, and I think that just serves to show that there's a lot of stereotyping involved. It is the case of portraying Blacks as just entertainers or sports people. It serves to portray us as just being that sort of way instead of being a scientist... (hmcT/95/33).*

As we can see, "the stereotyping involved here is systematic, elaborate and based on assumptions of separate racialised groups possessing distinct mental and physical abilities" (Small, 1994, p. 105). No wonder that the most talked-about and discussed issue by the study participants regarding stereotypes and Black students was the perception of Blacks as athletes. The students believe that the general view of Blacks as only excelling at sports has contributed to the perception of the Black student as an academic failure. Here's how one student put it:

*In North American society, Black kids are supposed to be good in things like basketball. A lot of who you see up there, they're either rappers or basketball stars or involved in some area of sports. The only time you see more Black people on television in Canada is during the Olympics. That's something that I could never fully understand (hmcT/95/36).*

He further elaborates on this point (which has already been made but is worth repeating in this context) by noting that:

*Paul Robeson was a football star, he was an actor, he was a writer, he was a singer, he was a letter man in college, he was I think a lawyer*

*too. He went to Rutgers and Columbia. His grades rank the highest in the school's history. It's like, we have to focus on the fact that he was a football star in College. The man did so much more and there's so much more than physical exertion but if you're Black it's considered that's what you're supposed to do (hmcT/95/36).*

Generally, as these narratives and the following show, the students viewed sports with some contempt:

*I look at professional sports as a very negative. I frown upon it. Living in North America, that is, I frown upon it because some Black kids really look at it and they limit themselves to that field. They don't realize that there are other things that they can do and other things that they can possibly be good at. And what a lot of them also do not realize is that being in professional sports and having an education behind you is even more prestigious. How many people can brag that, 'Well I have a degree in Phys. Ed. and a degree in Physics and I'm also making a couple million playing basketball (hmcT/95/31-32).*

Kwesi, another student, expressed his sentiments this way:

*Athletics are fine. I don't think much of pro sports. I think pro sports is a very negative industry overall and I'm really personally very exhausted of seeing all these images of the only acceptable Black man as an entertainer ... You look at how many White teenagers are buying Rap music records, where Black people talk about murdering each other or raping each other. The teenagers don't understand the full context; they're seeing it as just action and thrills. But it's preparing them for a life where people get thrills out of seeing Black people destroy each other. After all, all the football and the basketball, that's what it is, that's the Roman Coliseum. There was a case study a few years ago comparing portrayals of athletes, White and Black within the pages of Sports Illustrated. It showed a White quarterback who was on the cover and it's a full shot, so we see his feet and his head, and he's standing up with a golf club, sort of [inaudible] gently in one hand resting on the ground. He's wearing nice slacks and a golf shirt and on a very peaceful scene. Within a few issues, they had a Black quarterback on the cover and his face—he had his helmet on, the grill*



*across which makes him look like a caged animal. He's got his teeth bared and he's [inaudible]. His face is jammed right up against the camera. The message is clear: how do you package Black men for sale? Well, they are brutes, and what are White men? They are calm, rational. I think the emphasis on sports is destructive (hmcT/95/35).*

For other students like Ama, a way out was to avoid sports altogether even though she liked sports. The stereotypes bothered her so much that,

*I didn't want to do track anymore because of this. You see lots of Black people doing track and field. It's not a bad thing, but I always wondered, 'Did they do anything else other than this?' It is this focus that bothered me. Even if I could throw, I could do that better than most of the other things I did, but I thought what if this is all I'll be doing. Before I know it, I'll be pushed into it more than anything else. [So], even though I liked sports, it was not really my number-one focus. It's always been education—reading, learning, the sciences (hmcT/95/32).*

### *Discussion*

These student experiences are part of a growing body of evidence that corroborates what many racially visible groups have been experiencing in Canada and the United States. Besides racial discrimination, it is an experience that includes “stereotyping by the dominant power groups whose attitudes are reflected in institutions such as education, the media and the law” (Brathwaite, 1989, p. 206; see also Dei, 1996; Yon, 1994). Indeed, the same concerns about social stereotyping of Blacks, for example, as “trouble-maker[s], violent, and criminal” (Dei, 1996, p. 48) have been found in many studies and reports. For example, in his study *Drop Out or Push Out?* which examined the attitudes of 200 Black and non-Black students toward school, Dei (1995c) recounts the experience of a Black student who narrates why he dropped out of school:

I can tell you the reason why I dropped out. The school I went to, they made me feel like I wasn't smart enough to do the stuff. They

told my parents to send me to a technical school. They treated Blacks like we had no brains ... and that the Chinese were smarter, the Whites were better, so I just said 'Forget it' (cited in Sarick, 1995b, p. A3).

Another report tells the story of a Black grade 12 student at an Ontario school whose teacher appeared incredulous when she came out on top in a class science test. "Did you write your name on someone else's paper?" she quoted him as asking her. The same teacher had previously suggested she drop science after Grade 10 (Canadian Press, July 26, 1995). Carl James (1994) also shares his experiences about his Ontario university students with this comment a student made about him: "I was ... surprised when I later found out that Carl has a Ph.D. in Sociology. Somehow that did not fit my stereotype of a Black person, especially from the Caribbean" (p. 126). In another instance, an English instructor tells a Black student to "see me after class." When she met the instructor, she was told "this is the best essay a Black student has ever turned in to me. Tell me about yourself. Where did you learn to write so well?" (cited in Brown, 1994, p. 1). Boateng (n.d.) relates the story at a Parent/Teacher conference where "a Black parent expressed justifiable indignation when the teacher informed him that his (the parent's) child's grade of 'C' minus was 'excellent.' [Furthermore], one report exists about a teacher in one school who wanted to know from a Black parent whether his son played football or ran track. The teacher had never even seen the son and was meeting the parent for the first time at a high school orientation" (p. 5). At a conference of Black youth in Edmonton in March 1995 to commemorate the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, many Black students said stereotyping of Black youth was pervasive and constant and that many of these stereotypes are negative and harmful. Just like the students who participated in this study, they were particularly concerned about the role played by the media in the perpetuation of negative stereotypes about Black youth, and cautioned Black youth not to build their identities around these negative stereotypes (Lendore-Mahabir, 1995). Similarly, in her interviews with Black

students in Edmonton secondary schools, Spencer (1995) also found out that “some students felt there were specific stereotypes that related to their academic potential. As one student stated: ‘[We have to] ... show them that Black people are not drug dealers, pimps, whores, not just sports people, rappers and singers. We are people that have high intelligence. They see us as someone who can do great ‘slam-dunks’” (p. 54). According to Spencer, “several students felt even though the teachers did not express any open animosity or direct negative verbal comments, they had to try extra hard to prove themselves in order to overcome the stereotype of Blacks as being non-academic” (p. 54-55). As well, she was told by the students that “often administrators would seem to choose them [Black students] from among several other ethnic or racial groups to question if they were skipping their classes. Here the students felt that the stereotype of the Black students as someone who skips comes into play” (p. 63).

Many studies (see for example Feagin and Sikes, 1994; Hacker, 1992; Pincus and Ehrlich, 1994; Steinberg, 1981) have shown that North America’s race-based ideologies, policies, and practices have resulted in largely negative stereotypes of Blacks and other racial minorities. Black people as a group are particularly caught in a struggle to escape social labels and categories. What is significant for me in this study is how this process of racialization—or what has been termed a “socially constructed stereotype”—(see Omi and Winant, 1986; Small, 1994) has contributed to negative perceptions affecting Black learners. There is a concern about the lack of portraying Black students as academic successes, and rather showing them as “athletes, outcasts or partyers” with little interest or engagement in academic pursuits (Hayes, 1996, p.26; see also James, 1994; Perry, 1993). The stereotypical image is that Blacks are generally deficient and prefer sports and entertainment over education. As a Black University of Toronto scholarship winner told a Canadian Press reporter, “The collective idea of what Black kids can do is very limited. Society in general has been giving the message that Black kids won’t amount to much” (Canadian Press, July 26,

1995). Invariably, there is a missed opportunity to show variety because of the little balance or representation of the majority of Black students who do well in school. The point is well-expressed by this observation:

Recent research...points to a disruptive pressure tied to racial stereotypes that affects these [Black] students. Black students know that the stereotypes about them raise questions about their intellectual ability ... They may not believe the stereotypes. But it becomes a threatening hypothesis that they can grow weary of fending off ... Over time, the pressure can push the students to stop identifying with any achievement in school (cited in Benjamin, 1995, p. 7).

Thus, in his recent and continuing diatribe against Black people, Dinesh D'Souza writes, in his book *The End of Racism* (1995), about "Black cultural pathologies"; Blacks "scorn for hard work and academic achievement"; "civilizational differences" between Blacks and Whites; "the breakdown of civilization within the African American community" and so on. In fact, according to D'Souza (1995), "despite substantial progress over the past few decades, [Blacks] continue to show conspicuous evidence of ... failure in schools and colleges ... " (p. 6); he goes on to equate Blackness with academic failure and Whiteness with academic success with this statement: "Many [Black] students seem to have adopted ... a hostile stance toward the values of the White world, including the values of scholarship and study. Among some Blacks, 'getting ignorant' is considered a virtue and a source of self-esteem" (p. 499; see also Ziegler et al., 1991). In fact, as C. Steele (1995) has argued, this kind of negative perception about minorities, and the resulting stereotypes in society that goes with it, can shape the achievement outcomes of groups such as Blacks and women.

Stereotypes have been found to play a significant role in intergroup relations and serve an important function in the maintenance of racism (Larocque, 1991). Stereotyping is defined here as "a tendency to overgeneralize about individuals based

solely on preconceived notions about their racial, ethnic or religious group. This tendency to overgeneralize about other groups is often accompanied by a strong belief in the 'correctness' or 'truth' of the stereotype and a disregard for fact ... While the idea of generalizing or categorizing might seem appropriate, it can be negative [as in the case of Blacks and] it could be to the disadvantage of racial and ethnic group members" (James, 1989, pp. 52-53). So, "applied to race and ethnic relations, stereotypes refer to a shared consensus regarding the generalized attributes of others with respect to perceived physical or cultural characteristics" (Elliot and Fleras, 1992, p. 335). According to Miller (1985), one of the reasons we establish stereotypes in the first place is to explain the number of differences among groups, and stereotypes (accurately or inaccurately) can and do contribute to the development of these explanations. Miller (1985) further notes that:

Once a stereotype is formed, individuals are likely to note and regard information that seems to support the stereotype as confirmation of its validity and to ignore or discard information that is not consistent with the stereotype rather than change the stereotype in a significant way. Over the past several decades [and as this study intends to show], the number of Blacks who objectively do not have any of the attributes predicted by this stereotype has risen rapidly, but large numbers of Whites may still be ignoring them on the grounds that they are exceptions that prove the rule (p. 81; see also Stephan and Rosenfield, 1982).

When it comes to the stereotypes about Black intellectual capabilities, I share C. Steele's (1992) contention that "the culprit I see is *stigma*, the endemic devaluation many Blacks face in our society and schools. Blacks fail in school for reasons that have little to do with innate ability or environmental conditioning. The problem is that they are undervalued" (p. 68). According to Steele (1992), this devaluation "grows out of our images of society and the way those images catalogue people" (p. 72), and furthermore, terms like 'prejudice' and 'racism' often miss the full scope of racial devaluation in our society. Logan (1990) further elaborates:

The negative stereotypes connected with education and learning begin at the elementary and secondary school levels and continue beyond college. Black children attend schools where most of their peers, if not themselves, are labelled by the professionals as “culturally deprived,” “high-risk,” “learning-disabled,” “stupid,” and “crazy” by their classmates. Even when such descriptors do not fit students, the prevailing attitudes still affect their well-being. The negative stereotypes continue and are reinforced through the curriculum and by the school’s faculty. From the perspective of teachers and administrators, the tendency is to expect less academically from the Black student and to assume that nearly every Black student does not meet the standard academic requirements (p. 13).

S. Steele (1989, 1990) has referred to this presumption of Black academic inferiority as “stereotype vulnerability”—implying that “everywhere in this new world her skin color places her under suspicion of intellectual inferiority” (C. Steele, 1992, p. 74). The consequence has been that some Black students perform poorly in school because they buy into the stereotype that they cannot compete academically with White students. As well, the psychological costs are such that the burden of stereotypes depress Black academic performance and impose on Black students a self-doubt and aversion to academic competition. Indeed, Black students who have never been victims of racism can perform below expectations academically because of negative stereotypes (Dei, 1993a; Gose, 1995; Miller, 1995). In carrying out further research in this area, Steele and Aronson (1995) have recently employed the term “stereotype threat” to account “partly for the relatively poor performance of any group widely considered deficient in some ability, such as women in science” (*Report on Education Research*, December 6, 1995, p. 3). According to Steele and Aronson (1995):

The existence of such a stereotype means that anything one does or any of one’s features that conform to it make the stereotype more plausible as a self-characterization in the eyes of others, and perhaps even in one’s own eyes. We call this predicament stereotype threat

and argue that it is experienced, essentially, as a self-evaluative threat. In form, it is a predicament that can beset the members of any group about whom negative stereotypes exist. [For example], whenever African American students perform an explicitly scholastic or intellectual task, they face the threat of confirming or being judged by a negative societal stereotype—a suspicion—about their group's intellectual ability and competence. This threat is not borne by people not stereotyped in this way. And the self-threat it causes—through a variety of mechanisms—may interfere with the intellectual functioning of these students, particularly during standardized tests ... But as this threat persists over time, it may have the further effect of pressuring these students to protectively disidentify with achievement in school and related intellectual domains (p. 797).

The situation is compounded by the fact that, despite a stream of scientific evidence to the contrary, the concept of Black inferiority continues to thrive in many minds. Thanks to publications like Herrnstein and Murray's *The Bell Curve* (1994); J. Philippe Rushton's *Race, Evolution, and Behavior: A Life History Perspective* (1994); and Itzkoff's *The Decline of Intelligence in America: A Strategy for National Renewal* (1994), race theories of group differences survive today. These cultural and genetic notions of inferiority are applied in varying degrees to most minority groups. However, as Miller (1995) points out, "the genetic theory has been applied most commonly and extensively to Blacks" and because of that Blacks "have suffered more educationally from this aspect of White racism than any other minority group" (p. 79; see also Fairchild, 1991; Gould, 1981; Macias, 1993).

Many, including educators, still believe that Black students' school failure is related to their inferior intelligence and their own inadequacies and problems (Macias, 1993). For example, a recent survey of experts on testing published in the *American Psychologist* indicated that a large number agreed that intelligence is highly heritable, and that Black/White differences in IQ are at least partly genetic (Ziegler et al., 1991, pp. 79-80). The so-called "deficiency approach" alleges the genetic and cultural

inferiority of the Black “race” and has been used historically to support decisions that emphasized vocational education for Black children at the expense of providing them with a liberal education. This has been extremely damaging to the educational advancement of Blacks as it has provided rationale not to invest as much in the education of minority children as in White children. As well, this kind of reasoning locates the source of Black academic achievement within the “skill deficits” and cultural background of the Black student and thus participates in ‘blaming the victim’ (Boykin, 1986; Carlson, 1995; Erickson, 1987; Irvine, 1990; Miller, 1995; Orange, 1995; Selden, 1978; Strickland, 1994; Tyack, 1974). It is perhaps no coincidence that one of the contemporary manifestations of the racialized obstacles faced by Black students today is the pervasive streaming of them into the Basic and General levels of education—resulting in negative consequences as these lower academic tracks and labels become self-fulfilling (BLAC Report on Education, 1994, p. 43; see also Oakes, 1985). In fact, I believe that the process of ‘streaming’ or ‘tracking’ in which Black students are channeled into vocational rather than academic classes is one of the most insidious ways of negative racial stereotyping of Blacks in education. To be sure, there is documentation that many Black students who are capable academically are directed into vocational courses. Head (1975), for example, reports of a Black student who discussed his desire to become an engineer with his teachers. Upon hearing his desire, the teachers commented that he was not suited to that field: “You are a good basketball player and the school needs basketball players. Why don’t you become a professional and forget about the engineering?” (p. 89). Similarly, during their research on Black education in Nova Scotia, Black educators “were told by parents and students that it was a common practice for guidance counsellors or other school staff to steer Black learners into vocational or the general programs by telling them that they would graduate faster or it would be easier to get a job” (BLAC Report on Education, 1994, p. 43). The result of all this, as F. Henry (1986) found out from looking at evidence from Toronto, is that Black students miss academic training in



high school—but more seriously they are not eligible or ready for university education. This confirms Carlson's (1995) observation that "once tracked in remedial classes, disadvantaged youths rarely get ahead; and those who do acquire the 'basics' face economic disempowerment in the bottom tier of an increasingly inequitable labour force" (p. 414).

At the same time, if Black students are not 'streamed' into basic or vocational education, the prevalent stereotype still holds that they have a natural ability to excel at sports. Here, physical prowess becomes one of the stereotypes around which 'Blackness' is constructed. Thus, it has been observed that "P.E. teachers widely assume that Blacks are naturally better at sports, and promote Black participation as an alternative success system for these pupils, as a way of integrating them into the school culture and of gaining prestige for themselves and the school" (quoted in Small, 1994, p. 102-103). Spencer (1995) suggests that "this stereotype tends to reinforce the idea that physical prowess is divorced from intellectual ability" and falls "prey to the dualism of Western philosophy, where things are seen as 'either or'"—thereby "promoting the stereotype of the athletic Black male who doesn't excel academically" (p. 56). In sum, Stephen Small's argument is powerful in this regard:

These ideas, notions and beliefs constitute a relatively coherent, if often contradictory, ideology which might be described as follows: Blacks and Whites are different biological 'races' with different abilities; [for example], these abilities are manifested in the sports realm in consistent ways; Whites are able to think and handle sports requiring planning, decision-making and judgment; they are able to float better in swimming; Blacks perform better in sports requiring physical strength, speed and stamina, such as boxing ... The ideologies about Blacks held by non-Blacks 'reveal more about White attitudes than about Black attainments or qualities.' They have to do with maintaining status quo in power relations, and in distribution of resources within and outside the sporting world. Some writers believe

that many of the basic aspects of 'scientific racism' remain believable to most Whites, and even to many Blacks (pp. 105-106).

#### 4.5 Biases in School Curriculum and Textbooks

*African Canadian culture is often relegated to an inferior status by schools thus hiding our group's true historic struggle for survival, liberation and enhancement. On the one hand, the suppression, destruction, distortion of a group's history and culture by others, and the surrender of one's own culture results in low self-esteem. On the other hand, ignorance and disrespect for African Canadian history and culture breed low expectations and unhealthy educator assessments of African [Canadian] students, personalities and potential.*

BLAC Report on Education, 1994

*Education in Canada is based on and fundamentally reflects the culture, values and experiences of a White, middle-class, largely urban population of northern European origins. The society most curricula present to students—indeed, the society personified by most teachers—is one with which non-Whites from poorer, non-urban, or immigrant backgrounds seldom can identify. Compared to their classmates, therefore, visible minority students find little in education that speaks directly to them. There is little that reflects the cultures or heroes of their heritage, that evokes their interest or strengthens their self-image. Their respect for education dries up; they drop out.*

Cited in David Kilgour  
Whither Racism?

Perhaps no other area in the education of Black students attracts more concern than the attention on the curriculum. As James and Brathwaite (1996) correctly note, "the curriculum concerns are some of the most damaging elements in our students' schooling, and this is an area that has attracted much attention in the Black community and among educators" (p. 29). Not surprisingly, it was also an area that generated the most discussion and sometimes anger and emotion among the students in the study. In fact, the question of racial bias in the curriculum content as well as

eurocentrism in school courses and texts were also recurring themes in the student narratives. All complained that the curriculum had little relevance for their lives and, as one of them put it:

*I really didn't feel as though I got any education from school as far as Black education was concerned ... I didn't learn anything about Black history in high school. There was no subject [in Black studies] for you to take, and in regular social studies classes they didn't discuss anything Black or African. They might have said something about slavery once or twice but they didn't really say anything in depth and they didn't say anything positive (hmcT/95/38).*

This theme was echoed again and again by the students. Having grown up outside Canada before immigrating to Alberta with her parents, Akosua, who “never considered [herself] Canadian” then thought courses in Canadian schools would be more inclusive and reflect all of its people. However, she found out in high school that:

*Canadian history just seems to be concerned about White Canada. Except maybe the States because they're so close to the States, they're not really concerned about other countries. I never knew anything about the history of Blacks in Canada until I joined Ebony [a Black youth club in Edmonton]. That's when I started to realize, 'Oh, Blacks have been here for this long. I've talked to some Black families too here in Alberta and found that their roots have been here for a long time and it's like I never knew (hmcT/95/38-39).*

Kwabena, also born outside Canada, found that:

*A lot of the history was about World War I, World War II—European history. There was very little African history. You find that a lot of the students hardly knew anything about Africa whatsoever. All they knew was what they saw on TV or what portrayed Blacks in the most negative way (hmcT/95/39).*

One student found this eurocentric emphasis “frustrating” at times

*because we heard so much about the French and English and stuff. Amazingly, they don't even talk very much about the Natives. You'd think there'd be a lot more on that. It is frustrating because I mean the Blacks here did contribute a lot. We [Blacks] were one of the first immigrants here in Canada. I do feel that there should be a lot more mentioned about us, most definitely (hmcT/95/43).*

This last point was often mentioned by the Black students born in Canada. They are hurt by what one of them, echoing Willis (1995), called “a sin of omission.” For example, Abena, born here in Alberta, narrated that

*... in some of my classes [e.g.,] in social studies, when they did mention anything that had to do with Black people, it was generally that the Blacks came over. They were slaves. In English you'd read a book, Tom Sawyer or something, and it is Nigger this, Nigger that every second word and I found that in the end, I started to verbalize how why do you always portray the negative aspects of Black life. I found that a lot of my teachers just would almost automatically say something and they'd turn to me because they would expect me to give them a response because I wasn't going to be quiet about it. So, I thought it just made me more outspoken in the end which was to my benefit. It made me learn more about Black history on my own than in school (hmcT/95/39-40).*

For Kwesi, also born in Alberta, making some sense of this, he said he doesn't think “the big problem is that the teachers are hidden Klansmen, [although] you still find teachers who have really bigoted attitudes and that sort of thing.” He believes that “the real problem is that we're just invisible to the curriculum.” He explains further:

*I took social studies in high school and the history course — that was supposed to be an enriched history course. The history course was actually subtitled, 'History of Western Europe.' They didn't even make a secret out of it. So all the civilizations of the earth that were brown were left out. We didn't discuss China until the 20th Century. The first mention of Africans was not Egypt, or Nubia or Mali or Songhai or*

*great Zimbabwe. The first mention was the slave holocaust, which was called the slave trade (hmcT/95/40).*

On this last point, it also came out unanimously during the focus group discussions that Black education in Alberta's schools, if mentioned at all, "*tends to start and stop with Martin Luther King and Malcolm X. That's about it. There are a whole lot of other historical Black figures—music, science, you name it. Even in this country alone, there are a lot nobody knows about*" (hmcT/95/44).

I was curious to know how all this made them feel in class and school and so I asked them to tell me about it. Interestingly enough, although they were hurt and marginalized by the whole experience (one dropped out of school because of this, although returned later), most told me they were not surprised. They had expected it. They have been forewarned. As one said:

*I wasn't really surprised because I remember actually being told by someone before I went to [mentions school attended], I was told, 'You're not going to learn anything about Black education.' In fact, they said something about how the teachers there weren't very fond of Black students (hmcT/95/38).*

A few said they were "*furios*" because "*if you're willing to learn about other cultures, my culture might as well be known too*" (hmcT/95/39). One or two started to get into arguments with their teachers. Kwame relates one such experience:

*One time, I got into a big argument with a teacher. We were doing the history of the world. When it came to the history of Africa, the teacher said Africa's history started from 1773 when the White man came. I said this is foolishness. Africa's history didn't start with the arrival of the White man. I pointed out to the teacher that when it came to do the history of Russia he talked about way back in when they were still in [inaudible], that's their history. But when he talked about the history of Africa the only thing he talked about was when the White man came. That's my experience with Black things in Alberta's schools. Always,*

*it's not Black things. It's when the White people came and how the Black people kind of fitted in. That's about it (hmcT/95/45).*

For others too, it was the realization that *"a lot of them [Black students] didn't know themselves about their own culture. Some did, some didn't. That was disappointing. You'd expect Black people to know at least a little bit about their history"* (hmcT/95/39).

But perhaps the most important aspect mentioned by the students was the damage the impact of the absence of Black studies in the school has on Black students. This comment was typical:

*There was nothing on anything that was Black-related or Black successful in the academic area. I think if there was, even if was just a small thing, a Black child would feel that they had something to associate themselves with in the academic sense. This would make them more motivated to achieve as well, 'cause right now they just feel that maybe some kids feel that education is a White thing. But it's [education] not something that they should be ashamed of (hmcT/95/39).*

Another added that:

*I'm no academic genius but when you have a sense of what your people have done it helps you get through the school system too. It helps you get through different things because you feel that your people have made a contribution to where you are (hmcT/95/45).*

What I found remarkable about these students was that though the schools made no effort to introduce or teach them about Black studies, they made the effort on their own and, as one said, *"I learned about Black history more on my own than in school"* (hmcT/95/40). Some regretted this and commented that *"it's not fair that they should have to learn their own history outside school, when European history is being taught in school"* (hmcT/95/40). But the general feeling was this sentiment expressed by one participant:

*My attitude is 'Well, if it rains you get an umbrella.' We cannot count on our slavers and our conquerors to teach us our history and, in fact, if we do, we're fools because why should you trust them to teach you about yourself. Anything they should teach you about yourself, you should regard with intense suspicion. So I enjoyed finding the books about ourselves that we wrote, by creditable sources and that started at a young age. It also started because those books were around. They were in my home and I was taught that the library was a good place. I think parents, that's one of the best things they could do. Yes, take your kids to the baseball game, football or basketball. I guess it's supposed to be our sport. Take them there if you like but by all means teach your kids at an early age the library is a great place to be. I found all kinds of stuff there. The library was fabulous. That was my initiative I guess (hmcT/95/40-41).*

#### *Discussion*

As can be seen from the above student narratives, the curriculum in Alberta's schools is at odds with the experiences, backgrounds, hopes and wishes of the province's Black students. The continued marginality of these students within the Alberta school system has created the situation in which Black students lack any sense of identification and connectedness to the school. Alberta's secondary schools have failed to respond to the direct needs of the Black student and to incorporate Black people's history and experiences into the existing curriculum. This "sin of omission," as Willis (1995) calls it, has "[allowed] the cultural knowledge of culturally and linguistically diverse children to be ignored, devalued, and unnurtured as valid sources of literacy acquisition" (p. 34). According to Giroux (1986), "the issue here is that the school actively silences students by ignoring their histories ... by refusing to provide them with knowledge relevant to their lives" (p. 10).

It becomes depressing when one discovers that this situation is not unique to the Black students interviewed for this study. Indeed, my research findings on this topic are shared by many others. For example, in her interviews with other Black

students in Edmonton, Spencer (1995) concluded that, “the pinnacle of discontent for all groups of Black students was the heavy emphasis on European history in the social studies curriculum” (p. 110). Among the students interviewed by Spencer, there was a general perception that the social studies curriculum portrayed Black people as “passive, rather than active, participants in society” (p. 111). And where Blacks were represented in the curriculum, the students perceived it as often in negative terms. Here are some of the comments expressed by the Black students in her study:

- “They say this country is multicultural [but] they don’t teach any other culture except for Europe.”
- “I can understand [why] we get into this White history, but that’s all they teach us ... White history.”
- “In Social, there is a part in the book about Malcolm X, but we never get to that chapter; we always skip over it.”
- “We go into China, Vietnam War, Pakistan. When they hit Africa, there is like one page. People were slaves, they got into boats, they got killed ... That’s all the knowledge area” (pp. 110-111).

At a conference of Black youth in Edmonton in March 1995 to commemorate the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, conference participants also said the Alberta school curriculum does not reflect the cultural diversity of Canada. The following were typical comments: “The school curriculum is designed to put ‘Whites first’; Blacks are non-existent; The school curriculum portrays Blacks as slaves, not as accomplished people” (Lendore-Mahabir, 1995, p. 8). A teacher at the Black Heritage School in Calgary was surprised to discover that some Black students arrive at the school never having read a book written by or about



a Black person (*Edmonton Journal*, October 31, 1993). On this, another teacher also observed that: "A Black kid can go through five years of high school and never read a Black author. This is an era when the 1992 Nobel prize for literature was won by Toni Morrison, and the 1993 prize for poetry by Derek Walcott" (cited in Ruby, 1995, p. A21). No wonder that "an examination of Alberta texts, inspired by the Keegstra affair, revealed in 1984 that there still were anti-minority biases in books across Alberta" (Kilgour, 1994, p. 7). In fact, according to Winks (1971), in over 50 history texts on the Canadian market by 1960, not one published after 1865 makes the slightest reference to Canada's Black population (see also Hill, 1960).

Underscoring the points raised by these Black students is the observation made by Henry and Tator (1991) that, "from the perspective of the educational institutions themselves, the issue which has been the focal point of multicultural and race relations policies and practices has been the curriculum" (p. 16). The weight of the school curriculum is thus recognized by educators and by recent studies in the education of Black students. For example, an entire section of the *Draft Report on the Education of Black Students in Toronto Schools* is devoted to a discussion of curriculum matters. The report notes that: "The inclusion of Black Studies in the regular curriculum, some parents say, would enhance the self-respect of Black students and generate the respect of teachers and other students for Blacks. At the same time, the inclusion of Black Studies as an optional credit course at the secondary level would be of interest not only to Black students but to other students in the same way that languages and cultures of other people are of interest to persons of different backgrounds" (cited in Brathwaite, 1989, p. 209; see also O'Malley, 1992; Aoki et al., 1984). Another report also noted that: "Often [in] schools in which the student population is predominantly Black ... the school curriculum is largely reflective of European presence, settlement and development of Canada and, as such, provides little or no incentive for Black Canadians to develop their African heritage. Courses in Black history, a spotlight on Black achievements, an appreciation of Black culture—

these are things for which the African Canadian student hungers, often in vain” (Towards a New Beginning, 1992, p. 78).

There is a feeling among Black educators, students and parents that because the school curriculum is one of the most important elements of education and is the carrier of the philosophy, culture and national agenda of any country, the mismatch between Black students’ cultures and that of Canadian schools goes a long way to “reinforce feelings of limited self-worth and cultural isolation by ignoring the historical contributions of African Canadians or devaluing their culture” (BLAC Report on Education, 1994, p. 41; see also Bristow et al., 1994; Walker, 1980). The culture in Canadian schools, according to Kong (1996), is that, “in general, textbooks tend to present the perspectives of White, upper-class, Anglo- and French-Canadian males. Consequently, many textbooks do not acknowledge African Canadians as active participants in the shaping of our nation’s history” (p. 58). Adds the BLAC Report on Education (1994): “When you examine the Nova Scotia curriculum, the Black community hardly seems to exist at all” (p. 41). Richardson (1995) echoes the same point when he writes that: “The shelves of the history and social issues sections of Canadian bookstores have long been devoid of books by and about Canadians of African descent. Indeed, one might infer from public school history and social studies texts that Black people have had nothing to contribute to Canadian society” (p. 36). And on “The 350th Anniversary of Blacks in Canada,” Hill and Bruner (1978) aptly note that:

The history of Canada, according to the usual view of history, is told in White and red: White for larger-than-life creators of momentous events; red for the native Indians. But a deeper look reveals another distinct colour—Black. There is an almost total void in knowledge of Black heroes, ‘colored’ commandos who defended Canada against the Americans in the 1780s on the Detroit frontier; of Black politics, Tories who rallied against William Lyon Mackenzie’s 1837 rebels; of religious development, establishment of the Baptist faith by runaway

slaves; of Black slaves, who were both bound and freed on Canadian soil (p. 10).

In reference to these important omissions from Canadian school curricula, Winks (1971) further observes that:

Indeed, most White Canadians would not have learned that there were Negroes in Canada at all had they relied upon their formal schooling. Textbooks forgot that Black men existed after 1865, and only a few Canadian books gave even passing reference to the influx of fugitive slaves in the 1850s. Most did not mention Canada's own history of slavery and none referred to Negroes—or separate schools—after discussing the American Civil War. C.D. Owen's 1842 text for use in Nova Scotian schools contained a single reference to the long Negro involvement with the province: Blacks 'are perpetually begging and receiving charity.' In the twentieth century those few books which purported to discuss social problems for a school-age audience were imported from the United States, and readers not unnaturally assumed that the racial problems revealed in such books were unique to the Republic (p. 363).

This impact of the exclusion from the curriculum on Black learners has been analyzed by numerous educators and summed up by Asante (cited in BLAC Report on Education, 1994) as follows: "Lacking reinforcement in their own historical experiences, they [Black students] become psychologically crippled, hobbling along in the margins of the European experiences of most of the curriculum" (p. 40). As a matter of fact, the monocultural content of the school curriculum, including testing and grouping practices, and the expectations of educators for Black and minority children, have been established as the major barriers to educational achievement and equality (King, 1993). On this point, a 1995 report by the Black Learner Advisory Committee in Nova Scotia, *A Legacy of Inequality*, noted that Black students suffer and fail in the school system because little is said about the contributions of Blacks to the development of the province (cited in *The Globe and Mail*, June 30, 1995, p. A3). It lends evidence to what the National Alliance of Black School Educators has aptly

observed: "Academic excellence cannot be reached without cultural excellence" (cited in BLAC Report on Education, 1994, p. 18). It also emphasizes the point made earlier that, for dominated minorities, the extent to which students' culture and history are incorporated into the school curriculum constitutes a significant predictor of academic success (Cummins, 1983). Research by Hale-Benson (1986), also noted earlier, provides compelling evidence that the underrepresentation of Black culture in the curriculum and the resulting curricular and instructional inequalities, foster mediocre classroom experiences for Black children and erect barriers to their academic achievement.

The "persistent 'invisibility' of Black studies and Black history within the curriculum" (Yon, 1994, p. 124), as shown above, has been described by Kong (1996) as "exclusionary history"—"the conscious and/or unconscious omission of historical perspectives that conflict with Anglo-Canadian males' interpretation and representation of past events and people, as well as the omission of ethnic or racial groups, such as Black Canadians, from history textbooks" (p. 59). This "exclusionary history" also reveals how Black students are affected by the subtle forms of racism reflected in the school's curriculum. Indeed, in their book, *Teaching Prejudice*, (1971) McDiarmid and Pratt indicate that prejudicial attitudes and negative references to Blacks are widespread in the textbooks used in Ontario schools. So, all said and done, we currently have in our schools what Asante (1992) calls "a White self-esteem curriculum—that is, a curriculum that, by design or effect, reinforces White students' self-esteem" (p. 21). The dogma says that Western (European) knowledge is the sum total of what students should learn. That's why "in many schools, learning starts not with what students bring to class, but with what is considered 'high-status knowledge' that is, the 'canon,' with its overemphasis on European and European American [and Canadian] history, arts, and values. This seldom includes the backgrounds, experiences, and talents of [Black and minority] students in schools" (Nieto, 1994, p. 399). Regarding the subtle forms of racism reflected in this kind of

curriculum, Maclear (1994) poses this question: "In classrooms where the absence of African Canadians in curricular content is still more the rule than the exception, what messages are being sent to Black students as to their participation in Canadian society?" (p. 66).

I would argue that the "exclusionary curriculum" discussed above constitutes a "hidden curriculum" because it "often reinforces society's prejudicial view that Black children, particularly low-income Black children, are incapable and inferior" (Irvine, 1990, p. 8). According to Irvine (1990), "the hidden curriculum is the *unstated but influential knowledge*, attitudes, norms, rules, rituals, values, and beliefs that are transmitted to students through structure, policies, processes, formal content, and the social relations of school" (p. 5; emphasis added). This hidden curriculum, separate from the "formal curriculum" or what is actually taught in schools, also refers to "the different beliefs, assumptions, attitudes, and expectations that teachers bring to the school with them," and particularly, "the different social relations that are formed and the underlying organizational structures and practices of schooling" (Yon, 1994, p. 139). I'll agree with Yon (1994) that "the hidden curriculum has received less attention than the formal curriculum because it addresses what is essentially intangible, the very 'ethos' of schooling that is difficult to pin down" (p. 139). My point here, and again agreeing with Yon (1994), is that "the school's hidden curriculum can cause students to feel marginalized. This is the aspect of schooling through which the subtle and sometimes unintentional forms of racism manifest themselves" (p. 139). For example, in a 'personal reflection' on "Confronting a History of Exclusion," Kong (1996) made the following observation to illustrate the 'sometimes unintentional forms of racism': "By ignoring or omitting the faces and experiences of African Canadians in a society where race is often used to define people, the history curriculum not only alienated me from what I was supposed to believe was the history of my country, but also rendered me, a Black female, as a non-contributing 'newcomer'" (p. 62). Similarly, James Walker notes in his *A History of*

*Blacks in Canada: A Study Guide for Teachers and Students* (cited in Kong, 1996) that, "In the Anglo-dominated schools they [Black students] have been taught that the heroes are White, the accomplishments have been attained by Whites, the nation was built by Whites, all of which leaves Blacks as intruders, or at best hangers-on in a flow of history that ignores them" (pp. 62-63).

#### **4.6 Low Teacher Expectations**

*Low teacher expectations is one of the greatest barriers facing Black learners in ... North America as a whole.*

BLAC Report on Education

In looking at what actually happens when teaching occurs, there is a growing body of research and evidence to suggest that a teacher's expectations, encouragements, attitudes, and evaluations primarily influence students' perceptions of themselves as learners, and that a student's social class, race or ethnicity is a major determinant of teacher expectations. Some of the students I talked with mentioned teacher expectations and attitudes as one of the barriers they faced while going through the Alberta public school system. I must say that not all of them had negative experiences with teachers. About half had positive and supportive teachers. However, they all related that although they were academically successful themselves, they were aware that some teachers' expectations often doomed their peers to failure.

For the students who said teachers had low expectations of them, their narratives and experiences fall into two areas. One relates to how some of their teachers were not "sympathetic" and often did not encourage them to develop their full potential. Looking back now, they wished their teachers had encouraged and helped them as they did with White students. Here is how one related his experience in this regard:

*... I don't think most—and I can't speak about what other students went through. I can only speak about what I went through. I don't think most of the teachers that I had would ever have thought of themselves as bigots. None of them would have said 'oh, I hate this group' except as a joke. They would have all thought of themselves as very enlightened people who believed in social justice and equality. Now whether they truly did or not is a different matter. So I didn't ever have a teacher say to me, you can't do this, or you won't be any good at this. But I look at the difference between what I do as a teacher now and what they did. I don't think in the twelve years that I was in the Alberta public school system, I had a single teacher tell me that I should pursue an English degree or I should pursue a History degree or I should become a doctorate of such and such. Not one of them encouraged me. I'm always telling students you should go into this in University or you'd be really good at that, you have talent here, or you have ability, apply yourself, you'll be great. I don't remember one teacher ever telling me that or that I should be a writer, none of them. When I got to University, it was a very big change because I had invitations to join honours programs in two departments. During undergraduate work, I had professors urging me to get a Ph.D. I mean, one even said to me that if I didn't get my Ph.D., he'd kick my ass. They were nice and they were very encouraging. I wish I had that kind of encouragement during my public school years (hmcT/95/47).*

The other area in which students spoke about their negative experiences with teachers had to do with what appears to be the surprise on their teachers' faces when they handed in papers or assignments where they had excelled. Often the teachers would not believe the student had actually done that paper. As one put it, *"a lot of times, I'd do well in Math and Biology and they'd be surprised. I wondered why that was the case but I was told by my parents to do my best"* (hmcT/95/49). Another related how he had turned in an English essay. His writing and presentation was so well done that his teacher did not believe a Black student could write that well. He had to remind his teacher the rigour and discipline of essay writing in his native country—an experience that he brought to Canada and which he had used so well. Related to this incident was the one related by Ekua where her teachers had told her

she could not aspire to become a doctor because of her race and gender. Here is how she related her experience:

*What also threw me is I had other teachers, who because I wasn't doing well in their particular class, told me I couldn't do what I wanted to do. One particular teacher, I remember, my Chemistry teacher. I remember he told me that, there was no possible way, he even told my dad, that I could never become a doctor because I just couldn't get the Chemistry in high school. At first it hurt ... then later on it made me angry. So what happened was I figured, I said some day, maybe he could come into a hospital room and I'd be the doctor that would be assigned to him. So I figured, I got to go, I got to go. I had a Math teacher, he said the same thing, that maybe I should find something else, secretarial (hmcT/95/48).*

Ekua's experience is somewhat similar to Kwesi's who told me he

*always did enjoy the sciences ... and did very well in physics but I had a very bad experience with a math teacher [who doubted my abilities] in junior high and for two years in a row. That undermined my math ability, and if your math ability is undermined, then your physics ability is undermined (hmcT/95/51).*

### *Discussion*

Again, such sentiments concerning teacher expectations of Black students are more the rule than the exception. Various studies and research in Canada and elsewhere bear testimony to Black students' complaints in this area. For example, a study of Black education completed in Nova Scotia found, among other things, that low teacher expectations was one of the major obstacles faced by Blacks in the province's school system (*The Globe and Mail*, March 13, 1995, p. A4). A researcher was told by Black students in the Toronto region that "teachers think that if you are Black, and especially if you are male, there is nothing you can do well other than sports. If you don't participate in sports, there is something wrong with you" (Sium, 1987, p. 21). Here in Edmonton, Black students told researcher Lendore-



Mahabir (1995) that they believe that they are unfairly treated by teachers. Indeed, some believe that their school life would be better if there were more Black teachers. Others, however, cautioned that the ethnicity of their teachers is less important than their attitude to Black students. Nonetheless, there was general agreement that Black teachers would be a positive factor if they encouraged Black students to excel in school. As well, a survey of high school children in Quebec conducted in 1990 by the Provincial Education and Cultural Communities Departments found that one-third of the students of Haitian origin in the Montreal area reported that they felt that they were less supported than other students at school and felt discriminated against. This, in turn, contributed to a more general feeling of having less opportunity to succeed than other students (Lyons and Farrell, 1994). In another study entitled 'Pygmalion Black and White,' Rubovotz and Maehr (1973) explored the effects of teacher expectancy in a multi-racial context. They examined the possibility that White teachers would interact differently with White and Black students labelled (in both cases) as 'gifted' and 'non-gifted' in ways which would affect their school performance. They concluded that teachers gave preferential treatment to students labelled as 'gifted' and that the pattern of treatment depended to some extent on the race of students. In general, they found that Black students were treated less positively than Whites. Furthermore, if Blacks were labelled 'gifted' they were subjected to more discrimination than those labelled 'non-gifted.' And of course there is that famous ethnographic investigation of classroom life conducted by Rist (1970) of an all-Black elementary school in St. Louis in which he found that the teacher assigned the children in her classroom to three different ability groups on the basis of criteria (skin colour, dress and parental background; most promising, promising, and least promising) which correlated strongly with socioeconomic status. Rist contends that the children internalized these labels established by the external authority of the teacher. This tracking process, instituted so early in the school lives of these students, constitute a self-fulfilling prophecy (the so-called 'Pygmalion effect') which

they would live out the rest of their school careers (see also Rosenthal and Jacobson, 1968).

As a group, teachers thus form one of the most critical factors in bringing about a quality educational process and their expectations play an important part in student achievement and self-image (BLAC Report on Education, 1994; Boateng, n.d.; Braun, 1976; Good, 1980; Smith, 1980). This “teacher expectancy theory” states that “teachers form expectations for student achievement and thus treat students differentially because of these expectations. Over time, students begin to behave in ways that are consistent and reinforcing of the teachers’ expectations, behaviour that results in either positive or negative outcomes related to academic achievement, self-concept, motivation, aspirations, conduct, and teacher-student interactions” (Irvine, 1990, p. xix).

When one looks at the education of Black students, the evidence indicates that some teachers, it seems, often have lower expectations of Black students. In fact, research and experience have shown that Black students encounter and still face two institutional barriers: “teacher insensitivity and low expectations which result in differential treatment. Black students feel ignored by their teachers. They *feel invisible in class, unimportant*” (BLAC Report on Education, 1994, p. 42; original emphasis). In this study and others, Black students express the belief that White teachers view them as academically inferior, discourage their interests in academic subjects, stream them into vocational and athletic activities, and respond to them less positively than to their White counterparts. Consequently, these “negative expectancies militate against the [Black] students’ development and reduce their intellectual performance to a point that ultimately may cause them to forfeit a successful academic experience” (Boateng, n.d., p. 6; see also Garcia et al., 1995; Good and Brophy, 1973; James and Brathwaite, 1996).

Very often, many teachers will say “they are colour blind, that they see the person, not the person’s colour” (Richardson, 1995, p. 37). But this approach obscures the fact that, indeed, teachers hold biased and racist views and stereotypical expectations of different groups, and that they consciously or unconsciously have different expectations that are race-related which affect the way they subsequently interact with students (Singh, 1986; Yon, 1994). As Banks and Banks (1995) point out, “many teachers are unaware of the extent to which they embrace racist and sexist attitudes and behaviours that are institutionalized within society” (p. 156). Some concerns raised in this regard include teachers attributing Black and minority students’ school problems to “deficient” home and community environments when these students experiences do not match those expected by teachers and schools; some teachers’ tendencies to treat Black students as an undifferentiated Black rather than as individuals; a widespread feeling that Black students are generally expected to excel in sports but not in academic subjects (Garcia et al., 1995; Yon, 1994). Verma and Bagley (1979) have suggested such teachers as described above are “culturally deficient educators” and they see them as “one of the main impediments to the development of cultural pluralism in education [and in] attempting to teach culturally different people” (p. 9).

#### **4.7 Alienating School Environment**

Finally, apart from the racism, the negative racial stereotypes, an alienating curriculum and teachers who don’t expect much of them, Black students are also faced with another racialized barrier: that of a school environment that I can describe as “essentially solitary,” unsupportive, alienating and perhaps hostile. As expressed by the students in the study, the most difficult aspect of the school environment they experienced is the social isolation and loneliness as the only Black students in predominantly White schools and the lack of support of those around them. Because the Black or African population in Alberta is very small, all the students said they

faced “intense isolation and deprivation” in school. Sometimes they were abused, as this narration from one of the students shows:

*Things like racism, from the beginning, from kindergarten, my brother and I were, I can only count twice when we weren't the only Black kids in our class and people would stick their tongue out at me and I've been spit on the forehead and I've been called liver lips (hmcT/95/53).*

Not able to make or form friendships with other Black students made the isolation worse and demoralizing, particularly for the students who attended schools in the Catholic system. This is how one described his experience:

*In school, and this is a problem facing a lot of African students who go to the Catholic system, because there are so few of us in Western Canada who are Catholics—I know that's different down East. We will be faced with isolation, intense loneliness, deprivation. That's really unfortunate. I know that in all of elementary school and junior high, I never had an African peer in my grade level, ever. In high school there was one girl who was in my grade level and then there were, I think, one or two kids older than me and as I got up to grade 11 and 12, there were some kids younger and that was it. Primarily as a teenager, mostly you form your friends on the basis of who goes to school with you. I did not have any African peer friends and that was really distressing for me particularly because I was becoming very political at that point and it seemed like a major contradiction for me and it was a source of embarrassment for me that I had these political ideas that there was no personal evidence that I really believed those (hmcT/95/51).*

For those like Adwoa, who was coming to Canada for the first time,

*adjustment was difficult when I first came here. It was a difficult adjustment through until high school. In elementary I was the only Black girl in my school, in junior high there were about two others. I got called names and stuff like that. It was difficult and it did affect me drastically in that, in grade 12, I almost did not graduate. I was hardly at school (hmcT/95/53-54).*

Another aspect of the isolation the students related was the fact that most of them went through their entire public schooling in Alberta without ever having known or been taught by a Black teacher or counsellor. For example, one said, *"I didn't really have a Black teacher of my own until I was in university"* (hmcT/95/49). Another said: *"Since I've been in Canada, I've never had a Black teacher"* (hmcT/95/49). On the other hand, Abena, who had a Black teacher recounted how it had an impact on her:

*My grade 1 teacher was Black. In elementary school there were two Black teachers in that school. But I'm really glad that I actually did have Miss Buchanan as my grade 1 teacher because I just felt a little bit more comfortable going into the whole school system because it was somebody in a position of authority who was like me, so I didn't feel entirely isolated. I really appreciated that experience* (hmcT/95/50).

Having Black teachers in the school system was seen by all as critical. As one commented, *"The school system should have a bit more Black teachers. Some Black teachers who are sympathetic, knowing the Black history, the Black background, would be quite helpful"* (hmcT/95/49). Talking about counsellors, another said, *"if I were to go up to a Black counsellor, I'd relate more than if it were a White person. I think a lot of Black teachers or a lot of Black counsellors would be way easier to relate [to]. I think there should be more Black counsellors in school"* (hmcT/95/49).

Looking back, a few said the isolation and loneliness in school as the only Black student actually aided in their academic abilities. One remembers that:

*Even though the other White kids at school would not be necessarily achieving academically, I didn't associate myself with them necessarily because I was the only Black kid trying to [inaudible]. Even if they're not going on to post secondary, etc., that doesn't matter because I'm not like them to begin with because I always knew that I was Black and they were White. So, if my parents were saying school is the way to go, to me that was just like OK, school is the way to go* (hmcT/95/49-50).

At the same time, one regretted that the loneliness and isolation made Black students “shy and silent” and “nice and polite,” with the effect that, “*by and large [they could not make] positive contributions in class ... So when the situation required them to set an example of being extroverted, they couldn't do it*” (hmcT/95/50).

One may conclude from the above that the quality of the school context or environment is an important factor that has implications for school success for Black students. In fact, students' perceptions of the school environment have been known to be positively correlated to their school success. As Maharah-Sandhu (1995) remarks, “if the child feels alienated, and cannot see his/her world view represented in the school experience, it is unlikely that there will be equality of educational outcome” (p. 16). But because of the sense of isolation, many Black students don't seem to have a sense of belonging or ownership and thus feel alienated from the public school. The continued marginality of Black youths within the school system has created the situation in which these students lack any sense of identification and connectedness to the school (see Maharah-Sandhu, 1995). This has led to concerns by Black parents and communities regarding such issues as the absence of Black teachers and top administrators in schools (Dei, 1995a). So long as cultural domination remains a fact of life for Black and minority students, Sleeter (1991) argues that minority students may need to develop a strong sense of group identity and action, including commitment to common goals, awareness of conflict against a dominant group, and effective organization in order to overcome the impediments of the dominant culture. As well, “strategies should recognize the value of bicultural and multicultural identities of individuals and groups, as well as the difficulties confronted by those who live in two or more cultures” (Reynolds, 1993, p. 18).

#### **4.8 Summary and Conclusions**

As the student narratives and other reviews of the literature indicate, the school experiences of Black students in Canada and other multiethnic Western

democracies is indeed racialized. Consequently, school success and failure have come to be understood as one part of the larger process of racial conflict—making issues of race and racism<sup>1</sup> significant subject matters in the education of youths (Dei, 1996; Deyhle, 1995; Spencer, 1995; Pincus and Ehrlich, 1994). Table 1 presents a summary of the racialized barriers or features that impede the academic and school success of Black students.

These racialized barriers are seen as manifested in student assessment and placement; in labelling of large numbers of Black students as slow learners or having behaviour problems; in streaming; in low teacher expectations; in denigration by and exclusion of Blacks from the curriculum; and in the total lack of responsiveness to the needs of Black learners and concerns of the Black community (BLAC Report on Education, 1994, p. 35; see also see Dei, 1995a, 1995b, 1995c; Samuda et al., 1984; Moodley, 1985b; Walker, 1991; O'Malley, 1992). Commenting on the whole Black school experience in Canada, Solomon (1992) observes that:

Black students in White dominant school structures have not benefited from Canada's policy of multiculturalism. Despite this national policy, dominant-group educators continue to embrace an ethnocentric approach to pedagogy within schools. Although the official policy is multiculturalism, these responses show that the dominant teaching paradigm within Canadian classrooms is cultural assimilation. Teachers are socializing racial and ethnic minority children into the dominant, mainstream culture (p. 126).

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<sup>1</sup> I use the term 'racism' here to mean "an ideology promoting an uncritical acceptance, and negative social definitions of a group often identified by physical features (e.g., skin colour); and is premised on the belief in the cultural and biological superiority of a particular racial group over others. Insofar as racism is supported by a system of inequality and oppression constructed within societies, it is more than individual; it is structural and institutional. [Thus], a key component of racism is *power*—structural and institutional power" (James, 1995, p. 49; see also Feagin and Vera, 1995). Or as Elliot and Fleras (1992) put it, racism implies "any type of exploitation, oppression, or exclusion that is directed at those who are deemed racially or culturally different ... Those in positions of power are able to invoke a doctrine of superiority to ensure domination over those who are perceived as different and inferior" (p. 55). Moreover, the point is made that racism is not something that is experienced by all racial groups in the same way, and "as a defining principle ... racism points to histories, experiences, and cultural differences forged in relations of hierarchy, inequality, and abuse" (Giroux, 1996, p. 99).

This situation is further compounded by the prevailing view which sees Black students as academically inferior and reproduce images in schools of these students as “underachievers,” “behaviour problem,” and even “unacceptable.” It is sad that a significant number of people, including educators, still hold assumptions about the inferiority of Black people in spite of a stream of scientific evidence to the contrary. These arguments about ‘intellectual inferiority’ are bound to affect Black children’s perceptions of self-efficacy (Orange, 1995). These perceptions become foes of Black achievement when they foster beliefs, behaviours, or expectations that have negative impacts on the academic performance of Black students. We must reject theories about Black academic inferiority, and the stereotype of the Black student as a low achiever must be destroyed, for it is the result of a negative, racist image which has been used to limit the Black student’s place in society. The self-image of the individual is of immense importance in the development of one’s personality and self-respect. Damage to one’s self-image is serious, and Blacks have had to deal with racially stereotyped images, promoted largely by the mass media (Head, 1975).

I concur with Orange’s (1995) point that “Black students’ low achievement is a multifaceted problem demanding rigorous examination and multifaceted solutions” (p. 1). Solutions must include strategies that expose the inaccuracies of the myths that sustain stereotypes and prejudices about Black students. For example, C. Steele (1995) suggests “wise” schooling practices that will help alleviate “stereotype threat” among Black students. To maintain a sense of self-integrity and improve the educational outcomes of groups threatened in this way, he suggests that “schooling must first reduce their [Black students’] sense of stereotype threat and devaluation. For such students, an additional step may be necessary before conventional schooling can succeed: they must be brought to a secure conviction that, despite broadly-known stereotypes about their groups, their potential to learn is not seen as limiting” (p. 19). He also suggests that we “focus the school climate on building student-teacher relationships in which students felt valued for their learning potential and



optimistic about their futures. This climate [can be] implemented by a principal-headed team of teachers, parents, staff and social-agency professionals who [will] develop a plan for teacher training, parent workshops, coordination of student services, etc.” (pp. 19-20).

I share Dei's (1996) conclusion that “on both analytical and practical levels, [the students' narratives] bring to the fore the dilemma of searching for an appropriate centrality of the experiences, histories, and cultures of the diverse student body in curriculum and classroom pedagogical practices to facilitate youth learning” (p. 57). In fact, making Black culture empowering in schools now appears to be an indispensable and critical part of any large-scale program of Black political and economic advancement. The current system of schooling and education has to be radically transformed in order to reverse the inferiorization of Black youths by the historically Euro-centered school system. It is encouraging to note that several attempts are currently underway to develop programs emphasizing Black history and culture (Brathwaite and James, 1996; D'Oyley, 1994). Generally, as Gay (1988) points out, “ethnic students find content about their own group's life, culture, and experiences more meaningful and useful in learning tasks. This evokes the idea that learning is more likely to occur for different ethnic group students when there is similarity, congruity, and continuity between their home cultural orientations and school experiences” (p. 335).

It is also quite clear from our discussion that many Canadian teachers lack relevant training in Black history, race relations and cross-cultural understanding and have little appreciation of the enormous challenges and difficulties Black students face on a daily basis. They make things worse by the tendency to view and treat all students the *same*. But same does not mean fair and very often this 'colour-blind' approach serves only to deny Black students their rights to define who they are and the experiences that they bring to school. To educate Black learners successfully,

teachers need to be trained to successfully teach a multicultural and anti-racist curriculum. This includes developing "a sense of responsibility to becoming sensitive to their students' emotional, psychological, and physical needs. In addition, teachers must hold similar expectations for all their students and provide Black students and their parents with positive feedback and reinforcement" (BLAC Report on Education, 1994, p. 23). To enhance the academic performance of Black and other minority students they must also "provide each learner with academically rich and challenging material and opportunities for growth and learning commensurate with his or her potential" (Garcia et al., 1995, p. 446). Particularly, teachers must have positive attitudes toward racially visible students and have high expectations of African Canadian youth. Furthermore, teacher education institutions have to tackle fundamental issues of inequity. I believe that student teachers' attitudes, understanding and knowledge are not sufficiently coherent or informed to tackle racial and gender inequalities within schools and classrooms. One way to alleviate this is to ensure that teachers can transmit a sense of tolerance to their class by recognizing their own biases. Also, hiring and promotional practices of school boards should give more consideration to visible minorities. It is important that schools reflect the community's composition, as well as provide positive role models for all students. Black teachers are important for they contribute much to society and all areas of education and serve as role models for all children and youth (King, 1993; Lyons and Farrell, 1994; McCarthy and Crichlow, 1993; Siraj-Blatchford, 1993). Finally, teachers' expectations of poor academic work from Black students stem from how these teachers view their relationships with Black parents. It is reasonable to conclude that if so many teachers are inadequately prepared to interact with a culturally diverse student body, they would be less prepared to negotiate with students' parents. Indeed, as Boateng (n.d.) points out, "there are many teachers who are hesitant about communicating students' progress to parents for fear that parents would turn a deaf ear to the reports. This expectation is contrary to all reports which

suggest that the Black family is the motivating force that inspires children to value education, even in the face of all the negative stereotypes perpetuated by White teachers. It is critical that teachers understand and capitalize on the significance of the Black family and eliminate the myth that this powerful unit is capable only of transmitting a 'culture of poverty.' It is the Black parent who helps the child to understand that excellence in education is the foundation for success in society" (p.6).

Within our theoretical and conceptual framework of multicultural/anti-racist education, I suggest that we deal with the concerns expressed by Black students by having "educational institutions and school administrators increase current efforts to develop race and antiracism policies. Antiracism educational strategies should aim at the inclusion of minority students into the mainstream culture of the schools" (Dei, 1996, p. 57). Here, "the teaching of history needs to be reassessed in terms of the ethnocentric bias which has dominated much of the teaching of this subject in Canadian classrooms" (Henry and Tator, 1991, p. 18). It is sad that many educators mistakenly continue to equate the inclusion of diversity in school programs with lowering standards of performance (Gay, 1988).

For students of African descent, it is extremely important for schools to incorporate an Africa-centered perspective/approach in the processes of learning, teaching, and administration of education of Black youths. Black students must see themselves represented in all aspects of the school system. Black representation in the school curriculum is fundamental to developing an inclusive school environment and fostering a state of independence and self-reliance. This is essential to build Black students' self-image and -esteem as well as to provide them with the requisite cultural capital necessary to redefine their worth (Asante, 1990; Dei, 1996; Logan, 1990; Walcott and Dei, 1993). The following quote by William Pinar (cited in Kong, 1996) would seem appropriate to end this section of the chapter:

We are what we know. We are however, also what we do not know. If what we know about ourselves, our history, our culture, our national identities is deformed by absences, denials, and incompleteness, then our identity—both as individuals and as [Canadians]—is fragmented (p. 67).

In summary, I have presented in this chapter student narratives, supported by other research to illustrate how certain racialized barriers affect or impede the academic success of Black students in the Alberta public school system. I have presented evidence to show that racism and racial stereotyping have hampered, and continue to hamper, the life chances of African Canadian students in the educational system and stands in the way of student achievement. It is my view that the psychological effects of racism on Black students remain greatly underestimated. From the student narratives, I can conclude that how African Canadian students experience their schooling and education is filtered by their race, and, contrary to what is normally believed, racial identity does make a difference. Regardless of the level of awareness of their racial background, Black students in Canada's schools cannot ignore their racial identity as the dominant group will always view them as "the other"—Canadian citizenship notwithstanding.

I have also shown how a Eurocentric curriculum negates and devalues the experiences, histories, knowledge and contributions of African Canadians and how such racially biased curricula undermine the academic efforts of Black students. As well, I have presented some evidence to illustrate the low expectations some teachers have about Black students' capabilities and potential. Adding to this discriminatory treatment by teachers is the sense of isolation experienced by Black students in predominantly White school environments as well as other manifestations such as the scarcity of Black role models in the school system.

However, as shown in the next chapter, despite all these obstacles and challenges—and in spite of them—the students appear to be determined that they will

be educated and fulfill their vast potentials. Often, as most indicated, the racialized barriers were motivating factors that helped them succeed in school. For example, as an indication of how they were affected by racism, these Black students sometimes felt they needed to overcompensate and overachieve to prove they were as smart as their White classmates. To this, I'll express the "hope that education will help students triumph over the barriers of racism [and others discussed in this chapter] which continue to prevail among African Canadians. The discussions [and issues raised in this chapter] should alert us not only to the problems, but also to the ways in which they can be addressed by all concerned" (James and Brathwaite, 1996, p. 30). I hope that the discussion in the next chapter presents my contribution to this effort.

**Table 1**

**RACIALIZED BARRIERS THAT IMPEDE THE ACADEMIC  
ACHIEVEMENT OF AFRICAN CANADIAN STUDENTS\***

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**Racism and Racist Attitudes**

- Name-calling and racial slurs
- Discrimination and hostility
- Stigma of intellectual inferiority
- Devalued position in society
- Hostility and abuse

**Negative Racial Stereotypes**

- Societal labelling (troublemakers, violent, criminal)
- Streaming and tracking (lower academic tracks)
- Social stigma (Blacks as 'athletes' and 'partyers')

**Racially-Biased Curriculum**

- Eurocentric (monocultural) curriculum
- Lack of relevancy
- Invisibility of Black/African studies
- Bias in textbooks
- Negative references to African Canadians

**Low Teacher Expectations**

- Differential/discriminatory treatment
- Lower expectations and insensitivity
- Doubting of academic capabilities
- No encouragement
- Expect less academically from Black students

**Alienating School Environment**

- Social isolation and loneliness
  - Lack of Black friends/peers
  - Lack of Black role models (teachers, counsellors, administrators)
  - No sense of belonging or ownership
  - Difficult adjustment period for newcomers
- 

\*Partly adapted from BLAC Report on Education, 1994, p. 40.

## **CHAPTER 5. BEATING THE ODDS: A THEMATIC INTERPRETATION OF THE FACTORS THAT CONTRIBUTED TO SCHOOL SUCCESS**

### **5.1 Introduction**

When I began the research for this study, I was astonished at the relative lack of an existing body research on the successful educational experiences of minority, particularly Black, youth. As I indicated earlier, research on the educational experiences of Black students tends to dwell on the failures as reflected in the title, for example, of Irvine's (1990) book, *Black Students and School Failure*. However, as I probed deeper to see if I could find more positive features of the minority school experience, I saw signs of hope. There is now a growing body of literature (although primarily focused on elementary school grades) that is examining variables generally associated with achievement in minority students (see, for example, Donato and Onis, 1994). These variables generally deal with the macro social context in which Black and minority students academic success takes place. It is an "attempt to broaden our notions of what it means to be successful in school to include cultural and sociopolitical competence as well as academic achievement" (Ladson-Billings, 1995a, p. 151). This is because "the academic success of minority students is embedded in a series of interactions between and across classroom, school, and home, all of which operate within the broader societal context" (Garcia et al., 1995, p. 443). Thus, with respect to Black students, Perry (1993) notes that "discussions of [Black] school achievement need to focus on the extra-cognitive, social, and emotional competencies that [Black] children need in order to succeed in school" (p. 1). In order to set the stage and provide some background for our discussions in this chapter, I will briefly review some of the general salient and distinguishing characteristics of minority students who are successful in school.

Based on longitudinal studies by researchers (see Reynolds, 1993), three broad classes of “protective factors” have emerged as significant in the successful academic achievement of minority or at-risk students. The first factor, *Individual*, includes “child factors such as temperament, sociability, self-esteem, intelligence, and early school performance” (Reynolds, 1993, p. 4). The second is *Family*, and it includes “sociodemographic and structural factors such as the frequency and quality of parent-child interactions, parent expectations for children’s success, parent monitoring, and perceptions of belongingness and cohesion among family members” (p.4). The third and final factor, *Social Support*, includes “both school and community influences that foster adaptation such as participation in quality early childhood interventions, quality and quantity of family-school relations, schools’ academic emphasis and the behavioral and emotional characteristics of the school environment, and the presence of formal and informal social networks in the neighborhood” (p. 4).

The “three protective” factors cited above echo Johnson’s (1994) ‘Ecological Framework for Conceptualizing Educational Risk’ that provides a valuable tool for examining the educational experiences of minority students and for describing environmental characteristics that are likely to facilitate academic success. Johnson proposes that “child-environment interactions” occur in “four nested ecosystems”: classroom, domestic, community, and sociocultural contexts. Translated in more specific terms, it is suggested that if Johnson’s framework is adapted to discuss current educational and familial contexts that influence the achievement of minority students, it will focus on three levels or contexts (and the characteristics within each) that are conducive to success: classroom, school, student and family (Garcia et al., 1995). Within this context, the successful educational process or experience for minority students is viewed “as a series of ongoing interactions between schools, communities, families, educators and students. [Minority] student achievement and learning are products of an educational environment that is compatible with the needs and characteristics of the learner” (Garcia et al., 1995, p. 443).



Other research in the successful minority educational experience has indicated that academic achievement by minority children is associated with certain social psychological factors, e.g., personal factors such as self-perceptions, attitudes, and aspects of intrinsic motivation (Mboya, 1986; Pollard, 1979; Willig et al., 1983). Other researchers such as Comer (1980) have pointed to interpersonal relationships, particularly those which provide psychological warmth, encouragement, and support to the child. In their exploratory study of six high schools, Lucas, Henze and Donato (1990) also provided a model that promotes the success of Latino language-minority students. The researchers offer a framework that moves beyond the effective schools' model by listing eight features at the secondary school level that are essential for language-minority school success. In these schools, they found that teachers, counsellors, administrators, and support staff placed value on students' languages and cultures; held high expectations for students; provided staff development explicit to language-minorities; offered a variety of course options; gave special counselling attention to language-minority students and their parents; encouraged parents of language-minority students to become involved in their children's education; and shared a strong commitment to empower students. Many of the key features found in the Lucas et al. (1990) study mirror those found by Donato and Onis (1994) in their study of Mexican American students in successful inner-city elementary schools. They concluded that "the 'effective schools' research has inadvertently produced a positive framework for Mexican-American school success" (p. 177). The attributes of the effective schools they found were "characterized by strong administrative leadership; high expectations for students; school-wide staff development; parental involvement; recognition of student academic success; and a sense of community (pp. 177-8; see also Edmonds, 1979; Garcia, 1988; Purkey and Smith, 1983).

With this review as a background, I'll now proceed with my findings on the factors that account for the academic success of some African Canadian students.

Several themes emerged from my analysis of the narratives of the students in my study as to what made them succeed in school. While variation in responses occurred, by and large, the consistency of their narrative expression allowed me to develop the themes to be discussed below, to identify common elements, and to draw certain conclusions—hopefully, to lead toward the development of a theory of Black school achievement and its consequences for how the family, community, and school support the educational achievement of their children.

## **5.2 Strong Support and Encouragement by Parents**

*If you look at why Black students are doing well, it's very much related to parental involvement. It's a critical dimension, and I would say that the school systems could have done a better job of welcoming and of reaching out to the Black community ... But it's also a parent's job to reach in, too.*

Cited in *Sean O'Malley*  
Demand Quality Education, Black Parents Told

Of all the themes discussed in this chapter, this one on the role of parents in fostering school success in Black students was the most gratifying for me and the students. In fact, it appears to be the most critical factor of all. The students' accounts provide insights, ideas, strategies and encouragement into how Black parents can create learning environments and supports that give Black students confidence and pride to learn and be successful. It also affirms the importance of education and the relationship of education to the academic, political, social, and economic success of African Canadians. Apart from that, the students' experiences show that Black families of all socioeconomic backgrounds can be remarkably efficient and resilient at helping their children cope with schooling in a predominantly White school environment. Indeed, all the students stated that they persevered because of their parents' support and encouragement. And because the school environment was bereft of Black role models, their parents became their role models. As we shall see later in

the chapter, the student narratives and experiences also suggest that, as educators, we cannot concentrate exclusively on academic subjects as a measure of school success or achievement. We need to look at other intangible school outcomes such as initiative, responsibility, creativity, cultural awareness and compassion. Unfortunately, because these cannot be measured, their importance is often ignored in the student achievement literature.

From day one of the lives of these students, their parents, as one put it, have been “very supportive”—helping them to develop their self-confidence and self-esteem. From the parents’ own experiences in Canadian society, they knew what was awaiting their children in the “real world,” and so from the beginning had stressed the importance of education to their children and, as another student added, “*always made sure we were doing what we had to do in school*” (hmcT/95/57). One student even recalls that, as a motivating factor, his parents kept telling him to “*remember [that] Paul Robeson and W.E.B. DuBois and Sojourner Truth had to go through far worse than this*” (hmcT/95/64). Abena recalls the atmosphere in her house:

*I think my experience is a little bit different being that I was the youngest of six kids such that all my life all I've ever known is, just the norm in your house, that you were going to go to university because when I was going into grade one, my oldest sister was going into first year of university, so I've always seen that pattern in front of me. As well, all of my aunts and uncles are also successful, they've gone to university, etc. My whole family environment has been that of education and I've just always seen it (hmcT/95/55).*

Ama also remembers her dad as “*very pro-education when we were young.*” She recalls that her dad would let her play,

*... but usually he would have a rule that every week [I'd] have to summarize a little story [I] read for [him]. I hated it then, 'cause I couldn't go outside and play. At least that instilled that love for reading, for education, doing stuff like that. Going to school was a*

*good thing, it was a fun thing, they didn't make it seem like such a horrible thing. I hated being sick, every time I was sick, I would pretend I wasn't sick so that I would go [to school], just so I wouldn't miss anything. I think it was just because they themselves, like they've gone through the system, they know what education could do for you and what it cannot, kind of (hmcT/95/56).*

Looking back, Kofi didn't like what he had to put up with his parents, but now appreciates it. He recalls:

*When we were younger our mother did sit us down a lot of times and she taught us simple math, how to write. We all knew how to write before we were able to formally enter the school system. Our mother took the time to teach us. My father, when we were getting older; it came to a time when we were sort of fooling around in school, and I recall an incident where he took away our TV privileges and he would lock us in our room every night to study. I recall that as being sort of a transition period, that we got the understanding that we had to take certain things very seriously (hmcT/95/56-57).*

For Kwabena, too, his

*parents, right from the start, always said, 'Education first, everything else can wait.' They've always told me to set my priorities straight. I remember even as a kid my parents used to tutor me in the areas where I had problems and stuff like that. They always encouraged me to do well in school and all else will follow. Once you get your education, nothing else can stop you from attaining what you want to get. I think that played a big role [in my being successful at school] (hmcT/95/57).*

And with Kweku, he was "motivated from back home [the Caribbean] to go to university ever since I was young":

*My family [was] middle class, in upper middle class. My father wanted me to be a doctor. Ever since I was a little child, he'd say 'Dr. [name deleted], you're going to go to school and become a doctor.' I'd go along with him and smile. At the age of nine I was giving insulin injections to my grandmother every morning. He was trying to break*

*me in already. That environment sort of prepped me and when he died, I thought to carry it through. I was his oldest child, I was his first-born, I had three other brothers and a sister. What else is there to do, after he died, so I just went to school on my own because I wanted to go to university ... That kind of motivated me to want to achieve something because the cushion of having my father there was no longer. I wanted to take that route from day one. I knew I had to have an education here to survive. If you got a good solid foundation from back home, then you're going to do good in [school] (hmcT/95/64-65).*

The background and interests of the parents were also very instrumental and played a significant role in fostering the love for learning in their children, as this account by Kwadjo indicates:

*My parents were born in the Caribbean. They're sort of, very academic sort of people—literature, mathematics and so on. That's why I can't really understand why a lot of Black kids tend to have this philosophy that there are things that, well, I can't reach it so I may as well not try ... My mother can write poetry, she's a good mathematician; she is a teacher, of course. She's into various different types of art, and things like that. She would educate us on various Black figures too. From the time I was five or four or so we'd know about people like Paul Robeson, W.E.B Dubois. She knew that since we were living in this country we may as well know something about the Black people who pioneered something here. Like Mary Ann Shadd, who had the first Black newspaper here, the first Black editor, and others like John Ware ... My mother and father would sort of cultivate my mind with all this information from the time I was really small ... My father is a teacher also. My brother is into visual arts, music, things like that. He's a great history buff. He can tell you not only where Napoleon was on a certain date, but what he was wearing, or who he wanted to conquer (hmcT/95/61-62).*

This aspect of parental influence suggests that many of the parents saw education, especially for Black children, as more than acquiring the basics. This is best illustrated by this student narrative:

*Both my parents are parents to the nth degree, total definition of parents. I can't remember a time when I was little and we were outside where you wouldn't be able to see them not just looking through the window but actually being outside where you are. Playing with you or telling you things or teaching you things while they were playing with you and you didn't even realize it. We'd go and see important Black artistic figures like, I saw Dizzy Gillespie when I was 10 and I saw Miles Davis when I was something like 7. That's an aspect of education too, so that when you go out into the world you say, 'Well, my culture has meaning too.' My mother would tell me stories about when she was growing up and about my grandmother; well, I also had my grandmother with me too. So that too teaches you about respect for the elder generation which a lot of Black kids I see, a large majority, a particular section of them don't have (hmcT/95/62).*

This same student said when he decided to go to university, his mother told him to remember that “*university is not [for] job [seeking], not for money [but] for learning*” (hmcT/95/60).

Adwoa's parents' background also influenced her motivation to do well in school. She says,

*both my parents have university degrees so they wanted their children to have them also. My mom is a psychologist and my dad is an engineer; he has a Master's degree ... My motivation came from the fact that my parents had degrees, so that's why I wanted to do it, and also the fact that they basically pushed me to get through high school and get into postsecondary education” (hmcT/95/64). And for Afua, because “you'd see in the house, mom and dad have all these certificates ... [it's] instilled in your head that you don't want to let them down, you don't want to disappoint your parents ... That's just the way it's supposed to be. That's just how it was (hmcT/95/66).*

It is important to mention here that the parents' educational and professional backgrounds helped the students in many ways, such as assisting with homework and

dealing with ugly incidents of racism and name-calling in school. For example, one student recalls that:

*Whenever we had any school problems, we'd take it to her [mother] and she'd help us because she worked with kids, she knows what to do. My dad too, when I was taking calculus, a very hard topic, he helped, tried to explain what it was all about. They're helping, they're trying, just pushing us basically. This is where you should go, this is where it's at, you hate it but once you look back and you realize, okay, that was good (hmcT/95/56).*

Another student, whose father has a doctorate degree remembers that:

*When I was young, we'd come home from school with schoolwork and he'd always come and start tutoring us, helping us with what we needed to do and it helped. I actually skipped a grade, I didn't do grade 7. I went from 6 straight to 8 and I think [it was] the fact that I got my parents' help (hmcT/95/57).*

And another whose mom is a teacher also recalls her as being “*very creative, doing art projects with us, always participating in what we did in school.*” But she particularly remembers her mother helping her when she was in elementary school to cope and “*deal with a lot of name-calling: 'nigger,' 'Blacks are coming,' 'what did your mom do—did she stick you in an oven, cooked you too long' and all that kind of stuff. I'd come home crying and she'd be the one to say, 'Oh don't listen to them. You're way better than any of them could possibly be. Just keep your head up'”* (hmcT/95/65). This account is noteworthy and goes to show that, for Black parents, seeing their children through the education system is more than helping them to learn to read, write and compute. It means countering negative influences their children suffer because of their race, and being vigilant and assertive to make sure their children are treated properly and not become a victim of stereotypical perceptions about African Canadian students. This last point brings to mind this account by one of the students whose parent stood up and fought for her daughter's rights:

*When my parents first moved to [Alberta], they moved with another family and my oldest sister and the other family's oldest son were both going into grade 1 and they were automatically put into the slower class. My mother was not going to stand for this. She said, 'Why is my child in this class?' They said, 'She's not performing, this is where she should be.' So my mother got my sister tested and it showed she was above average intelligence and she caused a stink. She said I want my daughter in the appropriate class, so they did that. So from the word 'go,' my parents weren't going to give in either, even if the school system was against them; it didn't matter because they knew what they had (hmcT/95/55).*

Another related how his mother had sent an "extremely polite" but "really nice" letter to his teacher cautioning the teacher not to cast her son as the slave in the school's "slavery days" ceremonies which, according to the student, "actually did exist at my school." It was "complete with an auction and everything ... My mother's letter sort of made them think that maybe we should find something else to do" (hmcT/85-86). In any event, she requested that, should the school's "slavery days" ceremonies take place, they find someone else other than her son to be the slave to be auctioned. Finally, the parents' educational and professional backgrounds had meant family and community members always had higher expectations of them. One student, whose father is a dentist, said:

*people would say, 'Oh, you're Dr. [name deleted]'s daughter,' and they already had set expectations that I was going to be an overachiever, so to speak. So because they expected it of me, I wasn't going to let them down. I wasn't going to let myself down (hmcT/95/55).*

Based on these findings, I would suggest that parental response tends to range from mere family support (i.e., moral/psychological/emotional/identity affirming) to direct challenge of school structures and practices.



Related to the parental encouragement and support, and a very important factor as well, was what one student described as “*the presence of materials [in the home] that shows a love of learning and of knowledge*” (hmcT/95/58). As the student related:

*[Our] house was always filled with books and magazines and, for instance, developing auxiliary academic things such as drawing. At the house we always had lots of blank paper and pencils. So if those things are around, it's natural because we're born curious, curiosity has to be destroyed in us, it has to be beaten out of us ... If there are books around, kids will want to read. If parents model reading ... and read to their kids, kids will want to read. It's pretty straightforward (hmcT/95/58).*

Abena also remembers her home to be “*always filled with lots of educational things. My parents have lots of books. Whenever we would play games, they'd always tend to [choose] kind of mind-stimulating things. For example, it's just a family thing we do, we play Trivial Pursuit. As well, my mother started all of us reading very early*” (hmcT/95/55). For Ama too, “*there was tons of books at our house, and I was always reading, I loved stories so I loved to read. I was reading Animal Farm at grade 4 and I didn't have any clue what it actually meant, it was just a story to me. I was reading it 'cause it was there and I wanted to read*” (hmcT/95/56). Besides the books at home, most of the students said their parents “*always encouraged us to go to the library and just read even if it was just for fun*” (hmcT/95/57). But for some like Akosua, the home atmosphere was more than just the love of books; it was also a home where “*we ate dinner together at the table, we didn't sit in front of TV to eat ... I just remembered that we talked a lot, we got along and the kids did things together*” (hmcT/95/54). In thinking of the factors at home that contributed to his school success, Kwesi also recalls the role her mother played in making him learn to speak up, something he finds many Black children not able to do:

*Another thing, as I just alluded to, is the modelling ... Many parents live by the rule [that] children should be seen and not heard and yet then they expect their kids to be successful and to be proud and to speak up. If they've never had any practice at home then how are they going to apply those skills ... I think that relates to the household because if your parents are discussing the news with you or politics or culture or religion or art or stories, even if it's just a matter of talking about school work, [you'll] learn how to talk like adults, and they're going to learn that hopefully, not just by seeing it from afar, but by talking with [parents at home]. I think this is crucial (hmcT/95/58).*

A critical aspect for these students (which some of the above narratives alluded to) which influenced their school success was their acquired love for reading early in their lives. They all said books and other reading materials in their homes was what made it for them. Throughout their public school years, "reading gave [them] the desire for knowledge and made school very easy" (hmcT/95/61). One recalls that:

*My mother forced me into reading when I was young. When I say forced, I mean forced to the point where if I watched an hour of TV, I had to read two hours. I didn't get cable until I was 15, so I spent a lot of time reading books. Then even for awhile she cut the cord of the TV and I didn't have any TV because I wasn't doing my reading (hmcT/95/60-61).*

Another said:

*I was an avid reader. I read a lot. I read novels. I was reading novels from the time I was about in grade 2, not only juvenile novels, but I was reading adult novels by about grade 3 or 4. Then I got into reading comic books and that was very helpful even though they'd stare at [inaudible] someone that reads comic books [and say it] isn't literate. They forget that the work is reading and because Super Hero comic books involve a lot of [inaudible] or romantic dialogue, as in the romantic period in literature. Comic book readers ironically tend to develop larger vocabularies than their peers because all these arcane words are coming in. Plus comic books are the major [inaudible] of literature and science and so forth. They're always taking major ideas,*

*so I learned all kinds of stuff about science from reading comic books that my peers didn't know. So all that stuff helped me, that gave me an edge (hmcT/95/59).*

### *Discussion*

Supported by the student narratives above as well as other research, the evidence is clear that parental encouragement, support, activities, and interest at home and participation in school affect children's achievements, attitudes, and aspirations, even after student ability and family socioeconomic status are taken into account. Research shows that students gain in personal and academic development if their parents emphasize the importance and value of schooling, have high expectations and let the children know they do, and do so continually over their children's school years. Children have an advantage in school when their parents encourage and support their school activities, and they lay the groundwork for their students' success in school by building their children's self-confidence, self-concept, and self-reliance (Cummins, 1986; Epstein, 1987; Levin, 1995; Orange, 1995; Reynolds, 1993; Mah, 1995).

But for Black students, as I discovered in my study, I will argue that, perhaps more than White parents, parental encouragement, support, and expectations are particularly critical and appear to be the greatest factor because, as Reynolds (1993) points out, without a strong and supporting school climate, "[Black] parents must fill the void and counteract the schools' potentially negative influence" (p. 15). In fact, compared to White parents, I would say that Black parents must be extra vigilant in monitoring their children's school activities and provide emotional and instrumental support, or what has been termed "protective mechanisms," to their children. Indeed, research shows that, for Black students, despite highly unfavourable life circumstances, "parental expectations ... are found to be positively related to ... children's self-expectations and school achievement during the first-grade year" and "parental involvement was found to have consistent and directive positive effects on

the children's reading and mathematics achievement and social maturity in first grade" (Taylor, 1991, p. 20). In fact, Black students' feelings of acceptance and competence were consistently related to strengthened family functioning, including family cohesiveness, feelings of pride, and coping with problems through social, religious, and help-seeking activities (Taylor, 1991).

Slaughter and Epps (1987) have identified four approaches to parental impact upon the achievements of children and youth in the research literature: "parent as decision-maker, parent as supporter, parent as mediator, and parent as teacher" (p. 3). These approaches involve *family processes* which include "parents' expectations for children's educational attainment, parent monitoring behaviour, and the extent to which parents encourage their children to do well in school" (Reynolds, 1993, p. 5). It also involves *family background* and accounts for such factors as "parent education, socioeconomic status, and family structure and size" (p. 5). According to Reynolds, these characteristics have been consistently associated with school and social success.

In addition to background factors that measure a family's financial situation, social status, and race, another noted critical factor as influencing students' success in school is *family educational resources*, particularly those related to educational activities. The most common of these items are magazines, newspapers, and books in family homes. Family educational resources also include the parent's involvement in the child's development, such as awareness of and reward for intellectual attainment, and use of English at home. Researchers acknowledge that these factors may vary from family to family and from community to community, but they are critical in student achievement (Lee et al., 1991).

Very often, educators mistakenly interpret or attribute the cause of Black and minority failures in schools as the result of their "cultural upbringing" or "roots." For example, we know from the history of Canadian education that aboriginal peoples

were forcibly removed from their homes and families and placed in residential schools in order to rid them of their so-called "malignant cultures." And in the United States, there is the study by Glazer and Moynihan (1963) which described African American school and other failures as the result of the deficiencies of the urban Black family, its disorganization, and instability. The source of the problem was attributed to the home experiences of Black children which failed to transmit the appropriate cultural and educational environment to facilitate the types of learning required by schools and society. But as Moodley (1985b) points out, such a "victim-blame approach" overlooks "the complex interrelationship between the economic, social and political factors involved, which transcend the cultural basis" (p. 19). In fact, this suggests that we need to understand more of how the Black child's family interfaces with the educational process to affect school achievement.

Certainly, as the above student narratives indicate, and despite studies like Glazer and Moynihan (cited above) and more recent ones like D'Souza's (1995) suggesting self-hatred and lack of a learning environment among Black families and children, studies like mine and others show that some Black parents do indeed provide the "positive family love and parental evaluation" that has resulted in Black adolescents "hav[ing] at least as high global self-esteem as their White peers" (Simmons et al., 1991, p. 484). Thus, despite the fact that Black families must fight a second battle in the educational arena to "overcome the influence of general patterns of societal discrimination" (Dornbusch et al. 1991, p. 565), by and large, they have been "able to socialize their infants and elementary-school-aged progeny in accordance with the more optimistic, biculturally oriented, defensive oppositional identity [necessary for school success]" (Cross, 1995, p. 194). One needs to be careful here not to interpret "defensiveness" as a one-dimensional phenomenon. Indeed, from my data, defensiveness on the part of Black parents regarding the education of their children meant several things. For example, parents related to racial discrimination in schools with anger, bitterness and frustration. Others quietly resisted by providing

their children with the requisite social tools and knowledge to fight racism. All these could be described as “defensive” mechanisms.

Indeed, several researchers provide empirical support to support the findings in this study that Black parental support, encouragement and involvement in their children’s educational experiences enhances their achievement. For example, Clark (1983), in a case study approach that investigated Black family influences on school achievement, found that families of successful high-school achievers include retrospective descriptions of explicit literacy-enhancing activities during childhood such as reading, writing, word games, and hobbies. The families of successful achievers provided a home atmosphere that was strongly supportive of academic achievement. Clark also found that, unlike parents of low achievers who tended to avoid contact with school personnel as much as possible, parents of high achievers were assertive in their efforts to keep themselves informed about their children’s progress in school. The parents of successful Black students also appear to be more optimistic than parents of low achievers and tend to perceive themselves as persons who can successfully cope with life’s problems. So, from a policy perspective, Slaughter and Epps (1987) suggest that “parents influence their children’s academic achievement directly by the kind of educational environment they provide in the home, and indirectly by their impact on the schools their children attend” (p. 19). Similarly, Slaughter (1969) found that low-income Black preschool children who are successful school achievers through the first kindergarten year have mothers who set clear, firm, consistent standards for behaviour, but who are also warm, accepting, and flexible enough to consider the child’s viewpoint and to communicate this understanding (see also Slaughter and Epps, 1987).

Other aspects of the findings of this study are also borne out by research. For example, parental education is found to be positively associated with taking college preparatory courses in mathematics and science in each of four ethnic groups: African

Americans, Hispanic, Asian, and non-Hispanic White (Dornbusch et al., 1991). As well, the literature on status attainment has shown that family socioeconomic status is more related to school achievement among minority youth (Gottfredson, 1981). This mirrors Coleman's (1966) research indicating that family background and associated parental influences may be the primary forces affecting student achievement over time.

However, one piece of research that has not been borne out by the findings of this study is Ogbu's (1991b) analysis of Black education in which he argued that although Black parents value schooling, they warn their children that North American society does not reward Blacks and Whites equally for such credentials. Therefore, on the basis of their concrete experiences, Black parents offer their children ambivalent and perhaps contradictory values towards education. As can now be seen from the discussions in this section of the chapter, the Black parents in this study were quite the opposite to Ogbu's analysis. Theirs is a more consistent parental influence that, as their child's earliest teachers, they set priorities, expectancies and behaviours that influenced their children's educational development and achievement. This is not to suggest that they were unaware that "North American society does not reward Blacks and Whites equally for such credentials"; if anything, the argument could be made that it is because of this societal inequality that they did what they had to do for their children. At least it might partially bridge the inequality gap. Half a glass is better than empty.

### **5.3 High-Achieving and Positive Role Models**

*I think it's very important that [Black] children, our young people, have someone to look up to who can't necessarily dunk a basketball or dribble down the court, but who, through their intellectual abilities, can succeed. I think that's really important.*

*Johnnie Cochran*  
cited in Black Issues in Higher Education

In the individual and group discussions, role modelling emerged as a powerful factor in Black student achievement. There was concern about the absence of positive Black models and mentors in schools—necessary to further stimulate the success of Black youth. I asked the students to tell me about their role models and in what ways these role models influenced their academic achievement. Invariably, they told me because of the lack of Black role models in their Alberta school experiences, their parents and other family members became the most important role models for them. Additionally, most mentioned other notable Black political and artistic figures as influencing their intellectual development. Some of these included Malcolm X, Marcus Garvey, Angela Davis, Spike Lee, Langston Hughes, Claude McKay, Hugh B. Newton, Louis Armstrong, Muhammed Ali, Marian Anderson, Paul Robeson, Public Enemy, Stokely Carmichael, and Bob Marley. One mentioned the European missionary physician, Dr. Albert Schweitzer, as a role model.

All the students felt Black youth needed positive role models and were therefore particularly concerned that entertainers and sports figures are increasingly appealing to that element of the Black youth today who see no need for education. In fact, the issue of role models was often discussed by the students in relation to rap/entertainment/sports personalities. They appear to share similar concerns expressed by other Black students that “in constructing an identity around rappers and characters [negatively] portrayed in films, many young Black men were, in fact, reinforcing the negative stereotypes that already existed about them, becoming part of the process of their creation” (Spencer, 1995, p. 50). As one of the students put it:

*I'm glad that there are Blacks who are successful in those areas but at the same time, they get too much attention. Nobody ever focuses on the successful Black doctors, etc. The focus on Michael Jordan and other sports figures I think is very problematic. The younger kids growing up only want to [attain] sports star status and they don't think about the academic status which, in the long run, is more beneficial to them and more beneficial to the community as a whole (hmcT/95/69).*



With all of this focus on Black entertainers and sports figures, these students were glad to have their parents around who, because they were *“doing successful things and going towards [educational] success,”* tended to *“gravitate towards [them]”* (hmcT/95/67). For them, their parents *“were always there”* and *“holding on, trying to achieve whatever they wanted to achieve”* (hmcT/95/68). This, as they all acknowledged, was *“actually a very important thing for [them] growing up”* because they heard their parents’ *“own stories, history”* and saw their parents’ struggles, and realized *“they’re making it, so obviously I can”* (hmcT/95/68). This is how one described his mother’s influence when asked what made him defy all the odds and get him to where he is today academically:

*My mother, I would say ... My mother is a strong, intelligent woman who is articulate and deeply cares about people and expresses the love of learning and life and spirituality and art and you can't have a better role model. My mother, you know, really set examples that, you know, you have to fight, you have to struggle, you have to build the things that matter* (hmcT/95/70).

On how their parents and other role models influenced their intellectual development, most of the responses went like this:

- *People like Malcolm X [tell us] that we must reclaim our own destiny. We must build our own future. It is foolish to expect those who have destroyed us to help us. So, our self-determination is their primary message and that can be interpreted in a number of ways. It could be in an outright nationalist context or it could be working in a context like Canada where we believe that anything that's positive should be maintained and amplified and everything that's negative must be replaced. That to me is still a revolutionary message. That was the most important thing. People like Spike Lee and Chuck D were crucial because as artists and also people like Langston Hughes and Claude McKay, and many other writers, they demonstrated that through the power of storytelling and image and art, that peoples minds could be opened to things that they never would have dreamed of before. They influenced me as an artist ... It was the message of self-determination and the message of self-definition* (hmcT/95/69-70).

- *I guess I have to give them a lot of credit, especially Hugh B. Newton, because he couldn't read and then while he was in jail, he learned how to read and write, and speak properly by reading the dictionary, and then he went on to get his Ph.D. These role models helped in a small way. You know when your level is down, you pick up the book, you read it you're saying 'Okay, I can do that, I can do this' (hmcT/95/70).*
- *I was a big Mohammed Ali fan although I'm not a big boxing fan because he said more outside the ring than he did inside the ring. He was very articulate when he said it. That really influenced the way that I thought and the way that I spoke too, and what I wanted to do (hmcT/95/71).*
- *If you look at a hundred years ago, they told people like Marian Anderson, they told Paul Robeson he was stupid. The guy decided 'Okay, I'll become the greatest football player in the history of my college ... I'll become one of the finest actors ... I will become ... .' I believe he graduated with ambitions to become a lawyer. Highest marks in his class and he threw that in their face. There were a whole lot of people who are not revered or held up today and that's one of the reasons why a lot of Black kids are not doing what they should be doing because as far as they're concerned, what they see, they think it didn't exist and he is like one overt example of yes he did. There's a whole slew of names of people that had that same philosophy. If this is what you're saying I can't do, then not only will I do it, but I will become the definition of whatever it is that you said I can't do (hmcT/95/72-73).*
- *If you are around people [talking about parents] who are trying just as hard and they have just as many goals, I think it's easy to have the confidence to succeed to the point that you can (hmcT/95/67).*
- *Living with my mother, she always stressed education, she always made sure we were doing what we had to do in school, [that] in school, I always had my goals in my head. That was the way, that was what pushed me to excel in school. It was always that ultimate goal. At the time the ultimate goal was to become a doctor and specialize in ophthalmology, so I concentrated on things I had to do like my biology, physics ... made sure I stuck to that (hmcT/95/67).*
- *Spike Lee was a major influence on me and I realized how much we could do. Hip Hop artists like Chuck D, and Public Enemy and [inaudible], who spoke very intelligently through their lyrics and lectured on subjects ranging from political self determination to the extent of African history and the origin of civilization. They were my major role models (hmcT/95/69).*

Also noteworthy is the fact that, during the focus group discussions, the students agreed that living in Alberta, with a very small Black population, made it difficult to find or see Black models. As one of the discussants observed:

*If you're the same type of person going to school in Toronto you have a better chance because from a young age you're seeing Black people who are in all types of different roles like doctors, lawyers, all that stuff. Not just one in every city, but you're seeing professionals of all sorts, it's something from the very start you're thinking, 'I can do anything.' It's not even a question of it, you don't even think of it because you've gone to your corner store and seen a Black person, you've gone to the dentist and seen a Black person. Here [Edmonton] opportunities are limited because you don't see it [many successful Black people] (hmcT/95/72).*

#### *Discussion*

Indeed, one of the major factors identified by researchers as important for the positive growth of adolescents and young adults is “strong role models who provide them with human, philosophical and operational examples that help them establish meaningful values, goals, ideals and personal standards” (Lendore-Mahabir, 1995, p. 3; see also Abbey et al., 1990). And exposure to role models has been found to be a significant factor facilitating resilience among Black youth (Winfield, 1991, p. 12). As Dei (1996) notes, many Black youths make a direct connection between the problem of student disengagement and the lack of representation of Black role models in the schools. But as a 1995 study by the American Council on Education found, for instance, a growing proportion of minority students lack racial or ethnic role models, especially among their teachers.

The issue of Black role models was put on the Canadian public school agenda when, in a presentation to the Winnipeg School Division No. 1 Task Force on Race Relations, the CBWC (Congress of Black Women of Canada, Manitoba Chapter) stressed the importance that, wherever possible, especially where there are Black

students in a school, at least one member of the staff, teaching or support, should be Black. As the Congress forcefully pointed out, "Our children need role models ... There are lots of good qualified Black people who need to be in the schools so that our children could look up and say 'Aha, that's what I'd like to be one day'" (cited in Maharah-Sandhu, 1995, p. 14). As the student discussions pointed out, Black parents and students want to see more Black and minority teachers in the Canadian school system. In this regard, Black teachers are important, for they contribute much to society and all areas of education and serve as role models for all children and youth (McNeill, 1995). The issue, as it has emerged from this study, is that Black students need good, relevant role models to emulate. These should be from a variety of trades, professions, classes and backgrounds and should help to instill in students not only pride in themselves and their race, but should also demonstrate the variety of contributions which, as people, Blacks can and do make (Brathwaite, 1989). Among others, this is important because "the socialization process, that process in which the child learns the values, goals, structures and patterns of social relationships in any society is of immense importance. The young child must have adequate role models who personify these characteristics in order that he or she may develop a sense of identity, self definition, and attachment to his or her society" (Head, 1975, p. 76).

From the above narratives and discussions, one can safely conclude that adequate and positive Black role models, visible and ready to work closely with Alberta's Black youth, are in short supply. Particularly for Black male students, "We have failed to deliver to our boys and young men, acceptable models of manhood. Instead, substantial numbers of our youth make the passage from boyhood to manhood under the tutelage of men who define manhood in terms of toughness, sexual conquest, and thrill-seeking" (Boehm-Hill, 1993, p. 32). But as we have seen in the successful educational experiences of the Black students in this study, positive role models do make a difference. As Garcia et al. (1995) note, "role models and mentors who are members of the minority student's cultural and linguistic background serve to

influence his or her own expectations about success and failure. It is important for all children to have access to family members, friends, and other community members who can support their academic efforts and ambitions, and who may serve to motivate the child to do well in school. Role models serve an important function in establishing for some students that members of their own ethnic and racial group are represented in professions and careers to which they may aspire. Mentors can advise, counsel, and guide children and their families to reach their goals. Community-based learning programs may be one way in which the culturally diverse community can become more actively involved in the educational process; such a program also recognizes the 'funds of knowledge' in every family and community, including those that have traditionally been perceived to be deficient or disadvantaged" (p. 451). On this, one of the students in the study also remarked that: *"If students can see Black role models early on doing things—it doesn't have to be teachers; it can be parents in your community. I think that we need to celebrate all of the positives in our community, to make a big deal about it. We can get Edmonton's Black community together and then the community can be a resource"* (hmcT/95/67).

Not only for Black students, but non-Black students also need to see Black role models (male and female) to counter racism and interlocking systems of discrimination in our society (Dei, 1995a). Here, the increased presence of Black male teachers and administrators might also help to reduce conscious or unconscious prejudice toward males and toward Blacks, as well as provide successful role models for Black male youths (Simmons et al., 1991). At a conference of Black youth in Edmonton in March 1995 to commemorate the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, conference participants discussed the concept of a role model for Black youth and suggested that defining characteristics could include: intelligence, endurance, and a willingness to improve the Black community. Examples of role models provided were parents, famous persons such as Maya Angelou, Malcolm X, Dr. Martin Luther King, Harriet Tubman, and Spike Lee. There was

general agreement that more information was needed on role models who live in their communities and country (Lendore-Mahabir, 1995).

#### **5.4 Security, Knowledge, Pride and Affirmation in Black Cultural/Racial Identity**

In addition to their influence as positive role models for their children, the parents and guardians of these students also played a critical role in helping them develop a secure, clarified self-identity and pride in Black and African cultural/racial identity. As a result, these African Canadian students have fashioned for themselves a clarified ethnic and racial identity—a factor they all emphatically said was very significant in their academic capabilities and their success in school. They stressed that this was important given the struggle to maintain an identity in the face of overpowering subtle messages that as people of African descent, they must assimilate to be accepted as Canadians.

During my conversations with the students I was impressed by their demonstrated depth of knowledge about Black and African affairs, which indicated to me an awareness of themselves, not just as Canadians but as African Canadians or Blacks and proud of it. They sought information from their parents, friends and their own efforts and read widely on the Black experience. What emerged was that their parents made an effort and took special care to see that they are familiar with literature, history, politics, art and stories by and about Africans. As one of them related, his parents thought it *“is really important to know ourselves, our history as broad as it is, stemming from Africa, Black America to the Caribbean to the Continent of South America, to really know about our history”* (hmcT/95/75). All these, I believe, provide examples of the effect that affirming one’s culture, heritage and identity has on a positive outlook, which facilitates academic success. One such positive outlook is reflected in this personal narrative:

*I'm proud of being Black. Sometimes I feel a little bit self-conscious because of the way certain people might make me feel [This student, though not continental African born, was given an African first name from birth by his parents] but I'm in no way ashamed of [having an African name]. I've come in contact with Black kids who use different names because they're kind of embarrassed of the reaction they're going to get from fellow students [if they adopt African-sounding names]. A child from Senegal or a child from Iraq or a child from Kenya or a child from Mozambique, they all have this beautiful name that just tells exactly who they are, instead they'll tell you their name is Bob or their name is Egbert or something like that. Nothing's wrong with those names, it's just that you were born with the name so use it and don't be afraid that I'm going to embarrass you or make fun of you because I'm not, I'm in the same boat. I feel proud of my heritage too (hmcT/95/82).*

As alluded to earlier, this self-affirmation and pride in one's heritage challenges the conventional wisdom that assimilation is the answer to Black academic underachievement. These students' experiences show that they do not want "separation" from Canadian society as some critics of multiculturalism (see, for example, Bissoondath, 1994) would want us to believe, but a recognition and acceptance in Canadian society generally. Indeed, they don't see a contradiction in affirming their African identity and at the same time being Canadian. This is echoed by Head (1975) when he writes that "it is important that both processes proceed together; building pride and an awareness of Black history, culture, and achievements, must combine with an active involvement in the total life of the [Canadian] community" (p. 205). This also goes to show how successful these students have been in negotiating what DuBois (1969) has called a "double consciousness," and to what Darder (cited in Gay, 1994) describes as the "biculturality" of their ethnic-racial identity and their [Canadian]-ness (p. 152).

From the student narratives, three areas emerged that spoke to their security, knowledge, pride and affirmation in Black culture, and how they positively affected

their academic success. The first was the issue of identity and knowing who they are in Canada's multicultural mosaic. These discussions were prompted by questions and probing on multiculturalism in Canada, ethnic and racial identities. It became obvious, particularly for the students born in Canada that, at one time or other before they became secure in their Black identities, they have, as one of them put it, been "*through so many different changes in [their] identity*" (hmcT/95/74). But with the help of their parents, they overcame their identity problems and are now "*proud of [their] Blackness*" (hmcT/95/83) and wouldn't want to be called "*Negro or coloured*" (hmcT/95/83-84), but prefer to be variously called "*a Black woman,*" "*an Afro-Canadian,*" "*African Canadian,*" "*African,*" "*Black Canadian,*" "*Black man,*" and "*Black*" (hmcT/95/73-86, passim). They also wanted me to know that their identities were more than being 'Black' or 'African Canadian' and so on. For one individual it also meant that:

*My definition of being Black is secure enough that I don't have to call it something special for myself ... For my own identity, I look more at my qualities and my strengths as my identity as opposed to it just being. I'm also not just, you know, sort of a Black woman who sort of goes into the crowd and melts away. I think certainly when there is an issue, I'm in there and I'm involved in the community and I find that's a very important part and that's one thing, that although I'm interested in doing business and computers, something that I really don't want to ever lose sight of is the Black community (hmcT/95/74).*

For another it meant "*knowing who I am and how I present myself to society. I know I am somebody positive, someone you can look at in a positive way. If the term 'African' can be associated with me, well that means [something] positive*" (hmcT/95/74). Yet for others too it meant "*being open to different people without being intimidated by them [and not to] ever be ashamed of who [we] are, don't ever give it [Black identity] up*" (hmcT/95/76). It was interesting to note that the Black



students born outside of Canada claimed that their identities as Blacks or Africans were already established before coming to Canada. As one described it:

*I really don't want to talk much about that [Black identity] because I came from a country that was predominantly Black. So when I moved here [Edmonton], I [knew] stories about [name of country] and about the people ... I was around a majority of Blacks that were both in positions of power (hmcT/95/83).*

Another non-Canadian-born also said the issue of a Black identity

*didn't really bother me" because "I already had that background from home; I knew my historical lineage kind of thing ... Whenever I think of my history, I just go back to [name of African country of birth] ... and that's where it starts from for me (hmcT/95/75).*

This issue of identity was also discussed within the context of Canada's multicultural debate. Abena, born in Edmonton, says although she identifies herself as a 'Black' and a 'woman' and "was born in Canada," she is

*not necessarily considered Canadian" because "a White person down the street sees me and he would look at me like I was an immigrant." So, "in a sense I don't really associate myself 100 percent with Canada." [However[, "if somebody asks me I will say I'm Black Canadian but then I will also explain to them what that means and that means that I was born here and I live here (hmcT/95/77).*

Kwesi, also born in Edmonton, tells me:

*I'm a Black man or as I prefer, I'm an African. They could ask me are you an African or a Canadian, and at one time I absolutely would have said, I'm certainly not Canadian. The only Canadians are the First Nations people who were conquered and almost wiped out. Now I'm not so sure. [But], yes, I'm an African, I'm a Canadian (hmcT/95/78-79).*

And for Kwadjo, another Edmontonian, says if asked to respond to his identity within the context of multicultural Canada, he would say:

*I'm an Afro Canadian but then I'd say I'm living in Canada and I have to contribute something to the country, so think of me as a Canadian. Don't use my ethnicity to kind of say, 'Well I can only ... this person is only relevant when we get to this subject or this person is only relevant during February. We can't put him in this jar because he's Afro Canadian, he only wants to be considered the Afro part but not the Canadian part. I was born in Canada which makes me Canadian so please consider me Canadian, it's like I consider myself both at the same time (hmcT/95/82).*

But for Kwame, he has a “problem” with being called a Canadian. According to his story:

*People say because I was born in Canada, I'm Canadian, but I don't consider myself Canadian because I've never been treated in the way most Canadians have. I haven't had the advantages that many people had. I've had many disadvantages, I've been treated bad by the people, by the government, by the police, so I kind of feel like a criminal or outlaw in this country, so I've never called it my country. Other than that I don't have a country, so I just, I say I'm in Canada to get my education ... it's just a matter of convenience that I'm here, but it's not my country ... For now], I prefer to be called Black or call me [first name] or whatever. But don't call me Black Canadian because I don't feel Canadian, not right now (hmcT/95/80).*

These narrations suggest to me and others (e.g., Banks, 1993d; Fordham, 1991) that as long as becoming more comfortable in a White group means losing one's “Blackness” (something espoused by right-wing ideologues of multiculturalism), many Black youth will not choose more integrated settings. Thus it becomes important to identify and develop approaches that cultivate comfortable, and fully integrated, multiethnic school environments—multiethnic environments that strive to foster ethnic pride while at the same time facilitating mutual respect and cooperation. This

suggests that schools and teachers need to affirm, maintain, and value the differences that students bring to school as a foundation for their learning existence (Gonzales and Cauce, 1995).

Apart from the positive and proud affirmation of their Black/African cultural identities, the student narratives also indicated that knowledge about Black history and so on played a significant role on their road to achieving academic success. For example, Akosua, adopted and raised by a White family, remembers that *"my parents ... had gotten some records of Martin Luther King Jr., so that my sister and I would have to identify with and that kind of thing and learn about"* (hmcT/95/73). She also recalls that, although they were hard to find in the part of Canada in which they lived, her parents tried *"to find books with Black characters in them"* (hmcT/95/73). For Kwesi, the journey began for him when he was named after a famous African-American political figure. He believed this had *"a massive influence on who you are and who you can become"* (hmcT/95/78). Out of this *"cultural tradition"* as he calls it, came the reading (*"because those books were around in my home"*) and acquiring knowledge about Black and African affairs and *"started me into a series of political readings and that embraced a lot of, at that time it was being called Black nationalism and then Pan-Africanism"* (hmcT/95/78). Kwame also recalls that although he *"didn't like English,"* the pride and confidence of learning and knowing more about his African heritage led him to finally like English so that *"I could read and enjoy a lot of literature of Black people"* (hmcT/95/81). And for Kwadjo it started with *"[growing] up listening to everything from James Brown to Louis Armstrong"* (hmcT/95/81). By age ten, his parents had taken him to *"see important artistic figures like Dizzy Gillespie and Miles Davis"* (hmcT/95/42). This was not all:

*[My mother] would educate us on various Black figures too. From the time I was four or five or so we'd know about people like Paul Robeson, W.E.B. DuBois, Sojourner Truth, George Washington Carver. She knew that since we live in this country [Canada] we may*

*as well know something about the Black people who pioneered something here. Like Mary Ann Shadd, who had the first Black newspaper here, the first Black editor. People like John Ware ... (hmcT/95/22).*

By reading at home, Kwadjo was introduced to “*everything from Alex Haley to James Baldwin to Ralph Ellison*” (hmcT/95/42). He was also introduced to the works of Black writers like Langston Hughes, Richard Wright and Austin C. Clarke because “*these names would be told to me when I was little*” (hmcT/95/42). All these had an impact on his schoolwork because, as he says,

*having resources like that around you, it just makes you feel like you're important and that people expect something of you so that like in English classes and Social Studies classes, especially I found it connected with me a bit more and I would get better grades in those classes... I would see people like Richard Wright and James Baldwin and Langston Hughes—he was my favourite poet of everybody—and it would be like ‘wow,’ these people, they're thinking things that I thought, only they were able to articulate them a whole lot better and if I try maybe I can sort of get up there too... When you have a sense of what your people have done [e.g., produced great literature], it helps you get through the school system too, get through different things because you feel that your people have made a contribution to where you are (hmcT/95/41/42).*

On this, Kwesi also relates how his pride and knowledge about Black studies have helped him:

*It helps in two ways, one is a negative and one is positive. The negative is that you have a desire to overcome your enemies and that's important, only a fool doesn't want to overcome his enemies. How you define ‘overcome’ is a different matter. I'm not speaking of anything criminal but certainly showing them as being wrong about you, there is a delight in that, yes ... The positive is that you realize what a wonderful group of nationalities and states and civilizations we are. You want to contribute to that and you want to be a bold standard*

*bearer of red, Black and green [colours of Black nationalist flag]. That matters and so it's not a burden, you're proud to carry that and I know that for me ... I feel very positive about the fact that when I'm before a group of students or whatever else, that African students can look up and say now, there is an African man who is speaking confidently and he is speaking eloquently, if I should be so bold as to say that, and he makes me proud (hmcT/95/79).*

In addition to the knowledge about Black history and culture acquired through books, etc., the students also said they secured their African identities in other ways. For example, Kofi, born in West Africa, says:

*We don't speak English at home, we speak our [African] language ... I just really appreciate that you belong to a very well-organized society from a different country and with morals; [for example] you know what you can and cannot do around your parents. You know how to have discussions with your parents in a respectful way. Those things were some of the cultural things they taught me about (hmcT/95/74-75).*

He regrets that some African-born students—now Canadians—have abandoned this cultural tradition, “*their parents assimilated them by saying here [Canada] we don't eat our [African] food ... don't speak our [African] language at home*” (hmcT/95/75). These students, he notes, have “*started to speak back to [their] parents, started to in some cases smoking at a young age something like kids do here [Canada]. Some start taking drugs. Back home [in West Africa], it's only bad kids who do that*” (hmcT/95/75). The effect of all this, he drew to my attention, was that because “*many of them started talking back to their parents [an African taboo], disrespecting their parents, things got out of hand. That loss of control in their home environment made them lose responsibility. They couldn't get anything done ... School became nothing to them*” (hmcT/95/75). This last narrative should be interpreted with some caution as it puts the weight of “blame” on Black youth. Just like parents in North America, African parents also have their share of difficulties in caring and maintaining relationships with their children. Some succeed, others do not.

For other students, their Black identities were secured by their “*older brothers and sisters talking to them about Black pride, having pride in themselves and their race. One of my sisters wrote a lot of poetry and a lot of her poems were about Black pride and so I was reading things that were talking about being proud in [inaudible] and who you are*” (hmcT/95/77). Adwoa, born in South America, would recall that “*my parents always reminded me of what my African forefathers did, so that I could achieve and get the things that I have*” (hmcT/95/83). Afua, also born in South America, remembers this about her grandparents:

*[They will] sit me down and explain to me exactly [my] Blackness; this is what it means to be Black ... It gave me some kind of guideline. I came to realize, I am Black, its not going to rub off ... I don't think I would ever back down from anything ... Every once in a while I experience racism, [but] I have very high self esteem [and it helps me cope with it] ... I know where I come from, I know my heritage. A lot of the [Black] children today don't know; they're not interested. They're interested in partying, having a good time, that's about it. They need to know this is it, don't turn a blind eye. They have to know where they came from, they need to know their heritage* (hmcT/95/84).

Finally, some of the students said participating in Black community organizations and associations helped secure and affirm their Black and African identities. For example, one was the “*Co-president of the Black Students Association*” and danced with a “*Black Community Dance Troupe called Unity*” (hmcT/95/77). Another said she “*was a very busy teenager, didn't really have anytime for [her]self*” because of her association with “*African Canadian dance groups*” (hmcT/95/84). Yet another also “*danced with an African Caribbean dance group and did summer camp with Black children*” (hmcT/95/83). But most of them belonged to EBONY (Edmonton Black Organization of Nubian Youth), a group, as one said, “*was my first encounter with a youth group for Black kids*” (hmcT/95/77). Here is one student's description of her experience with EBONY:

*When I initially went there, I was just kind of in awe and I had this really happy feeling about I'm going to be with a whole bunch of other Black kids who you know we were there to have a good time but at the same time there was an educational aspect to it and so I got to hang out with people of my own kind and I got to learn and I just felt that was a very heartwarming experience. I think that if we had more groups like that, where Black kids could be with other Black kids and it would be a positive, wholesome environment, with an educational aspect to it, that would be very good for Black education. [What were some of the things you did?] Well you would have, generally what an Ebony meeting went like was, you'd go into the auditorium, there would be a film or a book or a just a topic at hand and it would be discussed that day. There were lots of arguments and there were lots of disagreements but everybody came [inaudible] respecting one another and they learned something from it, even if they didn't change their own opinion on such a matter (hmcT/95/77-78).*

### *Discussion*

Gibson (1991) has indeed confirmed that schooling may unintentionally contribute to the educational problems of students from culturally dominated groups by pressuring them to assimilate against their wishes. In fact, I'll argue that the experiences of these students show that educational excellence need not come at the expense of one's connection to one's cultural roots and racial identity. Black students don't need to "act White" in order to succeed academically or to be successful in society. If anything, as Gay (1994) points out, "a clarified ethnic identity is central to the psychosocial well-being and educational success of youth of color" (p. 151). Most scholars of ethnic and racial identity now agree with the view that ethnic identity provides a sense of social connectedness that is the basis for psychological well-being and that "a strong sense of connection and pride in one's ethnicity is related to healthy developmental outcomes, and that ethnic identity should therefore be reinforced whenever possible" (Tajfel, cited in Gonzales and Cauce, 1995, p. 147; see also Walters, 1994; Mah, 1995). Trueba (1994) also adds that "the very possibility of developing a positive self-concept and ethnic identity depends on the

recognition and celebration of one's own social, linguistic, and cultural heritage," and that there is "a profound link between ethnic identity and students' ability to participate fully in academia," concluding that "ethnic identification has an integrating effect on students that seems to facilitate their academic achievement" (p. 380). In this regard, for the Black students in this study, an African-centered learning environment "provide[d] [the] appropriate cultural foundations for learning" (Dei, 1995a, p. 194). I use the concept of racial or ethnic identity here to mean "the dimension of a person's social identity and self-concept that derives from knowledge, values, attitudes, the sense of belonging, and the emotional significance associated with membership in a particular ethnic group" (quoted in Gay, 1994, p. 151).

From the above student experiences, we can conclude that racial/ethnic identity promotes a positive self-concept and is related to higher levels of self-esteem and academic achievement. Moreover, because racial/ethnic identity is viewed as a necessary defence for disparaged minority groups such as Blacks against the inevitable psychological insults of racism, it is considered critical to the development of a positive self-concept (Cross, 1991). Indeed, as Dei (1996) aptly notes, for African Canadians:

Knowing about African cultural values and traditions can be an important buffer against racism. More importantly, it can provide students with the requisite coping and surviving skills and serve as significant sources of youth empowerment to deal with the competitiveness and the rugged individualism that arguably are the hallmarks of the Eurocentred school system (p. 58).

Cummins (1986) supports these findings when he contends that the strength of one's cultural identity is a vital factor in the expressive responses to the schooling experience. According to Cummins, "widespread school failure does not occur in minority groups that are positively oriented towards both their own and the dominant culture, and do not perceive themselves as inferior to the dominant group, and that are



not alienated from their own cultural values” (p. 22). This position suggests that “[Black] youth who are better integrated into their home culture will be more successful students, regardless of the structural barriers they face. In other words, the more [Black] students resist assimilation while simultaneously maintaining their culture, the more successful they are in school” (Deyhle, 1995, p. 408). This, in any case, seems to be a far healthier response than adopting an oppositional identity (discussed earlier in Chapter 2) that, in my view and the students in the study, effectively limits the possibility of academic success.

The relationship between cultural identity and academic success for minority students is further supported by empirical evidence. For example, researchers at Harvard University found that that Black immigrants from the Caribbean who identified with the heritage of their native land were most successful in school. They tended to see less racism and more opportunity than did those who identified themselves strictly as Americans (Associated Press, February 11, 1996). As a matter of fact, the Harvard researchers concluded that the more American customs the children of immigrants adopt, the less likely they are to do well in school and chase the dream that brought their families here. As well, in a national survey of 317 Black youths between the ages of 14 and 24, Bowman and Howard (cited in Slaughter and Epps, 1987) investigated the relationships of racial socialization by parents to the self-reported grades of respondents. Their research results indicated that grades were lowest for the one-third of the youths who reported that parents had told them nothing about race relations in the United States. Youths socialized to be aware of racial barriers reported significantly higher grades. The authors concluded that “it is through an emphasis on ethnic pride, self-development, racial barriers, and egalitarianism that Black parents attempt to filter to the developing child the meaning of [his/her] racial status” (p. 16). Likewise, a study of Southeast Asian students found a significant connection between grades and culture: in this research, higher grade point averages correlated with the *maintenance* of traditional values, ethnic

pride, and close social and cultural ties with members of the same ethnic group (Rumbaut and Ima, 1987; Mah, 1995). And Deyhle (1995), in her study of Navajo youth, found that “Navajos, subjected to discrimination in the workplace and a vocationally centered assimilationist curriculum in schools, *are more academically successful when they are more secure in their traditional culture*” (p. 403; emphasis added). Her study showed that “those students who embrace this life-affirming vision both gain a solid place in their society and are more successful in the Anglo world of the school.” (p. 403). She concluded that “the continuity of Navajo culture provides a supportive framework of family and community for young Navajos, which increases their chances for academic success” (Deyhle, 1995, p. 422).

These empirical findings clearly suggest that individuals will continue to categorize themselves, and that these categories will then provide the basis for both positive and negative group-based responses. As such, educators and policy planners must acknowledge that “race” and “color” remain unavoidable social issues, as well as important dimensions of identity formation, and should be openly addressed (Gonzales and Cauce, 1995, p. 154).<sup>1</sup> They also suggest that by refusing to accept either assimilation or rejection, these minority youth experiences force us to look at new ways of viewing school success. For example, in the Deyhle (1995) study:

The school success of [the] Navajo students, with strong traditions intact, is explained, in part, by a model of ‘cultural integrity.’ Supported by a solid cultural foundation, they resist by moving through high school as a short ‘interruption’ in their progression to lives as adult Navajo men and women. School success does not pose a serious threat to their cultural identity. Rather than attempting to erase Native culture and language, schools should do everything in their

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<sup>1</sup> Here, it is useful again to remember the theme of “hybridity” I discussed in my theoretical perspectives in Chapter 2. The critical point to note is that categorization of identity can become too “essentialist.” We must be careful not to “erect rigid boundaries and borders around categories of collective identity (race, class, gender, sexual orientation, etc.) [that] encourages us to presume that these categories are unified, static, and objective descriptors of natural difference” (Carlson, 1995, p. 417).

power to use, affirm, and maintain these if they truly want to achieve equity and promote Navajo students' academic success (p. 437).

What all this means for this study is that:

Cultural education is essential for the development of a cultural identity. Cultural identity is how we view ourselves in terms of our race, ethnic background, our values, language, customs, religious and social practices, clothing and diet. Cultural identity has a powerful impact on self-concept and self-esteem. Therefore a good education should lead to the attainment of self-knowledge, in addition to the preparation of people for economic survival and intellectually challenging careers. Self-knowledge is acquired through the study of a people's culture and history. African Canadian children need a sense of history and pride in their own culture and heritage, as well as the coping skills to deal with prejudice and racism (BLAC Report on Education, 1994, p. 41).

Consequently, these Black students' experiences suggest that "[African Canadian] students must be active generators of their own knowledge [and] for African youth, Afrocentricity as a discursive practice can offer 'a language of possibility'" (Dei, 1994b, p. 19). I'd like to close off this section with an exposition of the concept of Afrocentrism, an idea I subscribe to.

In recent years, an increasing number of Black scholars have begun to promote Afrocentricity as "an intervention paradigm" to facilitate the transformation of Blacks from a state of dependence to a state of independence and self-reliance. According to Asante (1987) and Karenga (1988), Afrocentricity is a frame of reference wherein phenomena are viewed from the perspective of the African person. The Afrocentric approach seeks, in every situation, the appropriate centrality of the African person. Afrocentricity is *not* a Black version of Eurocentricity. Eurocentricity is "based on White supremacist notions whose purposes are to protect White privilege and advantage in education, economics, politics, and so forth. Unlike Eurocentricity, Afrocentricity does not condone ethnocentric valorization at the expense of degrading

other groups' perspectives. Moreover, Eurocentricity presents the particular historical reality of Europeans as the sum total of the human experience. It imposes Eurocentric realities as 'universal'; i.e., that which is White is presented as applying to the human condition in general, while that which is non-White is viewed as group-specific and therefore not 'human'" (Asante, 1991, pp. 171-172). Furthermore, Afrocentric education is not against history. It is *for* history—correct, accurate history—and, if anything, it is against the marginalization of African American, Hispanic American, Asian American, Native American, and other non-White children (Asante, 1980; Takaki, 1993). Thus, in education, an Afrocentric pedagogy means that:

Teachers provide students the opportunity to study the world and its people, concepts, and history from an African world view. In most classrooms, whatever the subject, Whites are located in the center perspective position. How alien the [Black] child must feel, how like an outsider! The little [Black] child who sits in a classroom and is taught to accept as heroes and heroines individuals who defamed African people is being actively de-centered, dislocated, and made into a nonperson, one whose aim in life might be to one day shed that 'badge of inferiority': his or her Blackness. In Afrocentric educational settings, however, teachers do not marginalize [Black] children by causing them to question their own self-worth because their people's story is seldom told. By seeing themselves as the subjects rather than the objects of education—be the discipline biology, medicine, literature, or social studies—[Black] students come to see themselves no merely as seekers of knowledge but as integral participants in it. Because all content areas are adaptable to an Afrocentric approach, [Black] students can be made to see themselves as centered in the reality of any discipline (Asante, 1991, p. 171).

Advocates of Afrocentricity argue that the high rates of social problems such as school failure among Blacks are a direct result of the imposition of a Eurocentric world view on Blacks. For the Afrocentric, then, the intolerable level of minority school failure has to do with the fact that minority, particularly Black, cultural

heritage is suppressed in the curriculum. Black students fail because schools assault their identities and destabilize their sense of self and agency (McCarthy and Crichlow, 1993; see also Apple, 1989; Giroux 1992, McLaren, 1989). For example, according to Karenga (1988, p. 407), Eurocentric socialization has had an adverse impact on Blacks, including: (1) the internalization of a Euro-American mode of assessing the self, other Blacks, American society, and the world; (2) the loss of historical memory of their African cultural heritage; and (3) self-hatred and depreciation of their people and culture. Thus, the failure of Blacks to develop an Afrocentric cultural ideology and world view has made Blacks vulnerable to structural pressures that promote definitions of Blacks as being innately inferior to Whites, ignorant, lazy, dependent, promiscuous, and violent. Indeed, as McCarthy and Crichlow (1993) note, Afrocentrism is a liberatory discourse. When one reads the work of Asante and others, one "recognizes immediately a sustained effort to connect to an intellectual and political history of struggle waged by racially subordinate groups" (p. xv). Omi and Winant (1993) thus see the phenomenon of Afrocentrism in terms of oppositional terms:

It is now possible to resist racial domination in entirely new ways, particularly by limiting the reach and penetration of the political system into everyday life, by generating new identities, new collectivities, new (imagined) communities that are relatively less permeable to the hegemonic system (p. 7).

So, for the Afrocentric educator,

Afrocentricity is a commitment to a pedagogy that is political education. It is a form of education intended to equip students and teachers with the requisite cultural capital to work toward the eradication of the structural conditions that marginalize the existence of certain segments of the school population ... Afrocentric education uses African cultural values as a weapon of liberation and as counter knowledge to fight Euramerican ideological domination in schools. Afrocentric education, however, must be more than emancipatory or

liberatory pedagogy imbued with self-reflection, critique, and social action. Afrocentricity as an intellectual paradigm must focus on addressing the structural impediments to the education of the African student by engaging her or him to identify with her or his history, heritage, and culture. To be successful, the Afrocentric pedagogue must move away from a manipulation of the 'victim status and exploiting White guilt' to work toward finding solutions to pressing problems of educating students of African descent (Dei, 1994b, p. 17).

One such solution is one advocated by Carter Woodson (1933), who presented the idea of Black history as a form of Black cultural empowerment and liberatory pedagogy. In his view, dissemination of Black and African history would, "besides building self-esteem among Blacks, help eliminate prejudice among Whites." He aimed both "to inculcate in the mind of the youth of African blood an appreciation of what their race has thought and felt and done" and to publicize the facts of the Black among Whites, so that "the Negro may enjoy a larger share of the privileges of democracy as a result of the recognition of his worth" (Meier and Rudwick, 1986, p. 9). Woodson, who was to found what later came to be known as 'Black History Month,' tirelessly preached that as a race of people with a distinguished and heroic past, Blacks could proudly claim "a great inheritance." As he put it in a speech at Hampton Institute in 1921:

We have a wonderful history behind us ... If you are unable to demonstrate to the world that you have this record, the world will say to you, "You are not worthy to enjoy the blessings of democracy or anything else." They will say to you, "Who are you, anyway? Your ancestors have never controlled empires or kingdoms and most of your race have contributed little or nothing to science and philosophy and mathematics." So far as you know, they have not; but if you will read the history of Africa, the history of your ancestors—people of whom you should feel proud—you will realize that they have a history that is worthwhile. They have traditions ... of which you can boast and upon which you can base a claim for a right to a share in the blessings of democracy. Let us, then, study ... this history ... with the

understanding that we are not, after all, an inferior people ... We are going back to that beautiful history and it is going to inspire us to greater achievements. It is not going to be long before we can so sing the story to the outside world as to convince it of the value of our history ... and we are going to be recognized as men (quoted in Meier and Rudwick, 1986, p. 9).

Indeed, in his 1933 classic, *The Miseducation of the Negro*, Woodson shows how Blacks have been educated away from their own culture and traditions and attached to the fringes of European culture and history; thus dislocated from themselves, Woodson asserts that Blacks often put too much value to things European to the detriment of their own heritage. Thus, he argues, if education is ever to be substantive and meaningful for Africans in the Americas, it must first address the African's historical experiences, both in Africa and the Diaspora (see Codjoe, 1995).

### 5.5 Personal Initiative and Responsibility

Another factor that emerged from the students' narratives and credited for their academic success was their taking increasing ownership and personal initiative and responsibility for their own learning. Because they felt, as one student said, for example, "*[I didn't get] any education from school as far as Black education was concerned*" (hmcT/95/86), they took individual actions to advance their own academic efforts. As the same student put it:

*I feel like there are sources out there, it's just that I found that I had to seek them out myself and I had to find the things in the library and I had to get involved in groups and talk to people and that's basically where I got my education on Black history and that kind of thing (hmcT/95/86).*

Increasingly, as they embarked on this 'personal initiative journey,' their confidence and abilities were strengthened as they came to believe in themselves (as one put it, "*I*

*can do it [achieve academically]”* (hmcT/95/91). Another expressed that *“I had the confidence there because I knew that there [in school activities], it was only me and I sort of maybe found sanctity in that”* (hmcT/95/91). The students realize this places an unfair burden on them as Black students, but they have developed the attitude that ‘for us as Black people we have to take the initiative to bring about changes in our lives; we can’t just wait for others to change their attitudes towards us.’ This is how one student described his experience in this regard:

*I didn’t realize until I got older but personal responsibility needs to be expressed more in Black communities. I now realize for myself ... that responsibility played a big role in my development. I actually wanted to do something and that’s why I went this way. So I think young Black kids, their parents should [help them take] some personal responsibility from a young age. We must take responsibility for ourselves* (hmcT/95/91).

In fact, some research shows that individual actions of students have a relation to their academic performance—and for Black students, it was found that it makes a significant contribution to explaining achievement between high- and low-achieving Black students. Pelham (cited in Wilson-Sadberry et al., 1991) notes that successful outcomes for African Americans “are a result of taking responsibility for actions and overcoming obstacles. For racial/ethnic groups, success is attained by consistent effort and perseverance” (p. 88). Ogbu (1978) also maintains that the main and contributing factor differentiating the more successful from the less successful minority students appears to be the nature of the history of subordination and the exploitation of the minorities, *and the nature of the minorities’ own instrumental and expressive responses to their treatment*. In fact, for Ogbu, the explanations for minority school failure lie outside of the school itself and more on the students’ own efforts or home culture as it relates to educational achievement. This is particularly true for Black students, especially when it comes to educating themselves about Black issues.



That's why most of the students in this study expressed regret about the attitudes of some of their Black peers when it comes to taking personal responsibility for their own learning. As one said, *"I think some young Black kids have a problem ... There are many things that you can achieve ... [but] there are some kids who just don't take the initiative"* (hmcT/95/86). Parents were blamed for this as this personal narrative indicates:

*It's kind of hard to say because on the one hand people say, 'Well, the schools aren't highlighting Black figures and historical figures and such and people in the country who made a difference and people who are unknown. Like Howard McCurdy who is a Parliament member. On the other hand, I talked to a lot of my friends' parents and they're like 'Howard who?' So they're not even telling their kids about stuff like that and it's a two-way system, you have to have the schools and the parents* (hmcT/95/90).

One even goes so far as to not blame the schools for the lack of achievement among Black students, but *"consider[s] it the fault of the Black students"* because *"my main point about it is pretty much that it [education] is there for the taking but if Black people don't want it, then they're not going to get it"* (hmcT/95/91). Another agreed when she said, *"I feel that generally all Blacks, especially the ones here that aren't doing particularly well, I think that has to come down to a personal thing. If you have the determination and you want to do something, then you can do it"* (hmcT/95/91). So, this *"determination that you want to do something,"* again with the help of parents, was a catalyst in the behaviour of the students towards school. Their attitude was that *"if it rains you get an umbrella"* (hmcT/95/89). Thus according to Abena:

*I think as a person I'm just the type of individual who is always reaching and searching and trying to, like, if there's a mountain in front of me or a hill or anything you want to say, I'm willing to walk up that hill. That's just something innately within me, I want it, go up, I don't want to stay where I am. [That's why] I learned about Black*

*history, etc. more on my own than in school. As well, I think I can attribute my defying the odds to my family who supported it [my drive and initiative]; to them, if you were going to defy the odds to do good, that's fine, go right ahead and defy those odds. So family, friends and just my inner sense of climb the mountain (hmcT/95/88).*

For Ama, her personal drive and initiative emerged as a result of her “*want[ing] to be successful and [knowing] the only way is like getting some sort of education, some solid form of education.*” She therefore “*always wanted to learn*” (hmcT/95/87). She attributes it to “*my parents, really; I think even from my grandmother who was always, like, ‘You will go to school,’ ‘You will do this,’ ‘You will do that.’ Education-wise, you do your homework before you do that. Eventually it just kind of instilled that in me ... eventually it instills that focus [education] in you, and you say, ‘Yes, this is what I want to do’*” (hmcT/95/87). One student, during the focus group discussions, also attributed his personal initiative as thus:

*It's what my parents taught me how to do and it's weird; people will be over at our house and see books by all these different authors and they'll see videotapes about Count Basie and Alvin Ailey and all these people. ‘Where did you get these things?’ They're out there, you just have to know where to search (hmcT/95/91).*

To the students, when all is said and done, it boils down to this:

- *The way I look at it is that it's our responsibility, we have this victimization [mentality]; that's why I don't blame the school system, that should be our responsibility to do it. That school doing, them deciding to do it. We're not learning anything by it, so if it collapses, we're right back to where it started because Black people didn't organize it in the first place. I don't know anything about Jewish history, but every Jewish person I know, knows everything about it. Where did they learn that? They go to school, they go to church, they go to synagogue ... And they do all that stuff, they learn, so they know their heroes. That's what we have to do for our children. It's our responsibility to teach our children our heroes, through games—whatever the case may be—testing, whatever schools aren't going to do ... Let's have Saturday schools. Most do it; we can do it too (hmcT/95/92).*

- *You have to decide which way you want to live. Do you want in ten years suffering because of what you didn't do; when a little bit of studying could have gotten you through high school for example; a little bit more studying could have got you through University. You have to make that choice for yourself and then when you make that choice try to find positive affirmations, like through your community, through your family. If your family can't even help you in that way because they think 'Oh yeah, you're stupid' or whatever, find friends that are going to help you in that way. There are teachers out there, White teachers that are actually supportive. Yes, you may get a couple of negative ones but not all of them are bad (hmcT/95/93).*

Some examples of how these student initiatives and actions manifested themselves when in secondary school include:

- *When I went to high school here ... I'd set my goals and work towards it to a point that nothing will interfere with it. I planned then on applying to Medical School and going[inaudible] (hmcT/95/87).*
- *I was an avid reader. I find that generally I just kind of seek out knowledge for myself, whether it's in a formal setting or informal setting (hmcT/95/88).*
- *I'd enter things like contests, things like writing contests I'd be into, and art contests and it's weird because other Black kids would be looking at me like 'You're not supposed to want to do that stuff, because none of us are doing it,' you're the only one out there doing it. I thought I could do it and my mother would show me stuff that she'd written when she was young and poetry and I was just so surrounded by culture when I was growing up that it's, like, it's a part of me. For some people it might be alien to them, but for me things like literature, music and all types of music too was not. A lot of [Black students], they can't get into that, so they don't get to test certain skills of theirs or certain contests because they feel, 'Oh well, that's not Black or that's not urban or that has nothing to do with Canada' (hmcT/95/90-91).*

### *Discussion*

As the above narratives suggest, Black youth must take some responsibility for their education. Thus, the education of Black youth must not lead to a dependence on others but rather must foster a state of independence and self-reliance (Walcott and Dei, 1993; see also Asante, 1990; Karenga, 1994). In fact, it's being argued that one function of public schools is to prepare young people to become

socially responsible citizens in a democratic society and to provide them with opportunities to make contributions within their communities that are acknowledged and valued by their citizens. Students must be encouraged to participate in their communities in positive and constructive ways (Seigel and Rockwood, 1993). The research on youth development indicates that adolescents must develop a positive sense of purpose and personhood; make connections to the larger society; and engage in some concept of productive futures in order to become healthy, socially competent, resourceful, self-directed, hardworking and productive adults. Additionally, the literature shows (and as our discussions above indicate) that a youth's sense of personhood, self and future prospects results from the interplay of the multiple contexts in which he or she moves: family, peer group, neighbourhood, school, social and economic institutions, and labels of ethnic membership defined by the larger society. Some factors identified by researchers as important for the positive growth of adolescents and young adults include: personal initiative; support and guidance from adults; meaningful roles; sense of being valued by others and society; self-respect and respect from others; positive view of themselves and their development; sense of accomplishment and success; recognition; goals which challenge them to maximize their potential; positive expectations for their future; and strong and consistent discipline, with rules "wrapped in fairness, equity, consistent concern and high expectations" (Lenore-Mahabir, 1995, p. 3; see also Heath and McLaughlin, 1993).

#### **5.6 Extracurricular and Community Activities as a Protective and Coping Mechanism**

Apart from taking personal initiative and responsibility for their own learning, the students also mentioned that participating in extracurricular activities played a positive role in their academic achievement. From their accounts, their extracurricular involvement during their high school years operated as "protective mechanisms" or

“survival strategies” and served as “potential intervention points as they relate to developing resilience in school and community settings” (Winfield, 1991, p. 10).

All the students in the study participated in some form of extracurricular activity during their secondary school years. They showed how crucial extracurricular activities were in providing needed outlets for their energy and for teaching them important leadership and communication skills which, they said, contributed to their educational success. They participated in various forms of activities. For example, Akosua, who said she’d *“always been involved in sports and very well rounded in terms of other activities,”* her extracurricular preferences were *“definitely with sports”* (hmcT/95/93). She *“did gymnastics for about eight years and then when [she] got into Junior High [she] got involved in volleyball, basketball, track and all of those kinds of things”* (hmcT/95/93). Ama was another sports enthusiast who *“joined the track and field team at [name of Edmonton school], [and before moving to Edmonton she] joined the field hockey team [at school] in Waterloo”* (hmcT/95/94). In addition to track and field sports, other students, particularly the male students, *“played a lot of basketball”* and *“soccer”* (hmcT/95/94/97). Besides sports, the students were also involved in other activities. Abena, for example, *“took French lessons, piano, ballet. When I got to high school, I joined the Yearbook Committee and the Grad Committee”* (hmcT/95/95). Kwesi was *“involved with Cub Scouts and Boy Scouts.”* He was also *“involved with Drama”* (hmcT/95/95-96). Kwadjo was a music enthusiast who was into *“music, listening to all stuff, then trying to practice and things like that”* (hmcT/95/97). Ekuia did *“theatre [and] was in the Teen Festival of the Arts and ... also directed a choir, a junior choir”* (hmcT/95/98). Adwoa and Afua *“danced with African Dance Group[s]”* and participated in *“summer camps with children”* (hmcT/95/98). And Kwabena *“was actually involved in tutoring”* (hmcT/95/97-98).

The students described how these extracurricular activities were instrumental in some way to their success in school. For one:

*Because I was involved in so many different activities, I had to learn how to balance my time, etc. and I had to learn how to focus on tasks so that I would just put my mind to them and get them done. I found that when it came to school, then, when it came to studying, it was just like, 'Okay, it's time to study, sit down and do it.' (hmcT/95/95).*

And when she was taking piano lessons,

*I would often perform in the festival where you compete against other pianists and I would often go and I would play and I thought it's a very positive response, from the adjudicator, from the audience, etc. But then when it actually came down to allocating my marks, a lot of time there was somebody who would beat me by just one half a mark or something right. After a while it just started to really get at me that no matter what I did, there was always somebody who managed to beat me by that half a mark. Even though the adjudicator would only have high praises for you and the audience would say they don't necessarily think that was a fair judgment. [However], it kind of built up this feeling in me that 'Well, I'm going to get that half a mark the next time, so just keep trying harder and harder' (hmcT/95/95).*

Another recounts how his extracurricular activities helped him in his school and personal development:

*Even though it wasn't always fun at the time, I think that being involved with Cub Scouts and Boy Scouts was a very good experience because you learn certain skills, you get to go to the outdoors which I think is really important. A lot of Africans who grow up in North America never have that experience, they don't camp, they don't canoe or swim ... That's a pretty fun part of life. Those things were important for me because they gave me experiences that I could apply to leadership, that I could apply to responsibility, that I could apply to my writing. Also, I had jobs since I was little, so whether it was I delivered flyers and papers, and I worked in stores and this kind of thing and those all taught me things about responsibility in the work world, showing up on time and which is not to say I was a model employee every time, but nevertheless I learned a lot that helped me. I was involved with drama and that was very important because you gain a lot of skills in terms of*

*public presentation and public speaking is one of the most important skills any individual could have because you command authority and respect when you speak well ... So all that stuff helped me; that gave me an edge (hmcT/95/95-96).*

For a different student, playing and listening to all types of music

*kind of affects the way that you perform in certain areas in school too. I'm not a Rhodes scholar or anything, I was not a straight-A student by any means, but it [music] affected the way that I performed in school where teachers would say 'He's very positive.' I had a teacher who came back to me five years after I'd gotten out of her class, she told her husband that I keep telling him that he's so nice or he was such a nice kid or whatever, he always tries and things like that. Classes like English, I would get higher marks than any of my other classes except for things like Music ... [As well], practicing music teaches you about discipline and focus and things like that ... Discipline is important but the realization comes when you're actually more disciplined and music helps to do that ... Sometimes I say to myself that a lot of the problems that they have with the educational system with kids, they could solve them if they give them musical instruments and put them in a room and say 'try and learn this piece' or 'try and practice this piece.' 'Maybe listen to this and see what it's supposed to sound like or what this person has done with it and let that inspire you.' 'Learn this scale, or learn something about music, take this book and read it and try and write something like that, write a diary.' Education is often helped when people can learn how to do something artistically themselves (hmcT/95/97).*

Yet for other students, being involved in tutoring for example, “helped me look at other people, give out what I have to help other people to achieve what they want ... plus, it also helped me just to be better myself ... It just makes you a better person overall” (hmcT/95/95). Extra-curricular activities also gave one “confidence in school because I knew that I was getting out there and playing a sport and being part of a team and making friends” (hmcT/95/93). And for some it taught them “self-control,”

*“learning to be responsible,” “having to deal with myself,” and “it gave me something else to do other than cause trouble” (hmcT/95/96). As well,*

*a lot of my extracurricular activities were sports, some of them were team sports, some were individual sports and then like music as well like piano, like singing and that kind of thing. I think that it does add to your self-confidence because when you see that you can do something you feel good ... I think that my schoolwork also gave me—knowing that I was achieving in [extracurricular activities]—positive reinforcement as well in building up my self-esteem (hmcT/95/98).*

But during the focus group discussions, a few suggested that participating in extracurricular activities was, for them, a way of *“releasing tension from living in a White society” (hmcT/95/96)*. It was seen as a *“surviving strategy”* and a way to *“cop[e] with racism.”* This caused quite a bit of debate and discussion, but by the end of the discussion most agreed with this assessment and example of how participation in extracurricular activities helps in coping with *“living in a White society”*:

*I felt that way because it's one of the areas where nobody can tell you that you can't achieve what you're trying to do especially with what I'm doing. When you practice piano you're usually by yourself and you deal with your faults and your little technical problems that you have by yourself. When you overcome them nobody can take that away from you and it's very hard. You have to fight to get over the negative feeling you might have subconsciously about your playing or whatever you do as an extracurricular activity and if you do that then it's more difficult for other people to tear that down (hmcT/95/98).*

And there was one student who said she quit track and field *“basically because*

*... I just got the feeling that it's because I'm Black, I'm strong, I'm healthy, that's why you can do this and also I didn't really like it because most of the people in track and field are Black. I always thought why can't we join things like hockey, just expand and do something else instead of the stereotypical things ... It was bothering me enough, and it deterred me away from it [sports]” (hmcT/95/94).*



This narrative somewhat confirms what appears in the literature on student life in multiracial schools—indicating the “tendency for Black students, more so than Whites, to embrace physical education and extracurricular sports” (Solomon, 1992, p. 63). Tyack (1974), for example, argues that intelligence testing provided the technology for the stereotyping of Whites as mentally superior to Blacks and Blacks as ‘hand-minded’ and ‘motor-minded.’ According to Solomon (1992), “this association of Blacks with physical rather than mental agility gained support from the eugenics movement and still influences the attitudes and behaviours of teachers and students alike today” (p. 63; see also Selden, 1978). This also supports the point made by Ogbu (in Foreword to Solomon, 1992) and others that while Black and minority students want education for employment purposes, “they also realize that as racial minorities school credentials are necessary but not sufficient for their advancement. Consequently, these minorities divert some of their time, resources, and effort to the pursuit of alternative or survival strategies (for example, sports). This reduces their investment in education and affects their chances of success” (Solomon, 1992, p. x). I can say conclusively that, despite the story of the one student who quit sports for fear of perpetuating stereotypes, all the students in this study (even including the one I just spoke about) saw participation in extracurricular activities as *necessary* to academic achievement and, if anything, it positively affected “their chances of success.” This is quite contrary to Ogbu’s perspective.

Having said that, I think we still need to be mindful of the “reality of racialised stereotyping and discrimination” (Small, 1994, p. 101) when it comes to Blacks and sports. As Small (1994) notes, “racialised ‘stereotyping’ is central in [North] American sports — Blacks and non-Blacks are deemed to have differential abilities to excel in different activities” (p. 101). That’s why some teachers wrongly assume that Blacks are naturally better at sports, and they promote Black participation as an alternative success system for these students. My data show that the study participants are cognizant of this and know the adverse effect when Black youth are

diverted away from academic areas into sporting arenas. Their embrace of sport has more to do with providing needed outlets for their energy and learning important skills along the way that helped with their school success, than in perpetuating the stereotype about Blacks and sports.

### *Discussion*

The concept of “resilience” has been found in the literature on student life in multiracial schools as important to the “social competence and adaptive behaviour” (Winfield, 1991, p. 10) of minority youth. This “resilience mechanism” could, in turn, be applied within the academic setting and is based on the contention that “self-esteem and efficacy are in large measure based on an individual’s successful accomplishment of [extracurricular] tasks that are important to that individual” (Braddock II et al., 1991, p. 115; see also Winfield, 1991). Resilience here is generally conceptualized as “an individual’s positive response to situations of stress and adversity. This perspective presents resilience as a protective mechanism that is thought to emerge from specific personality features, such as self-esteem, or from family cohesion” (Braddock II et al., 1991, p. 113). Rutter (cited in Braddock II et al., 1991) has identified four types of “resilient mechanisms” that help minority students to mediate adverse circumstances or demonstrate resilient behaviours. These are mechanisms that “reduce the impact of risks, reduce the likelihood of negative chain reactions associated with adversity, establish and maintain self-esteem and self-efficacy, and create new opportunities for [academic] success” (p. 114).

Consequently, developing and taking part in extracurricular activities have been found among Black youth as assisting to develop “positive coping skills,” and that those “resilient and able to cope successfully” go on to “educational success” (Winfield, 1991, p. 7). Some of the ways in which this takes place are when resilience among Black youth leads to “the reduction of negative outcomes, the establishment and maintenance of self-esteem and self-efficacy, [and] the opening up of

[educational] opportunities (Rutter cited in Winfield, 1991, p. 8). Indeed, research by Nettles (1991) has found that "African-American high-school students' participation in extracurricular activities was related to their sense of well-being" (p. 142). For Winfield (1991) then, "the critical issue for [educational] policy and instruction centres around identifying the protective processes and mechanisms that reduce risk and foster resilience [among Black youth]" (p. 7).

Indeed, the relationship between extracurricular activities such as sports and academic performance have been supported by other research findings. Researchers have consistently found "positive links between athletic participation and several indicators of pro-academic investment behaviours and attitudes" (Braddock et al., 1991, p. 128). For example, using race as a variable, studies by Braddock (1980) and Picou (1978) have found significant positive correlations between athletic participation and educational performance, attitudes, and future goals among African-American males. In another study, Braddock found athletic participation, net of social class, and academic aptitude to be positively associated with academic self-esteem, curriculum placement, grades, and college plans for African-American as well as White males (cited in Braddock et al., 1991). In fact, according to Braddock (1981), participation in athletic programs has offered opportunities for developing strength and leadership in the African American community. Other analyses (e.g., Winfield, 1991) have also shown that "sports participation is positively associated with the aspirations of eighth-grade African American males to enroll in academic or college-preparatory programs in high school. Athletic participation is also related to plans to complete high school and attend college, enhances self-esteem, and promotes positive peer relations" (p. 12). Based on these findings, it has been suggested that schools consider the use of sport as an educational tool to enhance academic resilience among minority youth. As well, sports and other extracurricular activities have been recommended to be expanded and diversified to allow both athletes and non-athletes

more opportunities to experience academic benefits associated with extracurricular and sport involvement (Braddock et al., 1991).

### **5.7 The Interplay of Gender and its Contribution to School Success**

*It is important to note that most sociological studies, including those that compare the educational attainment of Blacks and Whites, tended, until recently, either to ignore women or to treat them as persons whose social status was a function of their father's or husband's positions ... During the past two decades, however, many social scientists have turned their attention to women's unique experiences in achievement, education, and the labor market.*

*Roslyn Aryin Mickelson*

**Why Does Jane Read And Write So Well?  
The Anomaly of Women's Achievement**

*"Get yourself an education so you won't have to stay with no sorry man."*

**A Black father to his two daughters,  
cited in Roslyn Aryin Mickelson  
Why Does Jane Read And Write So Well?  
The Anomaly of Women's Achievement**

During my research for this study, I discovered that the literature on gender differences among Blacks and other minorities in the school setting was rather sparse. As always, the many studies that have investigated gender status regarding differences in school-related behaviours have focused mainly on Whites (Pollard, 1989). After discussions with my supervisor and because half of the students in my study are women, I thought it would be appropriate and necessary to look at gender status and investigate whether it makes a difference to school achievement among Black students. Indeed, many studies of minorities have not taken gender into account. As Slaughter and Epps (1987) have pointed out, many studies fail to examine gender differences in achievement performance within the Black community. In the view of Andrews (1993), this is because women, particularly Black women, "have been constructed as

'other' in the context of social science research." Often, she notes, the research that is there "do[es] not speak to larger issues faced by women as a class in contemporary societies" (pp. 181-182). As well, my desire to investigate gender status was to acknowledge the view expressed by Morrow and Torres (1995) that "education is necessarily an important topic of investigation given its central role in gender socialization" (p. 392), as well as to find out whether "minority women and girls have radically different experiences of racial inequality than do their male counterparts" (McCarthy and Crichlow, 1993, p. xix).

I must admit from the outset that my student female sample size is very small and does not permit generalizations.<sup>2</sup> However, their remarks and narratives are quite consistent with the research in the literature and they provide insights as to what are the prevailing attitudes and perceptions regarding what Andrews (1993) calls the "'double whammy' of race and gender, being Black and female, compounded by the attainment of a high level of education" (p. 182). Their observations and the supporting research cited also lend insight into how gender is constructed in our society as well as contemporary issues in Black male-female relationships.

The Black women in my study are high-achievers and were highly motivated to succeed in school. Invariably, they all attributed their educational success to their "multiple identities" as 'woman' and 'Black,' and now adding yet another identity, 'educated.' When I probed how these identities pushed them to excel, it came down to wanting to secure for themselves "*emotional independence*," "*social respectability*," and "*economic independence from men*" (hmcT/95/passim). Ama, who has now completed her first degree and is striving for something more, expressed

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<sup>2</sup> Of the six women I interviewed for this part of the research, one chose not to speak about gender issues. Of the remaining five, three spoke at length and two were generally brief with their comments. I spent quite a bit of time with three who were interested in discussing the issue of gender and Black achievement.

the common sentiments when she told me she doesn't want any man to "take care of [her]" and finds that "mentality troubling and offensive." She said:

*I want to show that as a Black woman, I'm capable of achieving and taking care of myself. I'm capable, so why should I let anybody stop me. I know as a Black woman, I need to get an education so I can be independent. I don't want to be dependent on a man, I want to take care of myself and it's why I did so well in school ... My mother always tells me 'Get an education so that you can be on your own.' I thank my mother for that because I know I can survive by myself, on my own ... Don't get me wrong, I'm not anti-men or whatever, I just don't like to be the typical Black woman, you know [inaudible] ... Yeah, it's good if you get married and have kids, but you just don't know what the future holds and you want to [inaudible] up your independence ... [so that] you have your own financial stability ... especially as Black females. We don't have that much support, really (hmcT/95/99-100).*

Abena, now completing her first degree, also stressed the importance of "I don't want security in men," so she saw education as "building something for yourself" so that "I can take care of myself" (hmcT/95/100). Similarly, Adwoa, who is now pursuing a graduate degree in the United States, said:

*Knowing that I'm Black and female, I need to do something so that later in life, I basically need to have something to back me up to be able to do what I want to do because I just can't go out there just me and expect [a man to take care of me] ... because I do have the fact of being Black and female against me (hmcT/95/100-101).*

Likewise, Afua, also now in a degree program, remarked that "I need all the education to survive" because "more is expected of us [Black women] (hmcT/95/101). These views are supported by Mickelson (1989) who found in her research that:

Middle-class Black women do not necessarily perceive marriage as a route to upward mobility or out of poverty. Although many hope to marry a man who will keep them in the lifestyle to which they have been accustomed, they expect to work as well. Because Black families

have historically been characterized by flexible gender roles, middle-class Black women are familiar with the role of breadwinner. Perhaps Black parents, more than Whites, fear the precarious position of women who do not have occupational resources of their own. Education is crucial "just in case something happens," one middle-class mother cautioned her daughter and her daughter's friends (p. 47).

And according to Mickelson, perhaps as a result of the many factors that go against Black males in North American society, the condition of Black men as breadwinners are precarious and, as a result, many Black women are highly motivated to succeed in school or in an occupation. Even if they are married, they know their husbands are unlikely to earn enough to take care of their families.<sup>3</sup> Black parents, especially mothers, have become concerned and so they stress to their Black daughters to use education to obtain career and life success. The situation is best expressed by this advice that a Black father gave his two daughters: "Get yourself an education so you won't have to stay with no sorry man" (Mickelson, 1989, p. 57).

Apart from the desire to be secure and independent, these women also saw the quest for higher education and achievement as one way to fight stereotypes of Black women "from portrayals of 'welfare mothers' and 'whores' to 'Jezebels' and 'sluts,' in the cinema, on television, and throughout popular culture, Black women were represented as sexual objects, burdens on the economy, and failures" (Small, 1994, p. 82). The sentiments expressed by Small (1994) are particularly appropriate for this discussion when one considers that "for Black women in particular, racialized hostility in its cultural, institutional and individual manifestations was an everyday affair. The obstacles imposed by racialized ideologies, in conjunction with those of gender subordination, have a double impact on Black women" (p. 82). It's the 'sort of

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<sup>3</sup> According to Mickelson (1989), Black women, especially educated Black women, have always been able to gain employment (in a sex- and race-segregated occupational structure) more reliably than Black men. Today, she notes, Black women from middle-class families are the most likely to achieve and attain academically. And those with high levels of educational attainment (five or more years of college) are more likely to have jobs commensurate with their education than are White men (p. 47; see also Wilkerson, 1987).

the Aunt Jemima role' that Akosua, who has now taken time off from her university studies to start a small business and raise her young son, spoke about and wanted to shatter and avoid—and so she took the education route.

But for Abena, cited above, she wanted to go beyond more than just social stereotyping of Black women to the “greater inequality [that] has resulted given the kind of education that women are receiving compared to the education of men” (Morrow and Torres, 1995, p. 389). This particularly refers to “the fields of specialization [that] continue to be gender-linked—mathematics, engineering, and the physical sciences are dominated by males, and the social sciences and humanities are dominated by females” (Mickelson, 1989, p. 57). So, for Abena, she would “*want to go into certain academic fields [where] people look at you like, ‘What are you doing [here]?,’ ‘You don’t belong [here]’*” (hmcT/95/100). Here she recalls her sister’s experience:

*If you want to be an engineer, for instance, one of my sisters that initially went into Engineering ... when she went in, she said that she always felt that people were, you know, they didn’t want to accept her, they’re like, ‘You’re an oddball, what are you doing here?’ They didn’t treat any women exactly as equals within that faculty, but particularly with her, she was really quite isolated, she was on her own (hmcT/95/100).*

It’s worth pointing out that quite a number of the women who participated in this project took science seriously and went on to study science at the postsecondary level.

In a similar way, Ama, also cited above, said her desire to achieve academically as a Black woman was given a boost when, earlier in her high school years, she discovered that here in Alberta,

*There’s not much [Black female] role models, female that we see anyway. The first time I ever saw a female Black lawyer, it was at*



*EBONY [an organization for Black youth in Edmonton]. I was so surprised and I went to her, and thought 'Wow,' we [Black women] can also make it right here in Edmonton (hmcT/95/99).*

Additionally, the women attributed some of their success in the gender equation to the fact that:

*As far as society itself views Black people, I think Black women are less of a threat. I think that Black men, certainly, there's the whole issue of race, there's the issue of crime, there's the issue of delinquency and all these things but I think with Black women, a lot of times they just see Black women as being maybe a little subservient and a little sort of insignificant and not so much of a threat as I said before (hmcT/95/99).*

Abena echoes the same sentiments when she adds that:

*We [Black people] face different stereotypes. I find that Black males automatically get thrown into the category of athlete or Joe [inaudible], so to speak. In some ways it might even be more difficult for Black males in the sense that from day one they just got put into those two categories and nobody, society doesn't look at them as academics and so because of this "me man" mentality that a lot of the Black youth are taking on, they think, 'Okay, I'm going to have my fun and take on this great popular role.' I find a lot of Black males take on that and don't get the opportunity to be thought of as academics. Whereas Black females we face stereotypes, but at the same time, people are more willing to let you do certain things, so that if you are a Black girl and you're doing well in school, people accept that more readily than they do if they hear that some Black male has gone on to do Medicine or something to that extent (hmcT/95/100).*

Because of these societal expectations and cultural conditioning, the students believe, as Akosua put it, that:

*I think as a Black person I had struggles and as a woman I've had struggles but I don't think that together it's been an extra struggle as far as education has gone. I didn't feel pressure ... I think [as a result] I was pretty secure in my own activities and my own education that I didn't feel that I was striving to beat this Black man beside me. Maybe*

*as a female I've had to work harder but I don't think I've had to work harder as opposed to [a] Black man (hmcT/95/99).*

Over and above what has been discussed to this point, the Black women students' comments and narratives inevitably led to discussions about sexism and Black male-female relationships. Although one can argue that the issues discussed do not have a direct bearing on this dissertation, they are worth recounting here because it provides insight into wider gender issues in the Black community—with implications for education and the subject at hand (see Boateng, 1993; Codjoe, forthcoming).

For one thing, it was clear that these students would not buy into anything that will marginalize them, including relations with Black men. If their desire for personal autonomy and independence would mean no marriage or relationship, so be it. As educated Black women, they believe they have different ways of looking at things than, say, less educated Black women. For example, they reject “traditional attitudes” that say ‘a woman’s place is in the kitchen’ or, as one said, “*because you're a woman, you're supposed to behave like this or like that*” (hmcT/95/100). So, when it comes to seeking mates, they would seek Black males who would “*admire [them] for what you have achieved academically*” and allow them to “*exercise [their] rights as wom[e]n*” (hmcT/95/100). But “*knowing what's going on out there between Black men and women,*” they feel that most Black men, because of sexist attitudes and insecurities, would have difficulty accepting a “*strong, assertive and high-achieving Black woman*” (hmcT/95/101). Indeed, Solomon (1992) confirms, for example, that West Indian social formation is characterized by male dominance, and that this is of particular significance to the understanding of Black females' accommodation and resistance to the domination of Black male subcultural behaviours. Accordingly, Abena related that:

*They [Black men] admire you for what you have achieved academically, but when it comes to exercising your rights as a woman, they have a problem ... They want the typical Black woman, the one*

*they can boss [around] ... They don't like the package that comes with having an education, things like sharing responsibilities at home, gender equality, that sort of thing...If you get away from what is considered normal for a woman, then it becomes trouble (hmcT/95/100).*

Unfortunately, as some Black women have observed elsewhere, “some Black men may accept racist stereotypes of [educated] Black women as bossy or strident complainers” (Gose, 1996, p. A47). Morrow and Torres (1995) have noted that:

[Black] women who deviate from this pattern [gender inequality] not only must overcome influences of early childhood and the weaker gender/differences reinforced in early schooling; they also risk the more immediate rejection from ostensibly desirable males at a crucial stage of their own ego development (p. 402).

And to confirm this, note this comment from a Black woman in the United States when the subject came up for discussion: “As an educated Black woman in my 30s, I’m realizing that I may never get married, and that’s very painful” (Samuels and Adler, 1996, p. 67). It echoes a similar point observed by Brown (1994) in her study when told that, “I know some intelligent Black women who think that Black men don’t want to date intelligent and ‘together’ women” (p. 56).

The impact of educational attainment on marriages is a very serious issue and concern in Black communities, especially among Black women (see, for example, Gose, 1996). The conventional wisdom out there is that it is increasingly difficult for highly educated Black women to get married. Undeniably, there is some evidence now that for most educated Black women, the educational level is “an inhibiting factor in their ability to meet and marry a suitable mate” (Andrews, 1992, p. 8; see also Christian, 1995, p. 537). The situation is compounded by data (again from the United States) that reveals that “even if all Black men were eligible bachelors, there wouldn’t be enough to go around—for every one hundred Black women between the ages of twenty and forty-nine, there were eighty-nine Black men” (Christian, 1995, p. 538).

Moreover, of the eligible Black men remaining, a 1993 poll by sociologists at the University of California, Los Angeles, found that as many as 12 or 13 percent marry White (or Asian) women—six times the rate at which Black women marry outside their race (Samuels and Adler, 1996). And to show the “politics of colour among Blacks,” for a Black woman who is dark-skinned, studies show her prospects of marrying one of the more successful Black men available appear to be even less promising. As one Black woman said: “Brothers talk the African pride stuff, but when it comes to their girlfriends, if they aren’t light, bright and damn-near White ... they won’t date them at all” (Samuels and Adler, 1996, p. 68; see also Russell et al., 1992).

In any event, when all is said and done, most educated Black women, including those in this study, still believe that Black men are just insecure around Black women and would therefore not marry them. For example, in her research on “Highly Educated African American Women and Their Views on Marriage,” Andrews (1992) was told by one of her study participants that “after [she] enrolled in a doctoral program, things became progressively worse [for her marriage]” and later obtained a divorce because of the “intellectual gap, responsibility gap, and income gap between herself and her now-ex-husband” (p. 9). Similarly, an educated Black woman told *Newsweek* how tough a decision it was for her to make not to go to graduate school because “my boyfriend only finished two years of college and it bothered him that I had my [bachelor’s] degree. I could tell that graduate school would have sent him packing ... and with all the sisters out there without men, he would have landed somewhere quickly” (cited in Samuels and Adler, 1996, p. 68).

Of the six women interviewed for this study, only one is married. At the time of the interview, I could tell from the conversations we had that the rest were not yet ready for marriage. For them, the road to academic and professional achievement still lay ahead. All has not been won yet. In light of the above discussion, I cannot for

certain tell how they will do concerning marriage after the end of the road, but I'd hope things work out well for them and they find suitable mates, if they want to. One final note here: some might express concern that the Black women narratives narrowly viewed marriage within ethno/racial category and that marriage needs to be heterosexual. As much as one would like to take issue with these assumptions, that's how the students saw their relationships with Black men.

### *Discussion*

When it comes to academic achievement of Black female students, there is no doubt—as the experiences of these women in my study show—that:

Although the domains of academic achievement continue to differ by gender, once-popular stereotypes of girls as under- or nonachievers are now considered more mythical than factual. Levels of motivation to achieve among [Black] women, including intellectual achievement, continue to equal or surpass those of men (Mickelson, 1989, p. 47; see also Stockard, 1985).

And as Morrow and Torres (1995) also observe, there are still data and studies to show that there is a worldwide trend toward equalizing access to all levels of schooling for both men and women. The data is particularly impressive for Black women. For example, using data from the United States, it has been found that “about 900,000 Black women were enrolled in undergraduate and graduate programs at colleges and universities in 1994, compared with 550,000 Black men” (Gose, 1996, p. A45; see also Samuels and Adler, 1996, p. 67). As well, a report from the National Research Council in Washington, D.C. shows that Black women are earning more doctoral degrees than Black men. For instance, in 1995, only 482 Black men received doctorates compared with 805 for Black women (*Jet Magazine*, 1996b). In fact, statistics by the Population Reference Bureau (also from the United States) reveal that the number of Black men enrolled in colleges and universities in the United States in the past ten years had decreased by 5 percent and continued to fall, while for Black

women, enrollment had increased by 7 percent (Christian, 1995). Unfortunately, there is no comparable data for Canada, but after conversations with colleagues here in the province and in British Columbia and Ontario, it appears that a similar trend seems to be emerging (Codjoe, 1995, personal journal).

From my findings and what the literature and data show, women can and do achieve academically as well as men. Black women do well academically and, as the data suggests, they are more likely than Black men to obtain an education—especially higher education (Mickelson, 1989; Wilkerson, 1987). They tend not to be “socialized both in their families and in the schools into stereotypic, subordinate roles” (Suzuki, 1984, p. 303). As I have shown from the narratives of the women students in my study, educated Black women do not view their education as “as a credential for a desirable marriage or as ‘social finishing’” (Mickelson, 1989, p. 51), but rather as a measure of their “self-worth to achieve emotional security, respectability and economic independence” (Andrews, 1992, p. 6). In fact, it has been noted that there is “little evidence in the general literature ... which suggest[s] that young Black girls are encouraged to rely on marriage as a means towards economic security” (Spencer, 1995, p. 94).

In her study of Black youth in Edmonton schools, Spencer (1994) also gathered evidence to support the findings herein:

Many young [Black] women indicated a desire for a degree of independence in their future aspirations. Many highlighted that education was important, not only to get accreditation but also that this accreditation could lead to a job which would enable them to have the potential for financial independence from men should this prove necessary (p. 92).

For example, one student was cited as saying: “I come to get my education because I want to go far in life and I don’t want to depend on [any]body else to support me” (Spencer, 1995, p. 92). Similarly, studies by Mac and Ghail (1988) and Fuller (1980)

have also explored the perspective of Black female students in this regard. The comments by the young women cited above are consistent with the Black feminist literature which notes that most Black girls are now socialized to see themselves as needing to develop the skills that would enable them to be financially independent (Spencer, 1995). Michelle Wallace, a Black feminist theorist, echoes this sentiment when she recounts that: "I can't remember when I first learned that my family expected me to work, to be able to take care of myself when I grew up ... It had been drilled into me that the best and only sure support was self-support" (quoted in Spencer, 1995, p. 94).<sup>4</sup>

When we look at indigenous African cultures we also see evidence of women's empowerment and self-reliance. This is particularly true of matrilineal societies like the Asante of Ghana, Lele of Zaire and the Bundu of Sierra Leone (Dei, 1994b). Aidoo (1990) and others have discussed the powerful influence of women in traditional African society. For example, in the domestic economy, women play an important role by making decisions on the foods to produce, consume, market or exchange. This has encouraged self-reliance among women, giving them some degree of autonomy and leverage in terms of their relationship with men. As well, the presence of "secret gender societies" (e.g., the *Emaakuo* among the Akan of Ghana, the *Bondo* or *Sande* among the Mendes and Temnes of Sierra Leone and Liberia) have provided women with cultural sources of power and facilitated equal allocation of resources within their communities. Consequently, by relying on their resources and social groups, female dependence on men is lessened, serving to reduce the general male control in society through dependency relations (Dei, 1994b, p. 15; see also Boateng, 1980).

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<sup>4</sup> At the same time, other Black feminist theorists such as hooks (1992) and Collins (1990) caution us to be careful around "theorizing around essentialism," a topic discussed earlier in Chapter 2.

### 5.8 The Contribution of “Sympathetic” and “Culturally Relevant” Teachers

The discussion in Chapter 4 revealed that low teacher expectations resulting from racial bias was one of the barriers faced by some of the Black students in this study. This “racialized barrier” was identified as one of the negative experiences Black students generally face in their education in predominantly White societies. However, while some of the students spoke negatively about some teachers, a few described their experiences with some teachers as very positive and, as one said, “*really helpful*” (hmcT/95/101) and another described as “*sympathetic*” (hmcT/95/102).

Of the twelve students interviewed for the study, five described having positive experiences with teachers who helped them achieve in school. What was particularly telling for them was that, as the only one or two Black students in the school, these teachers made them feel welcome and part of the school system. And they did all they had to do to help them with school work. For example, Ekua recalls that even though

*I didn't like my high school too much ... there was oddly, ironically enough, I did have some teachers that were very encouraging, that when my parents came and talked to them they would say good things about me. My one Social teacher, he told my parents that I was 'very [much a] go-getter and very intelligent, very confident; [I] can go far.' I had an English teacher who was very [much] that way too. They were White teachers (hmcT/95/106).*

The same point was echoed by one of the students during the focus group discussions:

*I can think of one [teacher] in particular, almost the only one that treated me like she expected the same type of work from you that she expected from everybody else. I really wish I knew where she lived because she's probably in her 80's by now, but she was a really, really*



*good teacher ... A lot of what my mother would teach me, I'd go to school and it would be reinforced by her (hmcT/95/85-86).*

As well, during the individual interviews, Ama recalls her school experience with some of her teachers as: *"I usually found good rapport with the teachers so they always wanted to encourage, wanted to push you to do your best ... The teachers themselves loved what they were doing and they wanted to help you as well"* (hmcT/95/101). But she fondly remembers that "one teacher":

*When I first came to Canada, I found English really difficult and I remember [the teacher], taking that special time to help me. He just focused on helping me get over it, and do that, and just that special attention from the teacher was really helpful (hmcT/95/101).*

She also recalls the following:

*I had one teacher in grade 12 that was really good. That was the first time when I took Science ... We were doing Physiology [rest inaudible] ... She used to push me, I used to just not like this woman but I knew that she saw that potential in me [to be good at science]. When I talked to her later, she told me, I thought, push, push, push, you never know, something might come out of that. So she encouraged that push in me to do well. That's why I think, maybe a bit more sympathetic teachers like her. Now I know that there's probably not so many sympathetic teachers. There are some teachers like if you want to learn, you learn, if you don't want to learn, hey, that's up to you. I'm not going to stay here and cozy you into learning anything, it's up to you. To me that's the first thing a teacher should do. I think that grade 7 teacher that really took that time to say to me, 'If you want to learn this I will help you,' really instilled to me that there is good in some teachers. If we could get more of that, maybe a bit more realization that Canada is not just White Canadian history, but more ... It's all very nice but it's [Canada] expanding now, so they need to incorporate all the little histories that are now coming into Canada into the curriculum so that any person, not just Black people but all the different cultures can feel a bit grounded and say 'yes I am part of this community.' I think more*

*sympathetic teachers [like my grade 7 teacher] can help do this at school (hmcT/95/102).*

The latter part of Ama's narrative brings to light the idea of the "culturally relevant" teacher discussed a moment ago. The relevancy is illustrated by this recollection by Kwadjo:

*I got a lot of positivity from other teachers because of the junior high school I went to. The principal there was one of the few positive figures in the school ... When he retired I felt like this man had kind of helped me see the sunny side of what could have been a bad experience, so I sent him a card. I remember the day he called me into his office and he asked me if I'd ever heard of this [Black] gentleman. He gave me this stack of information on John Ware.<sup>5</sup> ... That kind of helped cultivate my mind with all this information [about Black history and culture] (hmcT/95/103).*

Later, he also recalls the "one English teacher in particular" who was "really pretty nice" and "nominated me for a Fine Arts award" (hmcT/95/105). And there was his drama teacher who "made me feel more like I actually could be believable" by casting him in a school play adaptation of King Solomon "with the two ladies, 'Is this your baby, is this your baby, I'm going to cut the baby in half,'" (hmcT/95/105). What was particularly significant for Kwadjo was that:

*He [his drama teacher] cast me as who would have been King Solomon and I'd already had a perception of myself as sort of relevant in that play. I could have had the same weight as a White kid who had been put in the same thing. He kind of made me feel like 'I don't care what the rest of your friends are saying or I don't care what Black kids are telling you that this is a White thing to do,' which is the same thing*

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<sup>5</sup> Famous Black cowboy in Alberta, who left his native South Carolina to escape racial hostility in the United States. He crossed the Canadian border in 1882. In Alberta, he gained respectability as a landowner and widely known rancher. The *Macleod Gazette*, for example, referred to him as "not only one of the best natured and most obliging fellows in the country, but he is one of the shrewdest cowmen" (Palmer and Palmer, 1985, p. 367). He is said to have introduced longhorn cattle into Canada and pioneered the development of the rodeo. A monument in his honour can still be seen in Calgary. His Alberta home has been declared a historic site (Thakur, 1988).

*that my mother would have said. It doesn't matter what anybody tells you as long as you know that you are doing something good, then go ahead and do it. So I would go in and do whatever I did (hmcT/95/105).*

Kweku also had an experience with a “culturally relevant” principal who “*was excellent, he looked out for the minority groups. He talked to us to know if you're doing good or whatever. When I went to high school he sat down with me and went through my [inaudible]. He helped me get into grade 12 and get credits for some of the courses*” (hmcT/95/106).

### *Discussion*

To be sure, there is now some research and evidence to show that there are indeed “successful [White] teachers of students of color” who “bring out the best” in Black students (Lipman, 1995, p. 202), and do not regard these students as “other people’s children” (Delpit, 1988, 1995). Lipman (1995) suggests that if educational reform is to benefit all students, we need to learn from the practice of these teachers, and include their experiences as part of our current discussions of school reform as well as add to the knowledge base of teacher education.

Ladson-Billings (1990, 1994, 1995b) has noted and identified these “successful teachers of students of color” as “culturally relevant,”<sup>6</sup> and maintains that they are central in “the academic success of African American and other children who have not been well-served by our nation’s public schools” (1995b, p. 159; see also Lipman, 1995; Shujaa, 1995). She argues that “the real difference” between successful and unsuccessful teachers of Black students “is that [successful teachers] are engaged in ... culturally relevant teaching”—“the kind of teaching that uses the students’ culture to help them achieve success” (Ladson-Billings, 1990b, p. 337). Culturally relevant teachers are characterized by their commitment to and belief in Black and

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<sup>6</sup> I’ll agree with this characterization of the teachers described by the students in their narratives.

minority students, building upon the students' cultural and experiential strengths to help them acquire new knowledge (Lipman, 1995). They demonstrate what Foster (cited in Lipman, 1995) has called "connectedness" (p. 203). These teachers pride themselves in supportive approaches to teaching and learning, and their "goal is to create a learning environment to help make all students successful regardless of ethno-cultural and/or socio-economic background" (Bowers, 1995, p. A17). Central to their kind of teaching is to allow Black students to 'choose' academic excellence without losing a sense of personal and cultural identity. They also support students' positive identification with Black culture and regularly use methods that draw upon the students' African cultural roots to help them succeed (Ladson-Billings and Henry, 1990). According to Irvine (1990), "when teachers and Black students are in tune culturally, it can be expected that communication is enhanced, instruction is effective, and positive teacher effect is maximized" (p. xx).

In sum, "culturally relevant teaching" is a pedagogy that is empowering in that it allows teachers to help Black students gain "intellectually, socially, emotionally, and politically by using cultural referents to impart knowledge, skills, and attitudes" (Ladson-Billings, 1994, pp. 17-18). It rests on three criteria or propositions: (a) students must experience academic success; (b) students must develop and/or maintain cultural competence; and (c) students must develop a critical consciousness through which they challenge the status quo of the current social order (Ladson-Billings, 1995b, p. 160). Banks and Banks (1995) have recently contributed to the debate by employing the term "equity pedagogy" to describe the same phenomenon. Equity pedagogy is defined here as "teaching strategies and classroom environments that help students from diverse racial, ethnic, and cultural groups attain the knowledge, skills, and attitudes needed to function effectively within, and help create and perpetuate, a just, humane, and democratic society" (Banks and Banks, 1995, p. 152). Equity pedagogy "may not always mean treating different groups the same; it

may sometimes be necessary to treat groups differently in order to create equal-status situations for marginalized students” (Banks and Banks, 1995, p. 156).

It has been observed that while our teaching population is almost exclusively White, the public school student population in North America is increasingly students of color. And rather than seeing and treating these students as “our own children—children we can love and learn with and from—their differences in race, language, culture, family structure, class, and ability have produced what novelist Toni Morrison calls a ‘symbolic other’—a negative representation by which to measure ourselves” (Ladson-Billings, 1995a, p. 150). One explanation for this is the argument that teachers often fail to make adjustments in their approaches to literacy for culturally and linguistically diverse students because “the majority of [teachers] are members of the dominant culture, implementing programs designed primarily for mainstream students. Teachers implementing these programs tend to treat students of color as exceptions to the norm, as students who should be assimilated into the dominant group, rather than accommodated according to their own needs” (cited in Willis, 1995, p. 43).

But I believe that we now must move beyond this as we now know that cultural differences between teacher and student can account for the low school achievement of Black and minority students (Erickson, 1987). Feeling ‘safe’ in school now, as one teacher noted, includes the students knowing that the teacher understands and respects their experience, background and cultural practices. In fact, I believe teachers could benefit from knowing more about their minority students’ families and experiences. And students from groups with negative academic stereotypes, like Black students, learn best when teachers help them believe they can. According to Claude Steele, Black students “must be brought to a secure conviction that, despite broadly known stereotypes about their groups, their potential to learn is not seen as limiting. Teachers should raise students’ expectations of themselves by affirming

their ability from the outset, rather than treating ability as something that is yet to be proven and, thus, in doubt" (*Report on Education Research*, December 6, 1995, p. 3). Cashmore (1982) thus urges teachers to raise their expectations of Black students in intellectual spheres and lower them in relation to "natural sports ability" (p. 210).

In her research of "successful teachers of students of color," Ladson-Billings (1994) critically examines eight effective teachers and analyzes what they do that works for minority students. The eight, nominated by principals and parents, are all women; three are White, the others Black. All eight, Ladson-Billings (1994) observed, nurture academic success and positive cultural identification among their students. They provide evidence to what she calls "culturally relevant teaching"—a pedagogy that "empowers students intellectually, socially, emotionally, and politically by using cultural referents to impart knowledge, skills, and attitudes" (pp. 17-18). And by their actions, these teachers "modeled an actively critical stance against racial injustice. In these ways, their teaching was liberatory—a pedagogy of empowerment" (Lipman, 1995, p. 206). I'll agree with Ladson-Billings and others that knowledge of exemplary teachers of Black students provided by research need to be incorporated into teacher education development so that others can learn from them. And to repeat a point made earlier, if schools are to value Black and other racial minority students and support their academic success and cultural integrity, education reformers cannot ignore the knowledge of successful teachers of students of colour. As Lipman (1995) notes, "these teachers can play an important role as exemplars and coaches or mentors. These teachers are a crucial bridge between current realities and more empowering educational experiences for students of color" (p. 207).

### **5.9 Positive Peer Relationships/Friendships**

The final factor that the students mentioned as having a positive impact on their academic achievement was the effect of having peers and friends who shared their high-achievement outlook. Most of the students said they chose or made friends

who were also high-achievers because, as one put it, *“it helps you when you gravitate toward people who are successful and going towards success”* (hmcT/95/67). For example, when earlier in her secondary school years, she *“saw for [her]self where they [student friends of hers not interested in achieving] were going”* (hmcT/95/107), Ama said she *“lost contact”* with these students and sought friends who *“were all high achievers and all wanted to move towards [academic success]”* (hmcT/95/107). One interesting finding that showed up in Ama’s narratives and in the other students as well was that, when it came to how friendships and peer relationships might affect their schoolwork, they were indiscriminating in their choice of friends. So, for Ama, when she found out that some potential Black friends might sabotage her academic credentials, she avoided them and made friends with like-minded students including *“a White girl,”* and she *“usually hung around a Chinese group ... and a couple of Indian [southeast Asian] students”* (hmcT/95/107). She didn’t really care that the Black students called her *“an Oreo cookie”* for making friends with non-Black students. She was to discover later that *“my thoughts [on these students] did come true”* (hmcT/95/107). They joined the unenviable statistics of Black student failures. For the same reason, Kwadjo also related that because of his *“academic and extracurricular activities, I made friends with people who I was around during those activities and a lot of them happened to be White”* (hmcT/95/109).<sup>7</sup>

Like Ama, Kwabena also lost some friends along the way because:

*I find that if you have friends who have different goals as you, not concerned [about education], same direction you’re heading, then I think they’ll have a big burden on your education as a whole because you want to do this and they want to do that, and you’re always making decisions whether to do this or that. Your mind should just be set doing what you have to do instead of going along what some friends will want*

<sup>7</sup> On this, I read an interesting research finding which showed that, “for African-American college students the number of White friends they have is positively correlated with their grades. In fact, in a Maryland study, the number of White friends was a better predictor of Black students’ grades than any skill measure” (C. Steele, 1995, p. 19).

*you to do, and may not be right as far as education is concerned* (hmcT/95/107-108).

So “*going through school*,” when it came to making friends, Kwesi, for example, made friends who “*were positive people who shared similar interests in things like science fiction and academics, that sort of thing*” (hmcT/95/109). Similarly, for Kwame who “*didn’t have too many friends*” (because “*if you have too many friends in school it causes problems because you spend more time hanging out with your friends than you do going to school*”), he chose to “*surround myself with*” were those friends who provided “*strong social and academic support*” (hmcT/95/109). Ekoa, too, “*wanted friends but I wanted specific types of friends. I wanted down-to-earth people for my friends and people who had some kind of goal and have school as a focus ... Those were the type of friends I have*” (hmcT/95/110). Akosua echoes similar sentiments when she told me:

*I certainly tried to be with people who had goals and who aren’t going to put you down every time you did well on a test. That was one thing that I faced when I was younger because if I ran a race it was because, ‘Oh well, you know Black people are faster.’ Just like everybody else, so I think the friends that encourage you and help you to do your best and you can do the same for them, I think those that you feed off each other* (hmcT/95/86).

And for Kweku, “*I didn’t hang out with the bad crowd, from day one*” (hmcT/95/110).

Indeed, research shows that peer relationships are an important part of the social context of the classroom and that students learn from their peers, as they are actively engaged in interactions with other students (Banks and Banks, 1995). In fact, according to Banks and Banks (1995), “the academic self-concept of students is highly related to their general self-concept, their ability to perform academic work, and their ability to function competently among peers” (p. 155). The research also



shows that the peer group with whom adolescents spend much of their time has the most influence. Undoubtedly, notes Orange (1995), "peers have the potential to affect academic achievement" (p. 2). It is thus clear from the above discussion that positive peer relationships play a factor in the school success of students. Ogbu and Fordham (1986) and Fordham (1996) have shown from their research that peers can become enemies of achievement, especially among Black youth when their influence negatively affects academic performance. Peer groups often form their own communities, or "countercultures" that may unintentionally sabotage students by undermining their academic efforts. As examples from my findings and others point out, peers can become obstacles to each other's achievement by ridiculing or threatening students who are trying to achieve. Many minority students, especially young males, feel it's not "cool" to do homework and make good grades. The problem intensifies when peers define academic achievement as selling out to "White" values or "becoming White" (Orange, 1995).<sup>8</sup> It is promising and heartening to know that there are Black students, like the ones in this study, who do not fall prey to such "oppositional culture."

#### **5.10 Summary and Conclusions: Toward a Theory of Black Student School Achievement**

The narratives and results of the findings here represent the responses of one group of Black students and by no means represent a homogeneous response to schooling. As Gibson and Ogbu (1991) have pointed out, there is intra-group variability in responses to schooling within each minority group. Blacks are no exception. What this research has attempted to do is investigate Black students who have taken the paths that Gibson (1991) calls "accommodation without assimilation."

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<sup>8</sup> Ogbu (in Foreword to Solomon, 1992) relates the case of a group of college women who arrived at the college with high aspirations for school success and high hopes for professional careers. However, while in school they "constructed a peer culture" in which the preoccupation was securing male companionship. It was to this end that the women invested their time and effort, and in doing so "derailed" their academic and professional pursuits (p. ix).

This endeavour has provided some support and adds to the literature which attempts to explain academic achievement among Black students. What has been accomplished is a reconceptualization of successful Black student experiences based on students' articulation of their lived experiences and how their behaviours reflect on their school and academic success. In spite of what might seem overwhelming odds and racialized barriers (as discussed in Chapter 4), these students were upbeat and demonstrated—in their actions and positive outlook—an indomitable resilience and a steely determination to succeed. I concur with Nieto (1994) that:

In the final analysis, [these] students are asking us to look critically not only at structural conditions, but also at individual attitudes and behaviours. This implies that we need to undertake a total transformation not only of our schools, but also of our hearts and minds (p. 424).

It is what Ogbu (1978) has termed “cultural ecological” in trying to argue for the need for a *multilevel analysis* in “schooling” deprived and minority students. His critical point is that there is the “concomitant neglect of border community forces with important implications for schooling. The result is that the ethnography of schooling to date provides almost no basis for an overall conception of schooling, especially schooling in the context of social, economic and political realities” (p. 3).

From the narratives of the students, eight factors emerge which I believe to be significant in contributing to the academic success of Black students. A summary of these factors appears in Table 2. I believe they constitute a “first level” theory of Black student academic achievement based on the articulation and experiences of a group of African Canadian students.

**Table 2**

**FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO THE ACADEMIC  
SUCCESS OF BLACK STUDENTS**

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1. ***The support and encouragement provided by parents is very significant in the academic achievement of Black students.*** Black parents play a critical role by:
  - affirming the importance and the relationship of education to the academic, social, political and economic success of Africans in Canadian society
  - filling the void and counteracting the negative influences their children suffer in school and society because of their race
  - creating learning environments and providing educational resources at home to give students the foundation and support to learn and be successful
  - setting high expectations for their children's success and letting them know about it
  - monitoring child's school activities and getting involved with child's school
  - providing emotional support to child to cope with adverse situations
  - helping child develop his/her self-confidence and self-concept by instilling pride in Black culture and history, assisting with school work at home, and encouraging the love of reading.
  
2. ***Positive role models and mentors in school and society is a powerful factor in Black student achievement.*** Because of the lack of or absence of role models, Black students need role models to:
  - help build confidence and make Black students realize can also achieve in many intellectual fields other than sports and entertainment
  - motivate and serve to influence Black students own expectations about school success
  - counter racism among non-Black students and show Black achievement in many areas
  - make up for the lack of representation of Black role models in schools (e.g., teachers)
  - 'deconstruct' identities around sports and entertainment figures.

Among those who have served as role models for Black youth, the following are noted by the students in this study: parents, Malcolm X, Marcus Garvey, Bob Marley, Angela Davis, Langston Hughes, Muhammad Ali, Spike Lee, Hugh B. Newton, Paul Robeson, Albert Schweitzer, Louis Armstrong, Marian Anderson, Claude McKay.

Table 2 (cont'd)

**3. A secured, clarified and developed self-identity and pride in African cultural/racial identity positively affects academic success among Black students by:**

- serving as an important buffer against racism and devaluation of African peoples
- providing students with requisite coping skills
- affirming that Black students don't need to "act White" in order to succeed academically
- providing the appropriate cultural foundation for learning via an African-centred learning environment.

Black students affirm their culture, heritage and identity by:

- an awareness of and pride as African Canadians
- a demonstrated depth of knowledge about Black and African history, politics, literature, arts and culture
- seeking an Afrocentric education
- participating in Black organizations and community activities
- speaking primary languages at home.

**4. Black students foster their academic achievement by taking increasing ownership and personal initiative and responsibility for their own learning.** Some noted characteristics include:

- setting educational goal
- developing sense of purpose
- seeking information and learning on own initiative curricular programs (e.g., Black studies) not provided by schools.

Perseverance and consistent efforts increase confidence and strengthen abilities as they come to believe in themselves and their capability to achieve.

**5. Participation in extracurricular and community activities play an important role in Black student school success.** Operating as "protective mechanisms" or "survival strategies," extracurricular activities help Black students achieve by:

- creating a sense of well-being and accomplishment
- learning how to balance time and focus on tasks
- reducing negative outcomes
- teaching important leadership and communicational skills
- helping to release "tension" living in White society
- developing coping skills
- maintaining self-esteem as a result of successful accomplishment of extracurricular tasks important to the individual. Extra-curricular activities mentioned in this regard include: sports (gymnastics, volleyball, basketball, track and field, field hockey, soccer); other (French lessons, piano, ballet, music, choir, summer camps with children, tutoring, drama, student committees, dance groups).

**Table 2 (cont'd)**

6. ***The “double whammy” of race and gender greatly motivates Black female students to succeed in school.*** Black female students seek education to:
    - be emotionally and financially independent (of men)
    - fight the stereotype of the Black woman as a “welfare bum” or “whore”
    - develop skills that would enable them to be independent
    - serve as role models for other Black women.
  
  7. ***(White) teachers who “bring out the best” in Black students and provide “cultural relevant” teaching are central to the academic success of Black students.*** Such teachers are:
    - “sympathetic” to the needs of Black students
    - do not regard Black students as “other people’s children”
    - uses students’ culture to help them achieve success
    - have high expectations of Black students
    - build on students’ cultural and experiential strengths.
  
  8. ***Having peers and friends that share similar academic and extracurricular pursuits. Positive peer relationships mean having indiscriminating friends that:***
    - value academic success
    - have similar educational goals
    - share similar academic/extra-curricula interests
    - provide “strong social and academic support”
-

**PART THREE:  
PROMOTING THE ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT OF BLACK/AFRICAN  
CANADIAN STUDENTS IN ALBERTA**

**CHAPTER 6.   IMPLICATIONS FOR EDUCATIONAL POLICY AND  
PRACTICE**

*Demographic projections indicate that ... racial minority students will increasingly dominate public schools well into the 21st century. This "new majority" demands that schools seriously assess and revise their policies, programs, and procedures to respond more effectively to its unique needs, to improve the quality of this student population's school experiences, and to enhance its academic achievement. The challenge, one of both equity and excellence, is to provide all students with an equal opportunity to learn to the highest possible level of their ability, regardless of where they live, their family structure, gender, economic background, ethnic identity, or home-based cultural orientation.*

*Geneva Gay*

Designing Relevant Curricula for Diverse Learners

*If education can be no more than an epiphenomenon tied directly to the requirements of an economy, then little can be done within education itself. It is totally determined institution. However, if schools (and people) are not passive mirrors of an economy, but instead are active agents in the processes of reproduction and contestation of dominant social relations, then understanding what they do and acting upon them becomes of no small moment. For if schools are part of a "contested terrain," ... then the hard and continuous day-to-day struggle at the level of curriculum and teaching practice is part of these larger conflicts as well. The key is linking these day-to-day struggles within the school to other action for a more progressive society in that wider arena.*

*Michael Apple and Lois Weiss*  
Ideology and Practice in Schooling

*Our belief is that children of African heritage can learn and achieve excellence in all academic areas where appropriate attitudes, support, and educational programs are established.*

*Black Educators' Working Group*  
Report of the Royal Commission on Learning

## **6.1 Introduction**

In this chapter, I examine the implications of the findings of the student narratives for educational policy and practice. As an educator, I believe we can do more to improve education for minority students. As the above epigram by Gay (1988) suggests, the challenges of educating the youth for the future in a multicultural society like Canada are likely to overwhelm the schools. Indeed, changing demographics tell us that the student composition in our schools will be markedly different from what we've previously known. Based on comprehensive analyses of recent demographic trends in Canada, a Statistics Canada report shows that the visible minority population will continue to be younger and grow more rapidly (although at a declining rate) than the national population. The report projects that from an estimated total of 2.5 million in 1991, including temporary foreign residents, the visible minority population in Canada is projected to increase to somewhere between 7.7 and 8.2 million by 2016. Ontario, Quebec, British Columbia, and Alberta will continue to receive the bulk of the visible minority populations. Under a medium growth scenario, the Chinese would continue to be the largest visible minority, followed by Blacks, Indo-Pakistani, West Asians and Arabs (Statistics Canada, 1993, pp. i-ii; also see Kilgour, 1994, p. 6). Putting this in some educational perspective, Giroux (1994) notes consequentially that:

Within the next century, educators will not be able to ignore the hard questions that schools will have to face regarding issues of multiculturalism, race, identity, power, knowledge, ethics, and work. These issues will play a major role in defining the meaning and purpose of schooling, the relationship between teachers and students, and the

critical content of their exchange in terms of how to live in a world that will be vastly more globalized, high tech, and racially diverse than any other time in history (p. 280).

Educating students today and in the future will therefore be a far different and more complex proposition than it has been in the past (Nieto, 1994).

I would advance the argument that as educators, parents, school administrators and policy makers, we “must respond to these challenges by not simply preparing students to take advantage of available opportunities; we must be able to articulate a new vision of education in our society” (Dei, 1993a, p. 61). Here, I believe that educational change is a collective process involving both those within and external to the system. It requires collaboration and partnership involving many diverse and multiple constituencies such as administrators, trustees, principals, teachers, parents, students and policymakers. As student diversity has and continues to increase in our schools, it has become obvious that educating such a heterogeneous population can be more effectively accomplished through a sense of shared responsibility and collaboration. So for instance, one can argue that “the academic achievement of Black adolescents depends not only on their individual attributes (i.e., intellectual abilities, aspirations, achievement motivation, and personal and social identity) but also on the social environment of the school and their available support networks” (Clark, 1991, p. 41).

By articulating a new vision of education in our society, I am speaking more about *transformation* rather than simply about reform. It is what Toh (1993) has described as a “transformative paradigm”—a frame of reference or a vision of education that, for example, “empowers learners not only to critically understand the world’s realities in a holistic framework, but also to move learners and teachers to act towards a more peaceful, just and liberating world” (Toh, 1993, p. 11). Relating to some of the issues I have discussed in previous chapters, the transformative paradigm



also relates to, for example, Bank's (1993) idea of "transformative academic knowledge," which consists of "concepts, paradigms, themes and explanations that challenge mainstream academic knowledge and that expand the historical and literary canon. [It] challenges some of the key assumptions that mainstream scholars make about the nature of knowledge" (p. 9).

Because of the theme of this dissertation, the transformative paradigm employed here speaks to a number of specific issues regarding improving educational chances and success for students of African descent. Critical in this regard is the following observation advanced by Dei (1994b):

There is an urgent need for a critical analysis of the institutional power structures within which learning, teaching, and administration of education take place in the schools and how these structures function to marginalize, exclude, and alienate Black youths. The current processes of schooling undermine Black students' subjectivities and their lived experiences whether as poor, middle class, male, female, single parent immigrant, or Canadian born. For many students the marginalization and the delegitimation of their individual and collective experiences all contribute to their low self-worth and self-esteem. This in turn adds to their frustrations and alienation from many societal institutions and, consequently, the tendency to rebel through oppositional behaviours like 'dropping out' (pp. 18-19; see also Clark, 1993; Cummins, 1994; Delpit, 1995; Watkins, 1993).

As I have partly shown in previous chapters, North American educational institutions have long been criticized for continued insensitivity to minority students' needs and aspirations. The student narratives and supporting research have documented how some visible minority pupils do poorly because of racial stereotyping, low teacher expectations, alienating curricula and textbooks, and lack of positive role models at the staffing level. Of course, these cannot be understood outside the context of a critical examination of the institutional power structures within which learning, teaching, and administration of education take place. This is

why a transformative educational paradigm necessitates an examination of how the institutional processes of schooling help generate some of the social problems and requires a framework for finding solutions to address the problems (Samuda et al., 1984; Walcott and Dei, 1993). In this regard, the transformative approach proposes that “virtually every facet of [Canada’s] education system needs to be examined critically, if it is to be made more responsive to the needs of those who fall outside the mainstream. Teacher training and recruitment, curriculum revision, employment equity, anti-racism education: all these must be the subject of closest scrutiny” (*Towards a New Beginning*, 1992, p. 82). Echoing the same point, the *Report of the Royal Commission on Learning* (1994) notes that, “in serving the needs of students from ethno-cultural and racial minorities, there must be significant changes in curriculum, initial teacher education, and ongoing professional development. The school system has a responsibility to identify barriers to success and, where it can, take action to remove those barriers” (p. 90). So for example, “issues of the eurocentric nature of the schools’ curricula, pedagogical practices that systematically exclude alternative viewpoints, and the resulting forced cultural amnesia that marginalized students have historically experienced should all constitute part of any [transformative] discourse on schools” (Walcott and Dei, 1993, p. 12).

Indeed, there is general agreement among scholars and researchers that, if multicultural and anti-racist education is to be implemented successfully, institutional changes must be made, including changes in the curriculum; the teaching materials; teaching and learning styles; the attitudes, perceptions, and behaviours of teachers and administrators; and the goals, norms, and culture of schools (see Banks, 1992; Sleeter and Grant, 1988). On an applied or policy level, I have identified—from the findings of this research—four areas in which I believe educators can take specific actions to encourage and promote academic achievement among students from minority populations.

## 6.2 Listening to the Voices of Racial/Ethnic Minority Students

*For the most part, discussions about developing strategies to solve educational problems lack the perspectives of one of the very groups they most affect - students, especially those students who are categorized as 'problems' and are most oppressed by traditional educational structures and procedures.*

*Sonia Nieto*

Lessons from Students on Creating a Chance to Dream

*The narratives of Black/African-Canadian youths show how the dynamics of social difference shape and implicate the processes and experiences of public schooling. On both analytical and practical levels, students' accounts bring to the fore the dilemma of searching for an appropriate centrality of the experiences, histories, and cultures of the diverse student body in curriculum and classroom pedagogical practices, to facilitate youth learning.*

*George Dei*

Black/African-Canadian Students' Perspectives on School Racism

Fine (1989) suggests that our school system often silences minority students through the structure of schooling: the curriculum, instruction, decision making, policies. However, I share Nieto's (1994) belief that a new vision of education cannot take place without the inclusion of the voices of students in the dialogue. To reflect critically on school reform, students need to be included in the dialogue. All too often, students are treated as a captive audience and, as captives, not given recognition that they may have a perspective on their social situation. Indeed, students' voices have been least highlighted in the discourse on public schooling in Canada. For example, student perspectives are, for the most part, missing in discussions concerning strategies for confronting educational problems. As well, the voices of students are rarely heard in the debates about school failure and success, and the perspectives of students from minority and dominated communities are even more invisible (Dei, 1995a; Nieto, 1994). That's why, following Dei (1995a) and Spencer (1995), I

believe the most significant aspect of this research has been the focus on Black students' narratives of their school experiences, especially relating to school success.

From this research experience, I share the belief that one way to begin the process of changing school policies and practices is to listen to students' views about them. On this point, if schools must provide an equal and quality education for all, educators can benefit greatly from hearing students' critical perspectives on schooling, which might cause them to modify or change how they approach curriculum, pedagogy, and other school practices. For example, Ghosh (1995) points out that "schools promote specific notions of knowledge and power by rewarding specific forms of behaviour. But if truth is based on different ways of knowing, then student experiences—their historical, social, cultural conditions—must be viewed as primary sources of knowledge so that they can be involved actively in the educational process" (p. 234). This raises the issue of *representation* (a point I shall address in the next section on curricular reform), a point noted by Roman et al. (1988) when they write that, all too often, "legitimate" knowledge does not include the historical experiences and cultural expressions of labour, people of colour, and others who have been less powerful. Thus, for example, in the view of Pinar (1993), the absence of Black knowledge in many school curricula is not a simple oversight; its absence represents an academic instance of racism, or what he describes as "willful ignorance and aggression toward Blacks" (p. 62).

Central to this discussion is the point made by Darder (1991) that the critical issue is the "notion of student voice and empowerment and the conditions required for bicultural students to develop their *bicultural voice* and experience a process of empowerment in the classroom." According to Darder, "in more specific terms, there must exist a democratic environment where the lived cultures of bicultural students are critically integrated into the pedagogical process" (p. 47). Wood (1988) suggests one practical or applied level at which this student voice and empowerment can take place

in the school system. In what he calls “a curriculum for democratic empowerment,” he proposes that schools must:

- develop a student’s stock of cultural capital—that is, an awareness that an individual possesses knowledge about his or her own history, and this knowledge makes acting as autonomous human beings possible. What this means for a democratic curriculum is the use of students’ own histories as the focus of historical inquiry;
- actively engage students in decision making—when students participate in decisions that directly affect them, they both develop the confidence that such action is possible as well as the desire to participate in even broader public debates;
- structure the curriculum so as to embrace the values of democratic life. These include the essential values of equality, liberty, and community (pp. 178-182).

And how does this promote the academic achievement of Black and minority students? According to Cummins (1986), by listening to students through this process they are empowered, and “students who are empowered by their school experiences develop the ability, confidence, and motivation to succeed academically. They participate competently in instruction as a result of having developed a confident cultural identity as well as appropriate school-based knowledge and interactional structures. Thus, student empowerment is regarded as both a mediating construct influencing academic performance and as an outcome variable in itself” (p. 23). This aspect of “listening” to students should be linked with processes of critical empowerment that includes enhancing capacity of students to process responses which can be negative or hegemonic. One way to do this, I’ll suggest, is by Giroux (1990) and Estrada and Kelly’s (1993) framework of “a critical and liberatory pedagogy.” Some of the most important aspects include:

- Legitimize multiple (and often competing) traditions of knowledge.
- Invite teachers to interrogate the discursive presuppositions that inform their curriculum practices with respect to race, class, gender, and sexual orientation.

- **Help students recognize that groups are differentially situated in the production of Western high-status knowledge and encourage them to raise questions about who is represented in the official knowledge that makes up the curriculum.**
- **Invite teachers and students to affirm the voices of the oppressed. Students should be encouraged to produce their own alternative and oppositional readings of curriculum content.**
- **Encourage teachers to recognize the importance of creating spaces for the multiplicity of voices in their classrooms and building a dialogical pedagogy in which subjects see others as subjects and not as objects.**
- **Education must be understood as producing not only knowledge but also political subjects. Rather than rejecting the language of politics, critical pedagogy must link public education to the imperatives of a critical pedagogy.**
- **Ethics must be seen as a central concern of critical pedagogy. This suggests that educators attempt to understand more fully how different discourses offer students diverse ethical referents for structuring their relationship to the wider society.**
- **Critical pedagogy needs a language that allows for competing solidarities and political vocabularies that do not reduce the issues of power, justice, struggle, and inequality to a single script, a master narrative that suppresses the contingent, historical, and the everyday as a serious object of study. This suggests that curriculum knowledge not be treated as sacred text but developed as part of an ongoing engagement with a variety of narratives and traditions that can be re-read and re-formulated in politically different terms.**
- **Critical pedagogy needs to create new forms of knowledge through its emphasis on breaking down disciplinary boundaries and creating new spaces where knowledge can be produced.**
- **Critical pedagogy needs to regain a sense of alternatives by combining a language of critique and possibility (Giroux, 1990, pp. 47-54; Estrada and Kelly, 1993, p. 32).**

### 6.3 Curricular Reform

*[North] American society is multicultural, multiethnic, and multi-racial, yet the symbol system and the education system are essentially monocultural and monoracial. When most people complete their K-12 education ... , they have no systematic view or understanding of Africa or of African people. They might know about isolated events or personalities, but that information is probably marginal and not considered part of the main body of knowledge.*

*Molefi Kete Asante*  
Learning About Africa

It has been demonstrated through the student narratives and other research that cultural domination is a fact of life for Black and minority students in our school systems. Meier et al. (1989), Boateng (1990) and others have drawn our attention to the fact that the persistent racial inequalities in school achievement have elevated culture as a terrain of racial debate in North American public schools. Indeed, “the continuous deculturalization of the [Black] child and the neglect of [Black] cultural values in the curriculum” has been identified as one of the most injurious factors that explain the comparatively poor performance of Black children in the public school system. Deculturalization, in this sense, “is a process by which the individual is deprived of his or her culture and then conditioned to other cultural values ... It is important to note that deculturalization does not mean a loss of a group’s culture, but rather failure to acknowledge the existence of their culture and the role it plays in their behaviour” (Boateng, 1990, p. 73). Some of the findings of this research has supported this contention and has argued that that the continued marginality of Black students within the school system can be partly attributed to the lack of identification and connectedness to the education system.

Because schools have failed to respond to the direct needs of Black students by incorporating African people’s history and experiences into the existing

curriculum, I support the move by Black parents, students and educators to incorporate an Africa-centred perspective/approach in the processes of learning, teaching, and administration of education of Black youths in the Alberta and Canadian public school systems. Black students must see themselves represented in all aspects of the school system. In fact, making Black culture empowering in schools now appears to be an indispensable part of any large-scale program of Black political and socio-economic advancement. This is part of a growing effort by minority students to challenge educators to be more *inclusive* in their pedagogies and other educational practices (Logan, 1990; Walcott and Dei, 1993). Giroux (1990) adds:

We live at a time in which a strong challenge is being waged against modernist discourse in which knowledge is legitimized almost exclusively from a European model of culture and civilization. In part, the struggle for democracy can be seen in the context of a broader struggle against certain features of modernism that represent the worst legacies of the Enlightenment tradition. And it is against these features that a variety of oppositional movements have emerged in an attempt to rewrite the relationship between modernism and democracy (p. 2).

The notion of inclusion is important here because it addresses “the question of *representation*; that is, having a multiplicity of perspectives entrenched as part of the academic discourse, knowledge and texts” (Dei, 1996, p. 78). It also means “bringing [Black] students from the margins to the centre; after all, one can be included and yet still be marginalized” (Dei, 1995a, p. 194). This speaks to Nieto’s (1994) caution that “adding curricula requirements may do little to change student outcomes unless these changes are part and parcel of a more comprehensive conceptualization of school reform” (p. 395).

I and the students in this study join the growing numbers of parents and educators in urban school districts who are supporting requirements that schools include or emphasize the contributions of Blacks and other minorities in a wide range of subjects in the school curriculum. We see it as looking for new ways to improve



the education of Black students and as a way to reverse the inferiorization of Black youths by the historically Euro-centred school system. We see the curriculum as the main avenue for disseminating knowledge about Black culture and achievement, to Black and non-Black students alike. It opens up ways to re-articulate the needs of African Canadian students and to reconceptualize educational theory and practice, including “equip[ping] the Black student with the requisite cultural capital to refine his or her self-worth” (Walcott and Dei, 1993, p. 14). As previously stated, I subscribe to the view that an Afrocentric pedagogy within a multicultural/anti-racist discourse offers an alternative paradigm for the education of Black youth. As Apple (1993) observes, only by centering the African experience(s) as the core of the curriculum can Black students sustain themselves and their culture and history. Dei (1996) further explains:

The Afrocentric discourse is about a paradigm shift; it means teaching about an alternative way of knowing, informed by the histories and cultural experiences of all peoples of African descent. As a pedagogic and communicative tool, African-centred education calls on educators within Euro-Canadian/American school systems to centre their analysis and investigations of African and Black issues in a perspective grounded in African ways of knowing. The challenge is to ‘move’ or ‘bring’ all peoples of African descent from the margins to the centre of post-modern history. For the educator, the challenge is to allow the African child to see and interpret the world with his or her own eyes, rather than with those of the ‘other’ (p. 92).

In advocating for an Afrocentric pedagogy, I and those who subscribe to it are not attempting to replace one form of hegemonic worldview with another. It is not meant to be *exclusionary*, but rather a means to incorporate “an African-centred knowledge into the mainstream curriculum as part of an effort to achieve inclusive schooling [for] *all* students—not just Black students” (Dei, 1996, p. 93). For example, schools can concentrate in their curricula the history of African peoples in African and the

Diaspora along with having it integrated into general history. I believe both can prevail without any conflict or contradiction.

Proponents of infusing African themes into the general school curriculum make their argument on some well-founded assumptions—assumptions which point to areas in which the prevailing curriculum has fallen short. Hilliard et al. (1990) point to six areas:

1. The significant history of Africa before the slave trade is ignored.
2. A history of peoples of Africa is most often ignored.
3. A history of the people of the African Diaspora—for example, Fiji, the Philippines, and Dravidian India—is not taught.
4. Cultural differences, as opposed to similarities of Africans in the Diaspora, are highlighted.
5. Little of the struggle against slavery, colonialism, segregation, apartheid, and domination is taught.
6. Little explanation of the common origins and elements in the system of oppression during the last four hundred years is offered.

The Organization of Parents of Black Children in Toronto expressed similar sentiments when they noted the following concerns about the curriculum in Canadian schools:

- the persistent ‘invisibility’ of Black studies and Black history;
- the present ignorance of teachers about Black culture and the history of Blacks in Canada; and
- the assumption that Black people are not part of the fabric of Canadian society.

Furthermore, proponents of an Afrocentric pedagogy believe that an African-centred curriculum will play an important role in helping White students, teachers, administrators and the public unlearn many of the stereotypes about Africa and people of African descent. It also will show that Black and African peoples are a

diverse group with multiple and varying social identities that have to be recognized and appreciated in the curriculum. But perhaps most important of all, it will help eliminate the reliance on negative pathological labels; e.g., “permanent underclass,” “at-risk,” “culturally deprived,” “cultural deficit,” “difficult to educate,” and “disadvantaged” that have formed the theoretical rationale for educational policy and decision making when it comes to Black students (Apple 1993; Asante, 1987; Dei, 1996; Van Sertima, 1990; Watkins, 1993).

I share Banks' (1991) view—and this is consistent with the theoretical framework adopted for this study—that we approach a curricular reform that makes an Afrocentric pedagogy an integral part of that reform, within a multicultural education framework. Multicultural education developed out of the struggles of the 1960s and early 1970s, receiving a major boost from the rejection of racial minority groups to racial oppression; it subsequently was joined to some extent by feminist groups rejecting sexual oppression. More recently, multicultural education emerged, as women, people with disabilities, and members of other groups on the margins of society echoed Black demands for inclusion, justice, fair depiction in textbooks, university-level studies of their particular group, and curriculum reform and transformation. It was grounded in a vision of equality and served as a mobilizing site for struggle within education. Proponents of multicultural education emphasize the effects that traditional ethnocentric schooling have had on minority children. Emphasizing Anglo-Canadian/American conformity and middle-class culture, schools have expected minority children to internalize the values, behaviour and culture of the majority. Such emphasis has resulted in minority children learning to reject their own cultures, history, and values (Banks, 1993; Banks and McGee-Banks, 1991; McCarthy, 1993; Roman, 1993; Sleeter 1989; Sleeter and Grant, 1987). As a result, Sleeter (1989) makes a strong case for multicultural education for all—but particularly for Black cultural assertion. She writes, for example, that “multicultural education ... has a longer history and a more varied body of thought than the field has in any other

English-speaking countries, and race (as opposed to White ethnicity) has long been at its core" (p. 54). Thus, multicultural education has long been a part of Black efforts toward collective identity and group empowerment. As Sleeter (1991) puts it, "empowerment and multicultural education are interwoven, and together suggest powerful and far-reaching school reform" (p. 2).

McCarthy (1993) identifies three types of multicultural discourses on racial inequality as embodied in the various school curriculum reforms, as well as in the articulated theories of some multicultural advocates. First, there are those proponents who articulate discourses of "cultural understanding." According to McCarthy, "the fundamental stance of this approach to ethnic differences is cultural relativism ... . Within this framework, all social groups are presumed to have a formal parity with each other. The matter of ethnic identity is understood in terms of individual choice and preference" (p. 291). A second emphasis in the multicultural field is that of "cultural competence." Underpinning this approach to education is "a fundamental assumption that values of cultural pluralism should have a central place in the curriculum ... Educators who promote the idea of a cultural competence approach to curriculum reform argue for various forms of bilingual and ethnic studies programs based on pluralist values that would help to 'build bridges' between America's different ethnic groups" (pp. 291-292). Third, models of "cultural emancipation" go further than the previous two approaches in suggesting that "a reformist multicultural curriculum can boost the [academic] success and economic futures of minority youth." According to this model, "a reform-oriented curriculum that includes knowledge about minority history and cultural achievements would reduce the dissonance and alienation from academic success that centrally characterize minority experiences in schooling" (p. 292). Thus, multicultural educators who promote the idea of cultural emancipation hold a great deal of faith in the redemptive qualities of the educational system and its capacities to influence positive changes in the job market and in society.

Coming back to curricular reform, Banks (1991) has identified four major approaches to transform the curricular to be more inclusive: the contributions approach; the additive approach; the transformation approach; and the personal, social, and civic action approach. Briefly, the *contributions approach* is frequently used by teachers to infuse ethnic content into the curriculum. According to Banks, this approach is characterized by the addition of ethnic heroes to the curriculum who are selected using criteria similar to those used to select mainstream heroes. The mainstream curriculum remains unchanged in terms of its basic assumptions, goals, and salient characteristics. The *additive approach* is characterized by the addition of ethnic content, concepts, themes, and perspectives to the curriculum without changing its basic structure, purposes, and characteristics. It is often attained by the addition of a book or unit to the existing curriculum. The *transformation approach* differs fundamentally from the contribution and additive approaches in that it changes the basic assumptions of the curriculum and enables students to view events, concepts, themes, issues, and problems from several ethnic perspectives and points of view. Finally, the *personal, social, and civic action approach* includes all of the elements of the transformation approach but adds components that require students to make decisions and to take actions related to the concept, issue, or problem they have studied in a lesson or unit (Banks, 1995, pp. 331-2).

Given the theme of "personal responsibility" that the students identified as one of the factors that promoted their academic achievement, I would opt for the *personal, social, and civic action approach* (which includes all of the elements of the transformation approach described by Banks above) as the best approach for curricular reform that will aid the academic achievement of Black students. I will characterize this approach as what McCarthy (1993) describes as "the elements of a new critical approach to multicultural education." According to McCarthy, first, such a new approach must begin with a more systematic critique of the construction of school knowledge and the privileging of Eurocentrism and Westernness in the school

curriculum. Second, a critical approach to multiculturalism must insist not only on the cultural diversity of school knowledge but on its inherent relationality. School knowledge is socially produced, deeply imbued with human interests, and deeply implicated in the unequal social relations outside the school door. Third, a critical approach to multicultural education requires a far more nuanced discussion of the racial identities of minority and majority groups than currently exists in the multicultural literature. This critical approach would call attention to the contradictory interests that inform minority social and political behaviour and that define minority encounters with the majority in educational settings and in society. And just as important, because of the issue of gender, minority women and girls have radically different experiences of racial inequality from those of their male counterparts. A non-essentialist approach to the discussion of racial identities thus allows for a more complex understanding of the educational and political behaviour of minority groups.

In discussing multicultural education, we should be mindful of the powerful forces against such a movement. In recent times, conservative educators and commentators have responded vigorously to the multicultural challenge—with a virulent reaffirmation of Eurocentrism and Western culture in debates over the curriculum and educational reform. Conservatives have dismissed multicultural education as radical and misdirected. They have perpetuated the idea that multicultural education is the study of the “other” (Banks, 1993). For example, Harry Broudy believes that the stress on cultural diversity is divisive, and will lock minority groups out of the system by failing to teach them “to participate not only in the culture of this country but also in the intellectual and artistic achievements of the human race” (cited in Sleeter, 1989, p. 51). As well, in his book, *The Closing of the American Mind*, Allan Bloom (1987) notes the “large Black presence” in major universities and laments the “one failure” in race relations: Black students have proven to be “indigestible.” They do not “melt as have *ali* other groups.” Similarly,

E. D. Hirsch (1987) worries that America is becoming a "tower of Babel," and that this multiplicity of cultures is threatening our social fabric. Patrick Buchanan pontificates about how "our Judeo-Christian values are going to be handed down to future generations, not dumped into some landfill called multiculturalism" (cited in Macedo, 1994, p. 91). And Arthur Schlesinger, in his *The Disuniting of America* (1992), writes that:

Instead of a transformative nation with an identity all its own, America in this new light is seen as a preservative of diverse alien identities. Instead of a nation composed of individuals making their own unhampered choices, America increasingly sees itself as composed of groups more or less ineradicable in their ethnic character. The multiethnic dogma abandons historic purposes, replacing assimilation by fragmentation, integration by separatism. It belittles *unum* and glorifies *pluribus* (pp. 16-17).

Here in Canada, we've heard similar sentiments expressed by Bissoondath (1994), Bibby (1990) and the Reform Party (Abu-Laban and Stasiulis, 1992). I don't subscribe to the conservative view that call for a common culture. I think the term 'multiculturalism' has been appropriated very skillfully by the New Right. That's why I share Estrada and McLaren's (1993) position that those of us opposed to the conservative multiculturalism call our position 'critical multiculturalism' or 'resistance multiculturalism.' Resistance multiculturalism is different. It refuses to see culture as non-conflictual, harmonious, and consensual. Multiculturalism without a transformative political agenda can just be another form of accommodation to the larger social order (Estrada and McLaren, 1993).

On an applied level, a reformed curriculum that embraces Afrocentrism focuses on:<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Although the concepts address here pertain to African affairs, I am not suggesting that, for example, 'cultural/historical dignity' is for only those who come from groups with histories of great civilizations. Or what is described here are only for the benefits of African students. Far from it. I am

- Africa and its place in the world from the early Egyptian civilizations, circa B.C., to the present
- textbooks, classroom lectures, discussions and assignments encompassing such topics as:
  - A. the great African civilizations
  - B. the golden age of Egypt
  - C. African religions and philosophy
  - D. European imperialism and colonialism
  - E. slavery and the slave trade
  - F. the African Diaspora in Canada, the United States, South America, Europe and Asia
  - G. the significant historical events of slavery and colonialism as it continues to affect current development on the African continent
  - H. spotlight on Black achievements and contributions to North American social and political developments
  - I. issues and problems of African and non-African relationships both on the continent (e.g., East Asians and Africans in Kenya and Uganda) and the Diaspora (e.g., Africans and African Americans)
  - J. positive African and other South interactions.
- Black and African writers; e.g., Maya Angelou, Richard Wright, Chinua Achebe, Austin Clarke, Langston Hughes, James Baldwin, Toni Morrison as part of readings in English classes.
- significant Black political and historical figures in Canada, the United States, the Caribbean and Africa; e.g., Martin Luther King, Malcolm X, Marcus Garvey, Kwame Nkrumah, Nelson Mandela, John Ware.
- courses on race, class and gender and how these intersect with schooling processes. Current issues and developments in society (e.g., O.J. Simpson trial) can be used as discussion points (Asante, 1992; Ben-Jochannan and Clarke,

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mindful that any curriculum which seeks to develop cultural pride should be couched in language that ensures comparable or parallel ideas that can be identified by all cultural groups.



1991; Dei, 1996; Hilliard et al., 1990; Hilliard, 1992; Strickland, 1994; Watkins, 1993).

To assist with the above, it is recommended that schools expand and improve their library collections in Black and African studies. As I shall point out in the next section, schools must diversify their teaching and administrative pool as a diverse school staff will bring different perspectives to issues discussed in the curriculum.

And how can a reformed curriculum that embraces Afrocentrism promote the academic achievement of Black and minority students?

- It will help Black students develop a strong sense of group identity and action, which can help overcome the impediments of the dominant culture. Group identity is used here to mean not only consciousness of a shared fate but also commitment to common goals, awareness of conflict against a dominant group, and effective organization (Sleeter, 1991).
- By seeing the world through the eyes of their African ancestry and not through the eyes of Europeans, Black students can build a strong self-image and esteem. This is necessary to reverse the inferiorization of Black youths by the current school system (Dei, 1993b).
- It will equip Black students with the requisite cultural capital to redefine their worth and foster a state of independence and self-reliance rather than a dependence on others (Asante, 1990).

I'd like to close this section with one of the student narratives on this subject of curricular reform. This in response to a question about what can be done in the curriculum to help Black students succeed in the school system.

*The first thing is that in many of the textbooks, the images the students see have to reflect a global environment and you know, African students will benefit not only by seeing images of Africans, but they'll benefit by seeing images of other brown people, such as Asians, Latin Americans, Arabs and so forth ... I know that has an effect ... The curriculum must be changed. ... There needs to be options at the high school level so that a student can take an extra history course, for instance, in a school with a [large] African population. There should*

*be available something like Social Studies 20A or 30A that would give you a concentration in a specific area, such as Asia, Africa or Latin America. I think that would be great ... because most students will never be in such an option course. What's really crucial is that they have to overhaul the Social Studies curriculum ... That has to be changed so that students have to learn about the history of various continental civilizations from the earliest periods until today. It is a real disastrous focus when our [Blacks'] first entry into the discussion of history is as enslaved people. What's really sick, we're told that these slaves were taken, which suggests our continent was filled with slaves and they were taken ... We need to learn about ancient Egypt and ancient Nubia and then moving into a more recent period and many other examples from across our continent. We need to learn those things, we need to learn about the African presence in European history, and in Asian history ... We need to learn that figures in European history like Aesop or Hannibal were Africans or that the first three Saints of Germany were African ... So those are things we need to know. It's just not in Social Studies, though, it has to be that in English we're taking stories, novels, plays, written by us, not only from North America but from the continent and this doesn't mean that there are only going to be stories that dwell on race and pain or White supremacy. They may be just any kind of stories that talk about us from our perspective (hmcT/95/111-112).*

#### 6.4 Teacher Education

*You cannot teach a child you do not love. You cannot teach a child you do not respect. You cannot teach a child you do not understand. You cannot teach a child whom you are afraid of. You cannot teach a child if your 'political baggage,' i.e. sexism and racism, is brought into the classroom.*

*Jawanza Kunjufu*  
Countering the Conspiracy to Destroy Black Boys, Vol. II

*At the present time, most teachers, school administrators and staff cannot be expected to contribute fully to African Canadian academic and cultural excellence in the absence of systemic training, both in appropriate teaching strategies and in African Canadian history and culture.*

BLAC Report on Education

There is no doubt that teachers play an important role in helping students to develop attitudes and behaviours. Since they bring their own cultural perspectives, values and hopes to the classroom, they are in a strong position to influence the views, conceptions, and behaviours of their students. So for example, a teacher who believes in White supremacy and considers White students as “our children” and Black students as “other people’s children” will, whether they intend or not, convey these attitudes and beliefs to students (Delpit, 1995; Gay, 1986).

There is some evidence to show that education students are predominantly White and monolingual, and come to their teacher education programs with very little direct intercultural and interracial experience. Indeed, recent research has shown that many education students view diversity as a problem rather than as a resource, and that they generally have very little knowledge about different ethnic and racial groups, their cultures, their histories, and their contributions to the making of North American society (Zeichner, 1995). In fact, as Goodlad (1990) concluded, many education students are not even convinced that all pupils are capable of learning. And other

education students and teachers still say that they feel unprepared to teach students of color (see Trent, 1990). This leads Zeichner (1995) to conclude that "despite all the rhetoric and hype surrounding multicultural education and diversity in recent years, the teacher education enterprise as a whole has done little to address the problem of preparing teachers to work with culturally diverse students" (pp. 397-8).

I argue that with the rapid shift in demographics, issues of race, ethnicity and learning styles will become important considerations for all teachers in every classroom. Consequently, teacher education programs need to be fundamentally reconstructed to more adequately prepare teachers to educate a diverse student population. In fact, I believe that changes in teacher training offer the best hope of significant change in the schools and of breaking the vicious cycle of self-fulfilling prophecies for Black learners. And in order to help Black and other minority students succeed, current teachers must address issues of cultural diversity. They must respect their minority students' dignity, acknowledge the contributions of their cultures, and relate the curriculum to their own experiences (Amster, 1994). Teachers must have high expectations of Black students as they do of White students. It is essential that in-service and pre-service teacher education programs prepare teachers to hear and respect the voices of people of color and actively work against oppressive educational practices and ideologies.

At this point I would like to advance the premise put forward by Gay (1994) that good teaching will be multicultural teaching, and that teachers play a key role in implementing multicultural education. As Banks (1995) also points out, effective multicultural education depends on the willingness of teachers to counteract the Eurocentric values and attitudes that many of them have internalized. In this context, Gay (1994) defines multicultural education as "the policies, programs, and practices employed in schools to celebrate cultural diversity. It builds on the assumption that teaching and learning are invariably cultural processes. Since schools are composed of

students and teachers from a wide variety of cultural backgrounds, the best way for the educational process to be most effective for the greatest number of students is for it to be multicultural” (p. 3). In a similar way, Delpit (1995) proposes that we conceptualize teaching as a profession that actively “recognize[s] and overcome[s] the power differential, the stereotypes, and the other barriers which prevent us from seeing each other. These efforts must drive our teacher education, our curriculum development, our instructional strategies, and every aspect of the educational enterprise” (p. 134).

On a more applied level, a number of curricular and instructional strategies have been identified in the teacher education literature and teacher education programs with which teacher educators have sought to prepare teachers for cross-cultural work and for teaching in a multicultural society. Zeichner (1995) identifies the following as particularly helpful.

### *Biography*

It is suggested that part of the teacher education curriculum should aim at resocializing preservice teachers in ways that help them view themselves within a culturally diverse society—possibly leading to restructuring self-perceptions and world views. The crucial aspect involved here is designing appropriate experiences for preservice teachers to make meaningful connections between students’ personal/family history and the social context of life as experienced by different groups within a culturally diverse society. Preservice teacher education for diversity often begins with helping teacher education students to better understand their own cultural experience and to develop more clarified cultural identities. This is based on the premise that the development of one’s own cultural identity is a necessary precursor to cross-cultural understanding (Zeichner, 1995).

### *Attitude Change*

This strategy helps prospective teachers learn more about and re-examine their attitudes, assumptions, and beliefs about ethnic, racial, and language groups other than their own. It includes knowledge about prejudice and about specific strategies that can help reduce prejudice and racism among students (Zeichner, 1995; see also Banks, 1993d). Here, training workshops that draw upon different models, from developing cultural sensitivity and racial awareness to creating management skills for managing diversity can be helpful (Henry et al., 1995).

### *Countering Low Expectations for Students*

This addresses one of the most common elements in preservice teacher education for diversity: the typically low expectations that teachers hold for poor, ethnic, and racial and language-minority students. This strategy proposes several ways for teacher educators to deal with the problem of low expectations. One way is to expose teacher education students, through readings or direct contact, to examples of successful teaching for poor students of color. This attention to cases of success is often supplemented by helping students examine the ways in which schools help structure inequality through various practices in curriculum, instruction, grouping, and assessment (Goodlad, 1990; Ladson-Billings, 1991; Zeichner, 1995).

### *Cultural Knowledge*

This strategy is used by teacher educators to try to overcome the lack of knowledge among teacher education students about the histories of different cultural groups and their participation in and contributions to the making of our nation and world. An ethnic studies component in teacher education programs can potentially do a great deal to prevent mistakes by teachers that are rooted in cultural ignorance (Zeichner, 1995; see also Aronowitz and Giroux, 1985; Cochran-Smith, 1995; Ellwood, 1990).

### *Field Experiences*

To help sensitize prospective teachers to cultural differences and/or to help them become more capable cross-cultural teachers, some type of field experience is seen as helpful. Included in this category are brief community field experiences with poor children and students of color that are part of university courses and include reflective seminars in which students analyze their experiences. These community experiences are often used as a basis for helping prospective teachers learn how to interact in more authentic ways with parents and other adults from different racial and ethnic backgrounds (Zeichner, 1995).

In addition to the above, it must be emphasized that issues and discourses about race and racism need to be addressed in the pre-service teaching curriculum if we are to move ahead. It's true that when we "unleash unpopular things" by making race and racism explicit parts of the curriculum, responses are often strongly emotional. Resistance, misunderstanding, frustration, anger, and feelings of inefficiency may be outcomes, but they need to be addressed nonetheless (Cochran-Smith, 1995, p. 542; see also Tatum, 1992, 1994). As well, teacher education programs need to begin to broaden the criteria that are used to admit students into such programs, so as to take into account a commitment and potential to teach all children. This is important given minority under-representation in the teaching profession. One of the best opportunities for children to acquire different role models is missed as long as the majority of teachers are White and their training is still locked in the same tradition (Adam, 1985).

Finally, I propose the following guidelines to help teachers become "culturally relevant" in teaching students of African descent. These guidelines are adapted from "A Study of Preservice Social Teachers" by Osunde et al. (1996) and a program on "Planning a Social Studies Practicum" in African studies by Ukpokodu (1996).

- Through library research, discover current information on Black and African affairs to supplement what is available in your school's textbooks. Avoid outdated history texts that portray Blacks in the most degrading manner.
- Gather information from works by Black and African specialists which can be reliable, objective and authentic.
- Read the works written by Black and African scholars and writers so as to learn the Black perspective.
- Visit Black art shows and festivals, including museums (e.g., Glenbow Museum in Calgary) that have large collections of Black art or feature travelling exhibits.
- Use the concept of interdependence to explain issues focusing on area studies.
- Treat information from newspapers and magazines with some suspect and reservation. Most tend to focus on sensational items and in the process help to reinforce stereotypes about Black peoples.
- Invite Black students and community leaders in your area to your class to speak about their experiences and other issues. These should include Whites who can speak objectively about events in Africa or the Black community, based on their firsthand knowledge because of their experiences as teachers overseas, in the military, diplomatic service, or vacation trips.
- Avoid the use of terms or words that can have stereotypical implications, e.g., "culturally deprived," "disadvantaged," "tribe."
- Provide correct historical information about Africa and Africans in the Diaspora. For example, students need to learn that African history did not begin with the arrival of Europeans. Or, that Blacks have a long presence in North America
- Use modern Black and African literary works to provide reliable information. Novels and works by some renowned Black writers are recommended.

### **6.5 Role of Parental and Community Agencies**

*Canada's educational institutions have, for the most part, failed to understand the important and positive role that parents and the community can play in the learning process of students. They have failed to encourage and promote a school/community relationship in which parents feel they have meaningful access and an active involvement in the education of their children. The sense of alienation,*



*isolation and exclusion is experienced more acutely by visible minority and immigrant parents.*

*Carol Tator and Frances Henry*  
**Multicultural Education: Translating Policy Into Practice**

*No one has a stronger, more direct interest in good education than a parent. Educators who fail to recognize this, seeing parents instead as irrelevant, inadequate, or even obstructionist can never fully succeed in educating young people.*

*Herbert Kohl*  
**I Won't Learn From You**

I have presented enough evidence, both from the student narratives and other research, to show that “parental encouragement, activities, and interest at home and participation in schools and classrooms affect children’s achievements, attitudes, and aspirations, even after student ability and family socioeconomic status are taken into account. Students gain in personal and academic development if their families emphasize schooling, let the children know they do, and do so continually over the school years” (Epstein, 1987, p. 120). Indeed, the effective school literature has identified parent involvement as one of four factors that help improve student achievement. It shows that children have an advantage in school when their parents encourage and support their school activities (Epstein, 1987; Lee et al., 1991; Reynolds, 1993).

In helping to promote the school success of Black students, I argue that schools need to facilitate parent involvement and “give more emphasis to finding ways of increasing the involvement of minority parents in the education of their children and of developing closer ties between schools and the communities they serve. Incentives might be given to administrators and teachers for placing greater emphasis on family/school relations and on increasing parental involvement in the schools” (Suzuki, 1984, p. 319). This deserves some attention because research

shows that often minority parents are at a disadvantage when it comes to the extent that they interact with the school. As Maharah-Sandhu (1995) observes, "those very systems set up to include parents in the education of their children serve to perpetuate the advantages of mainstream parents and the disadvantages of parents from minority groups. The public school system also discriminates against parents with respect to participation in the education of their children. This is particularly the case with parents who speak English as a second language, or speak little or no English" (p. 15). As well, Delgado-Gaitan (1994) notes that "the manner in which parents relate to schools becomes a cultural issue not so much because different cultural groups interact differently with the schools, but because the process of engaging with the educational system is bound by rules, language, and values that privilege some people and exclude others" (p. 299).

Research in Canada and the United States has shown that although there are positive benefits of parent involvement on student achievement and that "minority students will be empowered in the schools to the extent that their communities themselves are empowered through their interactions with the school" (Henry and Tator, 1991, p. 28), many parents of Black children are alienated from the school system for a variety of reasons. For example, many Black parents say they have felt "unwelcome" and often "talked down to or belittled" by school personnel. Others complain about a communication problem where teachers do not keep them up to date about their children's education and how well they are really doing in school (see BLAC Report on Education, 1994, p. 47; Slaughter and Epps, 1987). At the same time, there is a pervasive attitude among educators that Black parents do not care about the education of their children. There is some truth to this. In a study of 334 Black dropouts in four Ontario cities conducted by Patricia Daenzer of McMaster University in conjunction with the Canadian Alliance of Black Educators, she found that two-thirds of the dropouts' parents never visited their school and another 22 percent visited once a year. The students said their parents rarely returned letters

sent home from school and concluded that they did not think their parents were concerned with their education (Sarick, 1995b, p. A3). I want to emphasize here that Black parents cannot afford to be apathetic: for Black parents' participation is even more crucial than that of White parents. Schools cannot and should not shoulder all of the blame of Black school failure or success. Black parents must become more active in their children's education. Like all parents, they have a direct stake in the quality of public school education and must be involved in decision making through representation on school trustee boards and school boards. Similarly, public schools must make some accommodations to Black and poor families. I agree with Slaughter and Epps (1987) that:

The perpetuation of a 'no-difference' ideology does not necessarily lead to equitable treatment; it may lead to an imbalanced focus on 'negative' differences between children of different classes and races. Teacher preparation programs should require completion of at least one course on the contribution of the home environment to the achievement development of children and youth. Courses on parent education which highlight (a) social diversity in parenting styles and (b) Black family life would also be desirable (p. 20).

Community advocacy can play a significant role in helping Black parents become more assertive and become change agents. For example, non-governmental organizations like the Toronto-based Urban Alliance on Race Relations can help respond to particular racial incidents and to deal with the general problems of bias and discrimination in the general society. Over the years, the Urban Alliance on Race Relations has developed effective strategies to deal with issues of racial exclusion in Canadian society. Black associations in Alberta, under the umbrella of the Council on Black Organizations can and should adopt some of these strategies to deal with issues in the Alberta context.

Garcia et al. (1995) have argued that for interactions between students, families, and educators to be more positive and effective, we need a broader definition

of involvement so that the roles and opportunities available to diverse groups of parents are increased. They make the point that parent involvement should also be viewed separately from parental support; that is, some parents who may be perceived to be uninvolved in their child's education may, in effect, be very supportive in ways that are not immediately visible to teachers and other educators. Thus, a broader view of parent involvement would include ways for these parents' efforts to be recognized and appreciated. As well, such a perspective would provide as many options as possible for involvement, including nonthreatening, low-commitment, low-profile activities, and there would be a concerted effort to match what is expected of parents with their level of commitment, willingness, and *ability* to be involved (Garcia et al., 1995, pp. 450-451; see also Vandergrift and Greene, 1992).

The following are some specific ways schools can involve Black and other minority parents in the education of their children. Included are strategies that schools can also use to improve the school success of minority students. They are derived from research in schools where minority students have been successful because of the active involvement of their parents as partners in their children's education.

- Invite parents, families, and community members to participate in school activities in a variety of ways, e.g., involvement in classroom activities, serving as role models and mentors, developing rich cultural and linguistic activities, and supporting the instructional program. Members of minority groups become a valuable resource for native-language support and cultural information for all teachers and students and provide a foundation from which to build a multicultural curriculum (Garcia et al., 1995, p. 451).
- Invite parents to play an important role in curriculum reform and implementation. As schools try to institute multicultural/anti-racism curricula, parents have become a valuable resource and they can have positive effects on the curriculum, especially if they are organized and supported by the local school and school boards (BLAC Report on Education, 1994, p. 48).

- Encourage positive interactions between parents and children by helping the school serve as a centre where parents can help one another. For example, support groups, parenting classes, and literacy classes are helpful especially when organized by or with the consultation of parents. Lending books, audio and video tapes have been seen as helping enhance education in the home. Through these resources, parents have been able to educate their children about the history and contributions of their cultures and communities—filling in gaps often left by schools (BLAC Report on Education, 1994, p. 48).
- Arrange regular home visits by specialists in early childhood education who provide educational materials where needed as well as help parents improve their abilities to work effectively with their own children. Parent groups are organized for regular meetings with educators to discuss what parents can do in conjunction with teachers to facilitate children's learning. Such discussions help parents understand the curriculum of the school, what standards of achievement are expected, and what parents can do at home to improve their children's achievement and the quality of life of the school (Slaughter and Epps, 1987, p. 19).
- Encourage parents to participate in training to become effective advocates for their children by learning how the education system works. Encourage parents to ensure that their children are in school daily, [are] prepared to learn, and will abide by school rules and regulations (BLAC Report on Education, 1994, p. 25).
- Teachers work collaboratively with minority-group parents and their ethnic community as equal partners in education. A crucial area of focus is establishing and implementing standards of operation that consider all cultural groups. Too often, parental and community input is solicited as a reactive rather than a proactive strategy (Solomon, 1992, p. 123).
- For Black parents, there is a need to be more vigilant in monitoring the use of their children's time in school. They need to communicate a strong message to teachers to relinquish the ideology that guides the differential development of Black students for the dubious world of sports and White students for predictable futures in attainable jobs. If parents believe in the achievement ideology and status mobility through schooling, then they must encourage in their children the appropriate academic attitudes and behaviours to achieve these ends. The Black community has always worked in partnership with the school in rewarding the accomplishments of the Black athlete. Similarly, the Black community needs to collaborate with the school in seeking out and publicly recognizing Black students who have achieved academically. It is only by

improving the profile of academic accomplishments that it will compete with sports for a high profile among Black students (Solomon, 1992, p. 125).<sup>2</sup>

Another area that is worthy of some attention is the role of the community in fostering the academic achievement of Black and other minority students. Like parental involvement, the importance of group and community involvement has also been identified as maximizing benefits for Black students. For example, the popularity of community involvement stems in part from evidence that African American students who succeed against the odds do so with the support of adults and important institutions, such as churches in their communities (Nettles, 1991, p. 136; see also Cummins, 1986). Indeed, students from racial/ethnic communities have benefited from an educational system that works in partnership with the community. Findings from program evaluations have indicated that community involvement helps stimulate Black student investments, defined as "students' commitments of their time, energy, and other resources in pursuit of legitimate opportunities that will yield a future return" (Nettles, 1991, p. 133). Moreover, community involvement processes have contributed to attitudinal shifts and to heightened achievement. According to Nettles (1991), community involvement consists of "the actions that organizations and individuals take to promote student development" (p. 133). For example, services inside the school such as peer tutoring provide students with active and engaging experiences that apply to school learning. Community service as a pedagogy can thus be carefully connected to purposeful study for students who are involved (Seigel and Rockwood, 1993).

Very often, Black community agencies have been accused of putting "too much emphasis upon dinners, dances, and commercial projects" (Head, 1975, p. 73). Moreover, the lack of unity in the Black community has sometimes made it difficult

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<sup>2</sup> For example, as a parent told George Dei (1993) in his "Narrative Discourses of Black/African-Canadian Parents and the Canadian Public School System," it is important for Black/African-Canadian parents to be at the forefront of helping the youth know about their African culture. He cements his

to achieve a degree of unity and agreement on common goals and purposes to help Black students succeed in school. But it is now felt that Black organizations should be more fully engaged in providing needed services to Black youth and to the community generally. Clarence Perry, a retired science teacher and president of the Canadian Alliance of Blacks—saying that “We have to do our own salvation”—has called on the Black community to push for changes, instead of waiting for school boards to adopt recommendations of reports (Sarick, 1995b, p. A3). Echoing the same sentiments, the authors of the Nova Scotia BLAC Report on Education (1994) have noted that:

The African Canadian community must take the initiative in restructuring the basis for the educational messages and values which subconsciously as well as consciously shape the self-esteem and achievements of all African Canadian children in the education system. The community must send a clear message to the children and Black youth that education is a priority for the community. This can be done through greater involvement with the education system and through community events that combine entertainment, motivation and education. However, even in the best of circumstances, public schools can only provide a part of what is needed for the education of African Canadian children. The most important cultural and historical education must be provided by the independent efforts of the Black communities. There is a need for independent African Canadian educational and cultural centres in every sizable Black community in [Canada] (BLAC Report on Education, 1994, p. 24).

It is encouraging to find that Black educators and Black community groups are increasingly mobilizing to define their own educational agenda, and are seeking alternative models and approaches for educating their children. One fine example is the Each One, Teach One mentor program. This program matches young Blacks, one-on-one, with successful Black adults who provide career advice, support, and

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political arguments by reasoning that if Black parents do not take on this task, nobody else will “... because the system is not made to function for us [Black people]” (p. 55).

motivation. Each One, Teach One, established in February 1992, also promotes literacy and cultural awareness by providing free, Black-focused books to youth, and by hosting an annual career-oriented Youth Day. With more than 200 mentors, it still cannot meet the demand—a sign that the program is popular and effective (Report of the Royal Commission on Learning, Vol. IV, 1994). Another example is the establishment of Black Heritage Schools, like the one in Calgary, which “help kids develop a sense of pride” and enjoy learning about Black culture (Adams, 1993).

To conclude, I'd like to make the point that instead of falling back on deficit theories and continue the practice of blaming Black students, their families, and their communities for educational failure, schools must develop a model of parent and community education and advocacy which empowers parents, communities and students. They need to focus on where they can make a difference through fundamental changes in their policies and programs (Nieto, 1994). For example, schools should be restructured to become open places where parents and others can feel that they are welcome—and valued. For the most part, schools do not give that message. Also, Black parents, like others, have a right to be treated with respect by school staff. Ethnic/racial sensitivity must be incorporated into school policies, programs and practices. As Henry and Tator (1991) note, “while boards may take their general direction from the provincial government, they have the power to initiate, develop and implement policies and practices as autonomous organizations. Boards must, therefore, also demonstrate their commitment to the principles of multicultural and anti-racist education by developing policies and giving clear guidelines to the schools under their jurisdiction” (p. 124). For example, teaching and learning materials used in the school system should reflect a multi-racial society that values the positive contribution of all its members. As well, boards must increase their pool of minority school teachers and administrators and implement race relations policies in the hiring and promotion of Black teachers. There is an urgent need to increase the number of Black administrators, teachers, social workers and guidance counsellors at all levels of



school administration and support. Indeed, if Alberta's public schools are to be perceived as legitimate, they must earn that perception by its local minority community. This involves a profound shift in the direction of daily practice and its symbolism, away from hegemonic practice and toward transformative practice (BLAC Report on Education, 1994; Erickson, 1987; Pollard, 1989).

## **6.6 Summary: Policy Recommendations**

I have outlined in this chapter some implications for educational policy and practice based on the findings of the student narratives and a wider literature. I identified four areas—listening to minority voices, curricular reform, teacher education, and the role of parental/community involvement—in which I believe educators can take specific actions to encourage and promote academic achievement among students from minority populations. In these areas, I provided—based on evidence and research—practical strategies or ways to help teachers, administrators, parents, community agencies and policymakers improve or help Black students succeed in school. In order not to appear repetitive, I propose, in what follows, to outline a few broad policy directions and recommendations that capture the essence of many of the ideas presented in this chapter. In developing these policy recommendations, I have relied on or have been influenced by many works, particularly, Dei (1996b), Suzuki (1984), Thakur (1988), Head (1975), Henry and Tator (1991), Slaughter and Epps (1987), BLAC Report on Education (1994), *Towards a New Beginning* (1992), Zarate (1994), and the student narratives (hmcT/95). At the same time, I wouldn't want to convey the impression that no reforms or initiatives have been undertaken in provinces across the country, including Alberta, to address many of the concerns addressed in this study, including the recommendations outlined below. For example, as Tator and Henry (1991) note:

While educational institutions vary enormously in the range of issues and concerns relating to multicultural, race relations and anti-racist

education, there is a growing consensus that the priority areas include: curriculum, assessment and placement, staff development, pre-service training of teachers and administrators, personnel policies and practices, school/community relations and incidents of racial harassment (p. 16).

According to Tator and Henry, one area that has been, for instance, the focal point of multicultural and race relations policies and practices in Canada has been the curriculum. They note that, "over the last few years, ministries, boards and individual schools have been involved to varying degrees in numerous initiatives which relate to the curriculum. One of the most commonly used strategies is the development of guidelines for identifying bias in textbooks and other learning materials. The intent of removing bias is to reduce the likelihood of negative attitudes developing towards groups" (p. 16). For example, the education ministries in Alberta and Ontario have developed materials that can be used as guidelines for detecting cultural or racial bias in existing materials. Alberta Education uses their document as an internal reference to help analyze and evaluate all curriculum materials that are produced by the department (Tator and Henry, 1991). And largely in response to the Stephen Lewis report (1992) and the demands of racial-minority communities for greater equity, Ontario introduced legislation that required all school boards in the province to develop and implement anti-racism policies in their schools. The province also destreamed the schooling process—grade 9 students would no longer be separated into academic and vocational streams. The streaming would be delayed until grade 10. In the area of Black education, Ontario also has allowed the development of an alternative model of education: Black-focused schools. In Metropolitan Toronto, government officials and members of the Black community recommended that a Black junior school be established in each of the area's six municipalities. The proposed separate Black schools would be administered and have a curriculum designed and implemented by Black educators (Henry et al., 1995, p. 189).

*Recommendations for Action*

On the basis of this study and others dealing with Black education, the following are recommended. It is based on the premise that despite some of the efforts described above, there is still a long way to go to provide equitable education to all students. These recommendations are also supported by the student narratives.

1. The Alberta government and Alberta Education should develop and make explicit their policy on multicultural and anti-racist education, and provide the necessary financial resources to support their implementation at the school and departmental levels.
2. School boards, with the Alberta Teachers' Association, should conduct a needs assessment to better design multicultural and anti-racist education programs for their communities as well as provide ongoing staff development in multicultural/anti-racist education. The role of teachers is critical in furthering the goals of multicultural/anti-racist education. What teachers believe and practice in the classroom has enormous potential for influencing the quality of life and the learning experience of all students, but particularly for those children of minority backgrounds.
3. Alberta's school boards should correct a long-standing gap in the education of all students by including in their school programs and curricula the contributions of African peoples to the growth and development of Alberta and Canada. The history of Blacks in Alberta should be included in the Grade 10 Social Studies curriculum and continue up to Grade 12. The contributions of all ethnic/racial minority groups should be included in this program. Alberta Education should authorize a study to examine bias and other negative references to Blacks and other minorities in school texts used in Alberta's classrooms. Here, Alberta Education can work with the Council of Black Organizations to design and prepare appropriate materials, videotapes, films, slides, cassettes, etc. for use in helping teachers and students understand and appreciate the multicultural and multi-racial nature of the population of metropolitan Edmonton/Calgary and of Alberta.
4. Alberta's school boards should review their policies regarding the hiring of teachers, guidance counsellors, social workers, psychologists, etc. to ensure that hiring and promotion of teachers reflect the ethnic and racial composition of the students and communities in which the schools are located.
5. Local school boards in the urban areas of Edmonton and Calgary should double their efforts to recruit Black teachers for their schools and promote qualified

ones as principals, consultants, department chairmen and other senior administrative positions.

6. Teachers and counsellors should be trained to recognize differences between cultural and academic problems, and be encouraged to discuss openly the issues of race and racism in the classroom. Many White teachers and administrators are uncomfortable in dealing with the subject.
7. Teachers should provide support and encouragement to Black students by holding high expectations for them, helping them solve problems, and rewarding them for their achievement efforts.
8. In consultation with Alberta's Faculties of Education and leaders of the Black and other minority communities, Alberta Education should give serious consideration to requiring all prospective teachers to take a series of courses and workshops in race/ethnic relations as a part of their teacher education program. This will include, for example, preparing new teachers in knowing how to work with parent volunteers, conduct parent/teacher communication, and overcome possible racial, class and gender biases. Teachers must acquire knowledge, understanding, and appreciation of the experiences and contributions of racial and ethnic minorities in Canadian society.
9. Alberta's schools must give more emphasis to finding ways of increasing the involvement of minority parents in the education of their children and of developing closer ties between schools and the communities they serve. Incentives should be given to administrators and teachers for placing greater emphasis on family/school relations and on increasing parental and community involvement in the schools. Schools, for example, can forge alliances with the Black community to develop a resource bank of role models who would regularly interact with Black students at the school sites and in the community, beginning with the elementary grades. Similarly, schools must hear what minority students have to say regarding problems they face in schools and what can be done to help them succeed.
10. Black parents and the Black community must deal with many of the issues facing Black students in a collective manner, and must be vigilant against any moves by school boards (e.g., tracking) that will harm the education interests of Black students. It is collective action that will place the Black community in a strong bargaining position.

## **CHAPTER 7. CONCLUSION**

### **7.1 Concluding Perspectives**

This study has investigated and documented examples of successful educational experiences of Canadian Black youth in Alberta's schools. It grew beyond the initial attempt to record why Black students fail in school to a deep analysis of why they succeed. The theme of this thesis is thus "not simply about telling the tale of woes which currently befalls Black [students]...Rather it is also about the staying power of Black people, the spirit of striving" (Small, 1994, p. 44). Indeed, the narratives of the educational experiences of these students provide the perspectives of those who have struggled to survive and to succeed in the mainstream culture while retaining their own cultural identity. These student experiences challenge the dismal picture portrayed of Black student life. Their insights serve to "stimulate thought, to assure us that there are things we do not know, things we must know, things capable of unsettling the world we inhabit" (cited in Galindo, 1996, p. 7).

The study uses a narrative and life history methodological approach. It is "crafted within qualitative research traditions [that]...recognizes the contributions of [African] communities' oral traditions that have historically played a key role in interpreting and critiquing sociocultural processes such as those involved in education" (Galindo, 1996, p. 7). The study also examines the particular circumstances of Black women and contributes to new developments in research on minority education by addressing the prior neglect of the voices and perspectives of those "never intended to be part of the dominant political and economic spheres" (Macedo, 1993, p. 204). As Fine and Lois (1993) point out, "these voices, once marginalized, need to be heard and centred—if we are serious about schools as a democratic public sphere, if we are sincere in our commitment to multicultural and

feminist education, and if we want to understand and interrupt the perversions and pleasures of power, privilege, and marginalization in public schooling" (p. 2). They challenge us to move "beyond silenced voices" and "to solicit and listen closely to the words, critiques, dreams, and fantasies of those who have dwelt historically on the margins" (Fine and Lois, 1993, p. 2). Because the students in my study were self-selected, I or the participants do not presume to speak for a voiceless group. Rather, the students tell me, they would like their voices and accomplishments to be acknowledged by the wider society, and see their narratives as "not as relics of the past, but as cultural processes that enable critical reflection of minority members' places in their community and society. They also enable resistance of ideological domination by presenting counter points of view that challenge the predominance of stereotypical representations of them, thereby providing more hopeful possibilities for their own futures" (Galindo, 1996, pp. 6-7).

Much of the analysis in this study is shaped by several theoretical propositions derived from the student narratives and the relevant social science literature. I have summarized (later in this chapter) what I find to be the significant research findings of the study. What I propose to do here is to synthesize and provide interpretive perspectives based on these research findings—thereby augmenting findings obtained through other research. Also, I hope to address what may be perceived as contradictions and inconsistencies in the study.

The first of these general propositions is that education still looms large in Black dreams of opportunity and success. As the BLAC Report on Education (1994) put it, "education is still the primary key to improving the self-concept, self-esteem, academic performance, and economic opportunities of the African Canadian" (p. 14). Contrary to popular mythology, Blacks have long attached great importance to education for themselves and their children. Education has been seen as a way to be accepted, as the "great leveller" that should bring first-class citizenship lives (Feagin

and Sikes, 1994, p. 79). In fact, the students in my study represent what Mehan (1996) calls "the current generation of minorities [who] reflects a faith in the potential of schooling to solve or at least deal with social problems." He adds that "although they feel victimized by systematic discrimination, they do not dismiss schools. Indeed, they express confidence that schools are or can be sites that foster the opportunity for children to succeed" (p. 276). And so, despite the current social inequities and hostile school and societal environments, Black students develop successful academic skills and can achieve as well as other students. They are "social subjects eager and able to think critically in order to negotiate and transform the worlds in which they live" (Giroux, 1996b, p. 486). In all of this, we can benefit and learn from the spirit of striving and the determination to succeed which characterizes so much of the Black experience in North America (Small, 1994). In fact, Feagin and Sikes (1994) correctly note that, "one way that Blacks consume personal energy is in determined efforts to succeed in the face of racism and other barriers, including overreaching to prove their worth in the face of Whites' questioning Black ability and competence" (p. 296).

Any discussion of Black school achievement always raises the issues of *context* and *comparability*. It's true that I worked with a select group of students—primarily African Canadian from the province of Alberta. These students make up part of the Canadian Black population that will not be considered *indigenous*; i.e., those who have lived in North America for many generations like the African Canadian population in Nova Scotia, or African Americans in the United States (Foster, 1996). They are primarily children of Caribbean and African immigrants who immigrated to Canada in the 1960s and 1970s. In recognizing the heterogeneity of Canada's African population, Foster (1996) observes that:

Understanding the Black reality in Canada must start with the recognition that Canada's Black population is unique and that it certainly isn't a carbon copy of the African-American population

south of the border...We Blacks in Canada have our own history and experiences that make our expectations and levels of national and cultural consciousness different from those of Blacks in other countries. But the community because of its relatively small size, has always had to reach outside of Canada for renewal (pp. 13, 18).

Did the backgrounds of these students as Canadian "voluntary immigrant minorities" play a part in their academic success? Will they have succeeded if some of them came to Canada as refugees, like the Ethiopians and Somalis? Would that have made any difference? Or, will they have achieved the same success if they lived in the United States, or in Ontario where there is a large Black immigrant population? Will the same results be achieved if a second or later generations of these students' families and school experiences were studied across time? And would cultural differences diminish as these Black students move from being first or second to third and fourth generation individuals? In thinking about these questions, it is important to note Cummins' (1993) point that "the variability of minority students' academic performance under different social and educational conditions indicates that many complex, interrelated factors are at work" (p. 104). As well, we should be mindful of Galindo's (1996) other point that "a unique observation made regarding the education of minorities is the need to examine the processes of minority education across more than one generation in order to understand cumulative influences and transitions in the education achievements of minority students. Such transitions are oftentimes only visible across the time span of more than one generation" (p. 6). With this said, I'd like to stress the point that the 'success' or 'failure' of African Americans in the United States cannot be understood outside the context of their several hundred years of enforced presence in that country, compared to the relatively recent arrival of the vast majority of African-Caribbeans and Africans and the tiny numbers involved in Canada. This context is important in our understanding of the relative academic success of the student participants of this study.



Here, let us recall our earlier brief discussion of Ogbu's (1978, 1983, 1994a, 1994b) distinction between voluntary immigrants and involuntary minorities. I characterized the students in my study as "voluntary immigrants" and suggested that helped to explain their academic success. Like other earlier immigrants, their parents chose to come to North America for its opportunities. They contrast their conditions in the new homeland with those they left behind and feel hopeful. They can always go back if things do not work out. Their desire to succeed sparks commitment to schoolwork. But involuntary minorities, such as African Americans, Native Americans, and Mexican Americans in a more complex way, were forced to be minorities in the White man's land. They contrast their conditions here with those of their fellow citizens and despair; certainly for African Americans and Native Americans there is no realistic homeland to compare with or to return to (Fischer et al. 1996, p. 185). Colin Powell, the former chairman of the United States Joint Chiefs of Staff put the distinction this way: "My Black ancestors may have been dragged to Jamaica in chains, but they were not dragged to the United States. That is a far different emotional and psychological beginning than that of American Blacks, whose ancestors were brought here in chains (cited in Fischer et al. 1996, pp. 185-186).

Because of my earlier references to Asian students, I'd like to mention Ogbu's discussion of Chinese Americans as an example of a voluntary immigrant minority who have been successful in the public schools despite structural and cultural subordination. In giving reasons for why Chinese Americans do not experience the same school failure as African Americans, Ogbu notes that they bring a cultural respect for learning and value for education as a means of self-advancement, and that their family structure and relationship encourage their offsprings to work hard in school. The same can be said for the Black students of this study. In fact, data from both Sweden and the United States suggest that minority students who immigrate relatively late often appear to have better academic prospects than students of similar socioeconomic status born in the host country. This is because they have not

experienced devaluation of their identity in the societal institutions, namely schools of the host country (Cummins, 1993, p. 104). This to me explains the Asian academic success often touted by the media. Yes, Asian students score more highly than Whites and Blacks on standardized tests. But it does not point to a racial explanation. As Canadian studies like Mah (1995) show, the great bulk of Asian American and Canadian youth today are the children of, or are themselves, "voluntary immigrants" quite different from the experience of the "involuntary immigrants." Fischer et al. (1996) make an interesting observation regarding the wider implications the Asian case have for understanding race and academic performance. They note that:

The scores of Asian and of Asian American children in school can be satisfactorily accounted for by how much more time, attention, ambition, and effort Asian children and their families put into education. Ironically, White Americans' disadvantage relative to Asians seems to rest, in part, on the American idea of "natural" talent. White mothers, children and teachers are much more likely to attribute success in school to innate intelligence than are Asians; Asians instead typically attribute success much more to hard work (p. 201).

In this respect, arguments that Blacks have done poorly in Canada and the United States because they are less intelligent than Whites are completely bogus. Research around the world show that the experiences of low-caste groups or subordinate ethnic minorities do worse in schools and on school tests than do dominant groups, whatever the genetic differences or similarities between them. Whether it is Eastern European Jews in 1910 in New York, the Irish in England, Koreans in Japan, or Afrikaners in South Africa, being of lower caste or status makes people seem "dumb." The particular history of Blacks and Mexicans in the United States, or Blacks in Nova Scotia fits the general pattern. *It is not that low intelligence leads to inferior status; it is that inferior status leads to low intelligence test scores.* Also noteworthy and hard to reconcile with the racist viewpoint is the way ethnic groups seemingly become smarter *after* they have succeeded. For example, in Japan

Koreans are “dull”, while in North America they are “bright”; Jews in America were “dull” some seventy-five years ago but today they are among the “cognitive elite.” Inequality lies in the design of society, not in the minds or genes of individuals. This turns out to be not a biological question but a social one (Fischer et al. 1996, pp. 17-18; 158).

A second proposition gleaned from the student narratives is that “widespread school failure does not occur in minority groups that are positively oriented towards both their own and the dominant culture, that do not perceive themselves as inferior to the dominant group, and that are not alienated from their own cultural values” (Cummins, 1993, p. 105). Some studies have shown that some minority groups academic performance improves as these members become assimilated to, or familiar with Anglo-American sociocultural traits (Mah, 1995; Stone, 1981). This is not borne out by my research findings. If anything, a positive ethnic and racial identity, enhanced with an awareness of their cultural background, promotes a positive self-concept and self-esteem among minority students, and is related to their higher levels of academic achievement. It suggests that the more minority students are involved in resisting assimilation while maintaining their culture and language, the more successful they will be in school. Although maintaining cultures and language appears to be a conflicted decision, these traits have a positive impact on academic success. It seems to be a far healthier response than adopting an oppositional identity (which some Black students have done) that effectively limits the possibility of academic success<sup>1</sup>. An important aspect to note here is that because few Blacks ever achieve their full potential in Canada, resisting assimilation and maintaining Black pride and culture mean that Canadian Black youth must “look outside of Canada and its school books for inspiration and dreams of how great they can become” (Foster, 1996, p. 19). They have to look elsewhere for their role models. “For where is the abundance of

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<sup>1</sup> Again, we need to relate to the notion of “hybridity” or “cultural fluidity” that has some aspects of bicultural adaptability. See discussion in Chapter 2.

Black heroes, the Black statesman, women, the Black politicians, the Black astronauts, Black police chiefs and Black chief executive officers?" (Foster, 1996, p. 19). This society never nurtured them.

The third generalization I suggest is that there is certainly evidence that the harsh and simplistic racialised theories of the past retain a strong hold on the minds and imaginations of many in the majority population. This study supports the contention that racial stereotype, prejudice, and hostility still operate indiscriminately, despite the actual identities and achievements of the Black individuals discriminated against. Clearly, as Feagin and Sikes (1994, p. ix) correctly note, "no amount of hard work and achievement, no amount of money, resources, and success, can protect Black people from the persisting ravages of racism in their everyday lives" (p. ix). Access has consistently been predicated on the notion that Canada is a 'White man's country'; that is, "ethnocentrism, 'racism', notions of insiders/outside and of 'the other', have all served to indicate who is to be included in and excluded from full rights to citizenship" (Small, 1994, p. 12; see also Galindo, 1996). In this context, Cummins (1993) has suggested that the educational failure of minority students is linked to the extent to which schools reflect, or interrupt, the power relations that exist within the broader society.

It is important to acknowledge this because neo-conservative thinking, particularly in the United States has intimated the "declining significance of race" to use the title of Wilson's (1980) book. In a much cited book that triggered national discussion about race and class, Wilson argued that the growth of the Black middle class resulted from racial discrimination, government remedial programs, and improving economic conditions in the 1960s and 1970s. And Shelby Steele in his book of essays, *The Content of Our Character*, and Dinesh D'Souza's *The End of Racism* also de-emphasized the significance of discrimination as a factor in Black problems. Steele and other right-wing and conservative Blacks such as Thomas

Sowell and Glen Loury have been heralded by the press and media, and have received top positions in political and policy circles, out of all proportion to their numbers in the Black population. Their views are certainly at variance with the views held by the majority of Black people (see Feagin and Sikes, 1994; Boston, 1988).

A fourth proposition I offer is that these student narratives emphasize the need for educators and policy makers to address critical issues regarding the Black and minority communities, particularly the role of parents. As the student experiences show, Black parents have an important role to play in the education of their children. For example, they can educate their children about the history and contributions of their cultures and communities—filling in gaps often left by schools. My study rejected the thesis that Black parents are often not interested in their children's education. Certainly, the socioeconomic backgrounds of the families of the students affected how well the students did in school. This has to be acknowledged as a factor. Not every Black parent has a university degree or is financially well to do. However, because of the family backgrounds of one or two of the students, I can say that a Black family's education and socio-economic background is a necessary but not a sufficient factor in student achievement. I would suggest that a cultural respect for learning and valuing of education by Black parents (irrespective of their class or socioeconomic backgrounds)—thereby encouraging their children to work hard in school is a much stronger factor.

Through the student narratives, I have maintained that Black parents play a crucial role in the education of their children. The parents of these students are a testimony to that fact. At the same time, I have cited research that show that some Black parents are apathetic to their children's education. Why this inconsistency? I suggest that most Black and minority parents feel alienated by the school system. Schools do not appear to be responsive to the concerns of minority parents (Galindo, 1996). Cummins (1993) has suggested that a major reason previous attempts at

educational reform have been unsuccessful is that relationship between teachers and students and between schools and communities have remained essentially unchanged. He contends that the required changes involve *personal redefinitions* of the way classroom teachers interact with the children and communities they serve. Implementation of change is dependent upon the extent to which educators, both collectively and individually, redefine their roles with respect to minority students and communities. For example, there is a need to create a different kind of teacher-parent relationship, one that encourages teachers to become aware of families' resources, incorporate students' cultural knowledge in the curriculum, and redefines teachers' expectations of parents. Contact and collaboration among community and school members that provide opportunities for students, teachers, and community members to participate in the learning process are needed to strengthen minority parents' and community members' participation in the formal education of their children. When educators involve minority parents as partners in their children's education, parents appear to develop a sense of efficacy that communicates itself to children, with positive academic consequences (Villanueva, 1996; Galindo, 1996; Cummins, 1993). Often, parent-teacher or advisory committees are manipulated through misinformation and intimidation. The result, according to Cummins (1993) is that parents from dominated groups retain their powerless status, and their internalized inferiority is reinforced. Children's school failure can then be attributed to the combined effects of parental illiteracy and lack of interest in their children's education. In reality, notes Cummins, most parents of minority students have high aspirations for their children and want to be involved in promoting their academic progress. Cummins uses the Haringey project to illustrate one example of school/community relations. The teacher's role in such relations can be characterized along a *collaborative-exclusionary* dimension. According to Cummins, teachers operating at the collaborative end of the continuum actively encourage minority parents to participate in promoting their children's academic progress both in the

home and through involvement in classroom activities. A collaborative orientation may require the teacher to work closely with and communicate effectively, in a noncondescending way, with minority parents. On the other hand, teachers with an exclusionary orientation, tend to regard teaching as *their* job and are likely to view collaboration with minority parents as either irrelevant or detrimental to children's progress (Cummins, 1993, p. 110).

A fifth proposition I suggest has to do with another contradiction in my study. This has to do with the issue of sports and the Black community. I have gleaned from the student interviews that extra-curricular activity, such as participation in sports played a crucial factor in their school success. Yet, although they did use sport as an educational tool to enhance their academic resilience, most were unenthusiastic about it. Using Small's (1994) analysis, I offer this explanation. It is a myth that sports have opened doors for Blacks to succeed in North American society and that "successes in the sports and entertainment arenas tend to suggest the end of racialised barriers and the advent of a truly meritocratic society" (Small, 1994, p. 74). As Small observes, and I agree with that, this so-called success is only one aspect of the picture, and a partial aspect at that. In fact, in areas like sport and music, closer inspection shows phenomenal success for few key individuals but limited success for Blacks as a whole. Blacks dominate only certain sports, and certain fields of music. Furthermore, Blacks occupy marginal roles in coaching and managerial positions, and as I pointed out earlier, there are still widespread racialised stereotypes and theories of sporting ability which impede Black aspirations. My and the students' concerns are that this racialised stereotyping lead to Blacks being channelled into sport and away from academic and intellectual activities. We tend to forget that Blacks are not supreme in sport; they are simply the best in a tiny selection of sports (Small, 1994, p. 74; see also Hoose, 1989; Lapchick, 1984). For Small (1994), the outcome of all this is equally adverse for Black people:

They divert young people away from academic areas, encourage them to perpetuate the stereotypes and generate conflict. And, as is usual with much of the racialised hostility, the ideologies about Blacks held by non-Blacks reveal more about White attitudes than about Black attainments or qualities. They have to do with maintaining status quo in power relations, and in the distribution of resources within and outside the sporting world. Some writers believe that many of the basic aspects of 'scientific racism' remain believable to most Whites, and even to many Blacks. The fact that Blacks embrace these ideologies is explained more by their need to claim some superiority in certain arenas than by any convincing evidence (p. 106).

Finally, what about generability? Can the findings of this study be generalized based on a selected few Black students? As I stated in my introductory chapter, the research on Black education in Canada is few and just emerging. In fact, the education of African Canadian students in Canada is a subject that is hardly on the minds of Canadian educators. I have also stated that when it comes to Black education, the focus of research is largely on Black school failures. The experiences of successful Black students as a research focus has been minimal, even in the United States where much of the research on Black education takes place. Often, because Black students are presumed to be automatic failures at school, research on successful minority school experiences are primarily focused on Asian students. Nonetheless, some research has been done to find out why some Black students succeed—mostly in the United States. I have cited some of that research in this study. I have also cited research on other successful minority students (e.g., Asians and Native Americans). The results of these studies support the findings of my study on the successful educational experiences of Canadian Black youth in Alberta schools. Based on this, I can safely say that the findings of my study can be generalized in some way. I have already addressed the limitations of the study in Chapter 1. And I list below the directions for further research.



## **7.2 Summary of Major Research Findings**

Summarized below are what I believe to be the most important findings of this study.

1. **Contrary to popular opinion and research, not all Black students make poor choices about education. Minority status does not always lead to negative educational outcomes. In fact, despite current social inequities and hostile classroom and social environments, Black students develop successful academic skills. They can and do achieve as well as other students, and they have high expectations and aspirations. Black students do not need to “act White” to “make it” in school. Academically successful Black students need recognition. We must spread the good news of the accomplishments and achievements of Black learners.**
2. **Contrary to views held by many in the majority population that Blacks do not value or love education, this study shows that Black students and their parents *do* value education. Education is still seen by the Black community as the primary key to improving the self-concept, self-esteem, academic performance, and economic opportunities of African Canadians. In fact, the parents of some of the students in this study were motivated to immigrate to Canada by their aspirations for their children’s education. The importance of formal education for most African Canadians, as with other racial minority groups, can hardly be overstated.**
3. **Black students simultaneously operate in at least two different cultural paradigms: one is the acquired culture needed to survive in a predominantly White society, and the other is the heritage culture needed to maintain a healthy racial identity and positive self-esteem.**
4. **Maintaining Black and African cultures and language, although a conflicted decision, has a positive impact on the academic success of Black students. The more that Black students are involved in resisting assimilation while maintaining and expressing pride in their culture, the more successful they will be in school. A positive Black racial identity, enhanced with an awareness and knowledge of Black and African affairs, is crucial to school success. An Afrocentric pedagogic education is essential for the development of Black cultural identity and affirmation—a powerful impact on Black self-concept and self-esteem. African Canadian students need a sense of history and pride in their own culture and heritage, as well as the coping skills to deal with prejudice and racism. Parental role is critical in the formation of these positive cultural identities for Black youth.**

5. Black students do not experience school in the same way as their White peers—contrary to the colour-blind attitude of educators who view African Canadian students as “just like any other student.”
6. Black parents have an important role to play in the education of their children. They are an important influence on Black student academic achievement. As a matter of fact, the Black students in this study did well *because* of the support they received from their parents. Black family contribution and support are very critical. They are needed to fill in gaps often left by schools.
7. Although parents’ high socioeconomic levels can be seen as a positive variable, Black students from homes with modest incomes or in single-family households can also succeed in school.
8. Individual attitudes and behaviours of Black students toward school and time devoted to academic-related tasks are important for achievement. They are known to make substantive contributions to explaining achievement differences between high- and low-achieving Black students.
9. The use of sport and other extra-curricular activities as an educational tool can serve to enhance academic resilience for Black students. Sports is not seen here in the stereotypical way that is often associated with Blacks.
10. Racism, racial stereotypes and low teacher expectations of Black students continue to stand in the way of Black school success. Racial discrimination manifests itself at all levels of education, from pre-school to university to policymaking. Combating racism, particularly systemic racism, needs to be considered as essential to educational strategies at all levels of education. A reformed school curriculum can be seen as the main way of disseminating knowledge about Black culture and achievement, to non-Black students and some Black students.

### **7.3 Directions for Future Research**

I have identified a number of important areas worthy of further investigation. I hope these findings will guide further research in the Black educational experience. Below are some suggested examples.

1. Replicate and investigate similar themes of Black student success across Canada. Many more Black students will have to be studied to determine whether the features that emerged will apply to other successful Black students in different locales. The factors that contribute to Black school success identified in this

study need to be examined in greater depth so that educators can understand them more fully and apply them in appropriate contexts.

2. Investigate further the processes that explain why some Black students succeed in school and examine, in more depth, the different ecological contexts surrounding Black adolescents: the family, the school, the community and peer relationships. In addition, the impact of parents' marital status, household structure, income, educational background and the type of role models available should also be investigated. This should also include the role of school-level factors.
3. Because my student sample are a "voluntary" group of African Canadians, it would be interesting to find out whether my research findings could hold true for the many African refugees from Ethiopia and Somalia ("involuntary group") who now call Canada home. Would their particular circumstances as refugees help or hinder their academic achievement compared to Africans who arrived voluntarily?
4. Because of the changing nature of society, its families, and its schools, and because we do not yet precisely know how family environments interact with the schooling process for different age and sociocultural populations, the study of home environment and student achievement will be worthy of continuing study. Particularly, more accurate characterization of these environments, especially during the elementary school years, will help educators to work with parents to design and implement more useful intervention programs in which homes and schools work as partners.
5. Explore models for school-family-community collaborations regarding Black and minority education. How can schools in Alberta build and improve links with parents and the community to serve their minority school populations and to ensure that all students experience success? There is a need to examine community contributions to minority school success.
6. Given the prominence of Afrocentric education among many Black educators and students, an interesting research focus will be to find out what should be included in an Afrocentric curriculum for Black Canadian students and how it should be integrated into the school's overall educational goals in a manner that will not alienate other groups.
7. Further lines of inquiry for furthering our understanding of extracurricular activities as a resilient mechanism for Black student school success is also required.

#### **7.4 Personal Reflections**

Having now reached the end of my study, a few words of some personal reflections are in order. What does this study mean for me? As an education policy and planning analyst with an interest in Black and minority education, there is no doubt that this research experience has been very rewarding and satisfying for me. It has enriched my understanding of what Black students go through to attain successful educational experiences—not to mention their struggles. It has demonstrated to me the incredible resilience demonstrated by African Canadians and how they reach “deep into their culture, heritage and personal experiences to employ various tactics and strategies to resist the imposition of inequality, and to carve out space to create their own priorities” (Small, 1994, p. 13). It tells me that not only are students authorities on their own experiences, but they also bring critical insight to the complexities of many issues facing minority students in the education system. This suggests to me that Black youth experiences, questions, and critiques of, for example, the meanings of race/ethnicity in Canada are essential to developing an approach to multicultural/antiracist education. In this respect, the success of these students should be an inspiration to us. It is also the source of our future. I’m pleased that I can now add to my knowledge these student experiences. I’ll now concentrate my energies on making my findings more accessible to the public. I feel it’s my civic role. I owe it to my community. I agree with Martin (1996) that, “today, it is critical to educate for tolerance and civic responsibility” (p. 265).

Although this is a small study, I feel it is a modest and positive contribution to the general area of minority retention in schools, especially for Black students. I often feel helpless to help the many Black students and parents who, upon finding out that I work with the Department of Education, tell me their woes and frustrations with the education system. In all of this, they think I can do something about it because I am part of the “system.” This poses some challenges ahead for me. How can I be part of

the “system” and at the same time do something to help the Black community. In a way, I have become the Black community’s liaison or conduit to the Department of Education. I have been asked and I have offered advice on how to deal with the department on certain matters of interest to the Council of Black Organization. There is more to be done by individuals like myself and education officials at the local board and provincial levels. That’s why I welcomed the opportunity to work with Black students in the “field”—a student population that is poorly understood and highly stereotyped because of its superficial resemblance to Blacks in the United States and the relative lack of information on the group. Perhaps through this, and by readings of my study, their concerns and aspirations will reach the ears of the “powers that be.”

This makes me recall an earlier encounter with the idea of “putting something back into my community”—especially as an African Canadian who has “made it.” When I lived in Montreal and Ottawa some many years ago, I’m often asked by White Canadians why I’m not back in Ghana helping with national development efforts. Given the relative underdevelopment of African economies many wonder why educated and professional Africans like myself choose to remain in Western countries rather than go back to their home countries and as one remarked, “clean up the mess.” One of my professors even offered to help me find work in Ghana should I choose to go back. He also felt that it was *imperative* I return to Ghana to offer my services.

At the end of an interview to test my knowledge about Canadian affairs on whether or not I could become a Canadian citizen, the citizenship judge told me it was too bad that I’d chosen to remain in Canada rather than go back to Ghana where my education and skills would be most needed. “Canada has enough educated professionals and technocrats; it’s in the Third World where such people are critically needed,” he said. And on a visit to Ghana in 1987, one senior administrator of a

government ministry lamented on the terrible conditions in the country and told me, "it's because people like you have left the country and refuse to come back to help."

For many years now I've pondered over such accusations of betrayal to my home country and asked myself whether I did the right thing by remaining in Canada. It has also raised many serious questions in my mind: What responsibility do I have to Ghana? Am I obligated to return and help in any way? Why must I and other educated and professional Ghanaians bear much of the responsibility for Ghana's development? And why do I feel guilty for not being able to contribute to Ghana's development?

"Our traditions are not about making money and going places by ourselves," said A. Sivanandan, Director of the Institute of Race Relations in London, England, to underscore the special responsibility the educated and more affluent members of Third World societies have for the welfare of the less fortunate. Sivanandan continued:

There is nothing wrong with ambition and aspiration so long as you take the rest of the family with you. Aspire by all means, but take everyone else with you. Remember Nyerere once said that *the business of the educated is to return it to the people who gave it to them*. So, the question concerning aspirations become whether our identity is a collective one, which takes into account the hunger and poverty of our people, or is it about the individuals who have managed to escape the hunger, power and degradation and made it? *What I am saying is that if we are talking about Black people, Third World people, what they should be aspiring to is to lift their people above the poverty level*. That is a worthwhile aspiration. There is no reason why the individual aspiration should not also be the collective aspiration; but where the individual aspiration is only individual, you cease to be Black (cited in Codjoe, 1994b, p. 36; my emphasis).

To make the point further, consider what Andrew Hacker (1992) noted in his book on race relations in the United States, *Two Nations*, about how White America

always points to “the abandonment of the Black Community by significant segments of the Black middle class.” He wrote:

...And like all middle-class Americans, you will want to enjoy the comforts and pleasures that come with that status. One downside is that you will find many White people asking why you aren't doing more to help members of your own race whom you have supposedly left behind. There is even the suggestion that, by moving to a safer or more spacious area, you have callously deserted your own. *Yet hardly ever do middle-class Whites reflect on the fact that they, too, have moved to better neighborhoods, usually far from poorer and less equable persons of their own race or ethnic origins. There is little evidence that middle-class Whites are prepared to give much of themselves in aid of fellow Whites who have fallen on misfortune* (p. 44, my emphasis).

Herein lies the dilemma faced by many middle-class Africans, and explains the guilt some of us feel: How can we “enjoy the comforts and pleasures of middle-class status” *and* at the same time “lift our people above the poverty line” *without* being accused of “deserting our own?” In my case, now that I have chosen to make Canada my home, how can I contribute to developments in the Black community? What should I do to “overcome the crippling sorrow of estrangement”?

I have thought about this as I worked on this research. I believe I cannot change the world alone but within my own limited space I can contribute to whatever little that I have or can offer under the circumstances. As difficult as it is, I do believe that Black and other minority intellectuals can and should make a difference through an active engagement in counter-hegemonic struggles of resistance to racism, sexism, homophobia, and other forms of exploitation in our society (McLaren and Estrada, 1993). As Macias (1996) point out:

Above all, we are also citizens of society, individuals with an ethical responsibility to advance our common lot, to recover our own heritage, to inquire and document, inform academic and popular thinking, and

assume our social responsibility to combat racism and ethnocentrism (pp. 147-8).

I couldn't agree more. This study has indeed been an eye-opener in exploring and knowing the possibilities that are available to me to help with activities that will benefit the Black community in Alberta. I agree with W. E. B. Dubois that Black scholars cannot be cloistered in an ivory tower, but have a responsibility to be activist-scholars. As one scholar put it, "it's not good enough for us to interpret and critique social, cultural, and political phenomena. You can write the scholarship and still have a passion for democratic change. Somehow a whole generation of Black scholars seemed to forget that lesson" (Manning Marable, quoted in *Chronicle of Higher Education*, October 20, 1993, p. A17).

I believe, as African Canadians, we can also contribute to promote more global justice, including Canada-African political and economic relationships, lobbying to re-orient Canadian aid to Africa and the Caribbean, challenging IMF restructuring initiatives in Africa, etc. With this, I am suggesting that our contributions need not be just internal to Canada. This is where the perspective of global education<sup>2</sup> becomes useful. It offers some possible alternatives for North-South relationships, for example, in the field of education that can challenge the process of globalization and associated hegemonic ideologies (neoliberalism) in the social and economic reforms inspired by foreign agencies such as the World Bank and the IMF. Indeed, the rapid changes in international affairs pose greater challenges and calls for a global education at all levels and in all disciplines (see Pannu, 1996).

I also hope that this study will not be seen as relevant only for Black students. It is not to ascribe a special status to Black students and say "there is nothing in it"

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<sup>2</sup> I use global education here to mean: "Learning about issues that cut across national boundaries and about the inter-connectedness of systems, ecological, cultural, economic, and technological. Global education involves perspective taking, seeing things through the eyes, minds, and hearts of others; and it means the realization that while individuals and groups may view life differently, they also have common needs and wants" (cited in Ramler, 1991, p. 45).



for other minority, or even majority students. But considering the importance of addressing the inequalities in the curriculum and of preparing *all* children effectively to live in a multicultural society, curriculum reform and classroom instruction to reflect the diversity of Canadian society appears to me to be crucial. Thus, from the perspective of educational policy and practice, public education needs to be informed by social science analysis and research such as my study on the complex interactions between ethnocultural diversity and schooling. I believe this study contributes to this goal. It is designed to empower all students, teachers and administrators to become knowledgeable, caring, and active citizens in a multicultural society (Banks, 1993a; Boateng, 1990). My point is well summarized by Dei (1995b):

Although I focus on African studies, I do not negate or devalue the relevance of, and necessity for, other studies (e.g., Asian, European, or native education). In fact, I see it more as a challenge for educators to grapple with the same issues that the pursuit of African studies in the schools pose for other studies. It is difficult to understand the argument that the promotion of African studies would create polarization or a balkanization within the school curriculum to the extent of alienating some students (p. 153).

Another potential implication to be noted is in the general area of minority retention in schools. As I have previously pointed out, racial minority and immigrant groups from all over the world will increasingly dominate public schools well into the 21st Century. It is beneficial and appropriate for Canada to create the environment and conditions that would ensure the success and contributions of these groups. The study and its findings should be considered a major contribution to educators as they find ways to create this environment. For example, the key message of my findings shows the correlation between the students' self-identity, home support and school success. This is a clear reinforcement of the psychological principle that affirms that cognitive development is inseparable from social and cultural development. This I believe can apply to all students—not just Black students.

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## **APPENDIX A**

### **INTERVIEW GUIDE**

(Note: In preparing this Guide, I borrowed ideas from Talbani [1991]).

#### **1. Students' Background**

1. Tell me something about your background.

##### *Probes*

- Where were you born?
- Where did you grow up?
- How long have you lived and attended high school in Alberta?
- When did you graduate from high school?
- What are you doing now?
- Tell me about your family background + family structure + education + occupational status + how long in Canada (if applicable) + why family moved to Alberta/Canada + parents influence on you and your education + how was it like at home (Do your parents help you and take interest in your school work) + issues and concerns + the 'ups' and 'downs'
- Experiences you can recall growing up Black in your community/city
- Experiences within your family and community
- The role of home language and culture as pivotal to the quality of the learning environment

#### **2. Learning and Social Experience at School**

##### *Probes*

##### **General**

- Where did you go to school (including high school)?
- Did you graduate from high school? If so, what year?
- Can you describe your experiences at school?
- How would you describe the racial/ethnic composition of students and teachers?
- Can you provide some examples of their attitudes or interactions with you?

- Did you have any adjustment problems in your school? Did anybody help you?
- Who were your friends? Did you make friends just among other Black students?
- What kind of characteristics do you think Black students as a group bring to the school and classroom?
- How much of what you know today about Black history, politics, literature, ideas, etc. did you learn as a result of your education and experience in Alberta's schools?

#### Inter- and Intra-Group Relations/Ethnic-Racial Conflicts

- Did you ever feel that any kind of unfair practice or discrimination exists in school which keeps you away from participating in educational or extracurricular activities?
- Did you feel that you were been treated differently from other students because you're Black? (If so, in what ways)?
- What social and cultural problems did you perceive among students and teachers?
- Did you feel that you were labelled, stereotyped, and/or discriminated? Were there any racist incidents at school (e.g., name calling, graffiti)?
- Did you come across any remarks made about you, manners or other behaviour, positive or negative? Were these remarks made by teachers, fellow students, administrator, others?
- Did you notice or feel that students from different ethnic groups did not interact with each other?
- Were there school programs that helped to reduce inter-group tensions at school? If there were certain biases, did the school administration or teacher take notice of them? Were any attempts made to resolve them?
- What were your perceptions of ethnic/racial communities and how were they formed?

#### Teachers/Administrators

- Were you fairly treated by your teachers and administration?
- How were your teachers? Describe their qualities and attitudes towards minority students
- What were your teachers' expectations of you?

- Did teachers treat all students fairly and equally? Were they willing to help all students?
- Did you have teachers from minority groups?
- What kinds of things did your teachers do in classrooms that facilitated the academic success of Black students?

### School Experiences

- How would you generally describe your school experience? What were some of your experiences?
- What does education mean to you? What's your concept of education?
- Did you feel there were students who were treated better or worse than you?
- Were you a member of any school club or association? What did you like about them?
- Did your school have any specific community programs for ethnic and cultural minorities?
- Did your parents participate in parent committees, or in any other activities in school?
- What kind of role do you believe parents play in the success of Black students?
- How did you do in school? What were your school results like? What courses/programs did you take? Did you think the results fairly reflected your educational achievements?
- Did your school rules apply to all?
- Is cultural diversity/multiculturalism projected/represented in your school's cultural activities or celebrations?
- Did your school foster the view of ethnic group languages/cultures and lifestyles as appropriate means of expression?
- What did you like about your school, and what did you dislike about it?
- How do you think the schooling experiences of Black students differ from that of White students?
- What coping strategies did you develop in order to become academically successful?

### Student Experiences

- What were your perception of students at school?
- Were there groups of different ethnic background in harmony with each other?

- How did you make friends at school? What did you consider to be important characteristics in your friends? (e.g., ethnic/linguistic background, academic achievements, gender etc.)
- How would you describe the different groups or groupings of students? Who dominated student affairs and politics? Why?
- How would you describe relations among various groups of students?

### Curriculum

- Did the curriculum and other instructional and educational programs in your school project Canada/Alberta as multicultural and multiracial society?
- How would you describe the image of ethnic minorities which is formed through the curricula?
- Did the curriculum help resolve the value conflict which exists in a multiethnic society
- What images were portrayed of Blacks or Africans in curriculum materials, if at all?
- Did the school program help students develop skills necessary for effective interpersonal interactions with members of other cultures?
- Did your school have resources to help you study and to know about the different cultural and ethnic groups in the school?
- If you could revamp Alberta's curriculum so that it would be more responsive to the needs of minority students what changes would you make?

### Extracurricular Activities

- How would you narrate your experiences in extracurricular activities?
- In what type of activities did you participate, and what else did you like to do outside school?
- What is the nature of your participation in school programs such as parties, dance, and cultural programs?
- Did the extracurricular activities reflect the ethnic and cultural composition of the school?
- Are there impediments to minority participation in extracurricular activities?

### **3. General Societal Issues and Concerns**

#### *Probes*

##### Aspirations and Ambitions

- How did you make decisions about further education, career choices, or friends?
- What are your future goals? Do you perceive any problems in achieving your goals?
- How do you perceive Canadian and Alberta society and your future in it?
- Do you see yourself playing any role in future in your community?
- What values and beliefs would you like to transmit to your children?

##### Issues of Race, Culture, Identity, Class and Gender Equality

- How do you define yourself in cultural terms? Canadian? Black/African Canadian?
- How would you describe your experiences as a Black Canadian? Are there any critical incidents that come to mind?
- What problems do you think Blacks will face in Canadian/Alberta society?
- What problems do you think Blacks will face in Canadian/Alberta society?
- What role should Black women play at home and outside the home?
- What are your attitudes toward Black women/men? Is there equality of the sexes?
- Do you think the issue of gender equality has been addressed within Black families and community?
- Have you been ambivalent about your identity as a Black person?
- What role did school/family play in your identity formation?

##### Other

- social and academic adjustment
- negative stereotypes
- subtle experiences faced on a day-to-day basis in schools
- Eurocentric bias in the curriculum, bias in textbooks
- paucity of Black teachers and administrators
- formation of Black students' subcultures within the school systems
- values and beliefs

- cultural retention/acclimation
- dealing with attitudes toward race and racism
- what constitutes a positive, stimulating, effective educational environment
- personal ties, such as family, community, and friendship networks
- association such as clubs, societies, youth organizations
- role of media
- positive self-concept
- what responsibility do you have for your own academic performance

**APPENDIX B****DESCRIPTION OF PROJECT AND PROCEDURES**  
**FOR OBSERVING ETHICAL GUIDELINES**

(Please Type)

*Short Title*

**Black Students and School Success: A Study of the Experiences of Academically Successful African-Canadian Student Graduates in Alberta's Secondary Schools**

*Applicant*

**Henry M. Codjoe**

**Purpose:** The purpose of the study is to examine the experiences and narratives of Black/African Canadian student graduates in order to learn and document some of the significant factors that influence and contribute to Black educational achievement.

**Methodology:** To acquire data relative to the dissertation subject, a series of semi-structured interviews will be held with twelve former high school graduates who excelled in the Alberta school system and went on to post secondary institutions in the province. These interviews will provide a means for exploring and gathering experiential material which can contribute to the sources and strength of factors contributing to Black educational achievement.

The interviews will be tape-recorded and transcribed and analyzed for emergent themes and issues. All participants in the first set of (individual) interviews will be provided with the opportunity to review the transcripts and the analysis if they so wish. A second set of (focus group) interviews will be held with a number of the students to provide complementary or additional information not possible from a one-on-one interview. These interviews will be tape-recorded and transcribed to facilitate explanatory analysis.

**Nature of Involvement of Human Participants:** Study participants will be requested to participate in one, and a second, focus group interviews. Those who wish to receive a copy of the interview transcript and the thematic analysis of the transcript will be provided with the material.

**Are underage or “captive” participants involved?** No

Please describe clearly the specific procedures for observing the University of Alberta ethical guidelines for research involving human participants.

**1. Explaining the purpose and nature of research to participants:**

Participants will be selected from a pool of thirty students who responded to requests to take part in the study. A letter will be sent to selected participants by the researcher and will:

- a) Explain the nature of the study and the general procedures to be followed in the conduct of the study.
- b) Explain the projected time requirements for the interviews.
- c) Request the participation of the participant in the study and an indication of willingness to participate by the return of a Letter of Intent to Participate.
- d) Explain the procedures related to the Ethics of Research as per University of Alberta guidelines and the related guarantees of confidentiality and anonymity of participants in human science research.
- e) Explain the timelines for the research activities and their involvement in subsequent interpretation and reporting of the data.

**2. Obtaining informed consent of participants:**

All participants will be asked to indicate their willingness to participate in the study by returning a signed Letter of Intent to Participate to the researcher. Should further information be required by the potential participant before informed consent is given, the individual will be invited to speak with the researcher.

**3. Providing for exercising the right to opt out:**

All participants will be advised in the initial contact letter if they agree to participate, they are free to opt out of the study at any time. As well, the



Letter of Intent to Participate will contain a clause which acknowledges awareness of the participant to opt out of the study at any time.

4. Addressing anonymity and confidentiality issues:

All participants will be guaranteed both confidentiality and anonymity, and assigned a pseudonym which will be used in narrating responses. Data analysis will not reveal the names of schools, locations or other parties involved in describing student experiences. The researcher will provide a signed guarantee of confidentiality and anonymity to all participants.

5. Avoid threat or harm to participants or others:

All participants will be assigned a pseudonym which will be used in data reporting and analysis. The study will be devoid of names of participants, schools, or locations. Should any participant, upon reflecting on the transcribed data, feel that an experience or incident which was described might be potentially harmful, the participant may exercise the right to have any reference to that incident deleted from both the data analysis and the study.

6. Other procedures relevant to observing ethical guidelines not described above (e.g., training assistants directly involved in data collection): None.

**APPLICANT:** Please submit the completed application form together with a copy of the research proposal to the Department Chairman's Office.

When the application has been reviewed, a copy of the form will be returned to the applicant. The copy of the proposal will be retained on file.

## APPENDIX C

### LETTER OF INTENT TO PARTICIPATE IN DOCTORAL RESEARCH\*

To: (Name and address of participant)

*Thank you for your willingness to participate in this research project. Your participation is very much appreciated. Just before we start the interview, I would like to reassure you that as a participant in this study you have several definite rights. These are spelt out in the form below. I would read these to you and I would be grateful if you would sign the form to show you agree to its contents.*

*I am the principal investigator of this project and I may be contacted at this phone number (939-6664) should you have any questions.*

Please be advised that I, \_\_\_\_\_ do hereby agree to participate in your doctoral research project entitled, *Black Students and School Success: A Study of the Experiences of Academically Successful African-Canadian Student Graduates in Alberta's Secondary Schools*. This agreement is made subject to the following terms and conditions:

1. That the study is to be conducted as per the Ethics of Research as developed by the University of Alberta and as per the material found within the approved Research Ethics Review Application of the Department of Educational Policy Studies. Specifically, the following points are relevant to this approval, and it is to reassure you that as a participant in this project you have several definite rights:
  - (a) My participation in this interview is entirely voluntary, and as a participant, I am guaranteed of confidentiality and anonymity and any comments which are excerpted from the interview data for use in the study will be attributed to a pseudonym known only to the researcher. Under no circumstances will my name or identifying characteristics be included in this report.
  - (b) I may, at any time, decide to opt out of the study despite my initial agreement to participate, and free to refuse to answer any question at any time.

(c) Arrangements for interviews can be made to suit my schedule and commitments.

(d) Should I determine, after examining and reflecting upon the transcribed data, that an incident which was described might be potentially damaging, I may exercise the right to have any reference to that data deleted from the data analysis and final report.

(e) Approval is given subject to the signed guarantee of confidentiality and anonymity noted at the bottom of this form. I would sign this form to show that you have read me its contents.

(f) An executive summary and/or report of the final dissertation will be provided to (on request) in recognition of my assistance in the study.

(g) The interviews will be tape-recorded to facilitate transcription and data analysis.

(h) Copies of the transcribed data and thematic analysis will be provided to me as soon as feasible after the conclusion of the interviews.

\_\_\_\_\_ (signed)

\_\_\_\_\_ (printed)

\_\_\_\_\_ (dated)

Address for those requesting research report

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

\*(To be read by interviewer before beginning of the interview. One copy of this form (unsigned) would be left with the respondent, and one copy would be signed by the respondent and kept by the interviewer.)

**APPENDIX D****LETTER OF INTENT TO PARTICIPATE IN DOCTORAL RESEARCH:**  
**GUARANTEE OF CONFIDENTIALITY AND ANONYMITY**

I, **HENRY MARTEY CODJOE**, guarantee confidentiality and anonymity to \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_ with respect to interview data while conducting  
research related to my doctoral dissertation project entitled *Black Students and School  
Success: A Study of the Experiences of Academically Successful African-Canadian  
Student Graduates in Alberta's Secondary Schools*, and that no reference will be made  
to location in the attribution of excerpted responses. I also further guarantee that any  
comments used from the interviews in the study will be assigned a pseudonym and  
that the participant reserves the final right to approve the inclusion of excerpted data  
in the doctoral dissertation.

\_\_\_\_\_ (signed)  
Henry M. Codjoe

\_\_\_\_\_ (dated)

**APPENDIX E****LETTER SENT TO THE EDMONTON BLACK ORGANIZATION OF NUBIAN  
YOUTH (EBONY) SEEKING ASSISTANCE IN RESEARCH**

{date}

Dear Mr. / Ms.

As part of my Ph.D. program in International and Intercultural Education at the University of Alberta, I am conducting research on the successful educational experiences of Black students in the Alberta school system. I would be very grateful if you could assist me in locating students in your youth organization who have graduated from Alberta high schools in the past two to four years. I would particularly be interested in students who may agree to participate in the study. I would like to interview these students about their educational experiences.

I am enclosing a synopsis of the study for those who may wish to have an idea of the study. Please have students who would be interested in participating in the study to contact me directly, or give their names to Etornam Dugbazah, a member of EBONY. Thank you.

Sincerely,

(Henry M. Codjoe)

Address:  
8704-104 Avenue  
Morinville, Alberta T8R 1C4  
Telephone: 939-6664

## APPENDIX F

### HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE ON THE BLACK CANADIAN EXPERIENCE

(Adapted from Thakur, 1988, pp. 67-74)

- 1604-6 Mathieu de Costa, a Black man, travelled with the expedition on which Champlain came to the Atlantic region. Some accounts describe him as a free man; others say he was a servant to the governor of Port Royal, Pierre du Gua, sieur de Monts. De Costa served as an interpreter between the French and the Micmac Indians of the area.
- 1628 The first recorded slave purchase in New France - a boy from Madagascar, who was given the name of Olivier Le Jeune.
- 1685 The "Code noir" became law in France. The "Code noir," or "Black Code," provided elaborate guidance on such topics as the sale of slaves, their religious instruction and training, and the disposition of their offspring. It clearly ruled against slaves' intermarrying with whites, being the subject or object of lawsuits, or possessing military arms. The code was never proclaimed in New France, but cases of theft and escape by slaves appear to have been dealt with within the spirit of the code.
- 1709 Slavery became legal in New France.
- 1734 A slave girl, Marie-Joseph Angélique, in an attempted escape, set fire to her mistress's house. The fire spread, causing serious damage to buildings in the city of Montreal. The slave girl was captured and hanged under circumstances that brought attention to the conditions under which slaves lived.
- 1763 The 47th Article of Capitulation included in the Montreal surrender documents was affirmed by the Treaty of Paris, permitting slavery to continue after the British conquest of New France.
- 1777 Slaves in Canada escaped to Vermont, where slavery had been abolished.
- 1783 Arrival of the Black Loyalists from the United States. Many of them established viable communities in Nova Scotia. Although the Loyalists were promised 100 acres (40.5 ha) of farming land for supporting the British in the American War of Independence, Black Loyalists received varying amounts of poor-quality land, and, in some cases, none at all.

- 1785 John Marrant, a Black Loyalist, returned from England to Nova Scotia and established a Huntingdonian congregation among the Black population at Birchtown. Several Black churches of other religious denominations were founded at this time.
- A British charity group, the Associates of Dr. Bray, sent funds to build schools and hire teachers for Blacks. Black schools were later established in Halifax and neighbouring communities in Nova Scotia.
- 1791 Loyalists settled in Upper Canada in the Niagara frontier and Amherstburg areas. The British granted freedom to runaway Blacks who became Loyalists, while permitting white Loyalists to bring other Blacks as slaves. This policy created social tensions in colonial Canada, since the authorities had difficulty in differentiating between those who were free and those who were not. It also generated tensions in the Black community between slaves and freemen. Of the Loyalists who came to Canada, more than 10 per cent were Black.
- 1792 A large number (estimated at 1200, or a third) of the Black Loyalists in Nova Scotia and New Brunswick migrated to Sierra Leone, West Africa, because promises of free land and full equality in Canada had not been fulfilled.
- 1793 The first parliament of Upper Canada, led by Lieutenant-Governor John Graves Simcoe, prohibited the importation of Black slaves into Upper Canada. All children born after the act was passed would become free on reaching twenty-five years of age. Upper Canada became the first British territory to legislate against slavery, although the act itself did not abolish the condition of slavery.
- 1796 Arrival in Nova Scotia of the Maroons from Jamaica. The Maroons, who were the descendants of African slaves, had been fighting the British colonial government in Jamaica since 1655 to maintain their freedom. In 1796, they laid down their arms on the promise that they would be allowed to remain on the island. On the orders of the Earl of Balcarres, the governor of Jamaica, they were deported to Nova Scotia in three transport ships. The British officer, Major-General Walpole, who negotiated the terms of settlement, refused a sword of honour worth 500 guineas from the government of Jamaica because of its action in deporting the Maroons from Trelawney, Jamaica. After assisting in building the Citadel in Halifax, Nova Scotia, many Maroons departed for Sierra Leone in August 1800 in search of a better life.
- 1813-15 Two thousand Black refugees came from the United States to Nova Scotia and New Brunswick during the War of 1812.
- 1826 A Black preacher, Rev. W. Christian, established the First Baptist Church in Toronto.

- 1833 The British Parliament passed an act abolishing slavery in all British territories on August 28, 1833.
- 1834 As a result of the act of 1833, at midnight on July 31, 1834, slavery came to an end in British North America. August 1 is still celebrated as Emancipation Day in Windsor, Ontario, and elsewhere.
- 1837 Black militia units participated in putting down the rebellion of 1837, started by William Lyon Mackenzie. Josiah Henson, whose name was formerly associated with Harriet Beecher Stowe's novel Uncle Tom's Cabin, fought on the side of the government in this rebellion. He helped to capture an enemy American ship that was threatening the town of Sandwich.
- 1841-42 Beginning of the Dawn Settlement in Canada West in what is now Dresden, Ontario. The Dawn Settlement was one of the most famous attempts to establish Black self-help agricultural communities in Ontario.
- 1842 By 1842 the Canada Mission had established fifteen schools in such Black communities as Amherstburg, Toronto, and Oro.
- 1850 The Common School Act, clause 19, provided for the creation of separate schools for Blacks as well as Roman Catholics. At the request of five or more families, a school could be established. This was used by local officials as the basis for providing separate schools for Black children. In many instances, white residents refused to have their children attend schools with Blacks, and in Hamilton, for example, there were riots when parents tried to prevent Black children from attending white schools.
- In the United States, the Fugitive Slave Act was passed. It stipulated that even free men could be enslaved if suspected of being runaways. This led to an increase in Black migration northwards (both freemen and slaves), and to the enlargement of Black communities in southwestern Ontario at Windsor, Buxton, Dawn, Sandwich, Chatham, and Toronto. Modern researchers estimate that the Black population in Ontario reached 40,000 by 1860.
- 1851 Harriet Tubman, the famous fugitive who was responsible for freeing some three hundred slaves, began her journeys, ferrying slaves across the border on the Underground Railroad. She made nineteen such journeys, guiding slaves to freedom in North America.



1851-3 The Anti-Slavery Society of Canada was established at City Hall, Toronto.

The Black press began to emerge with the establishment of the Voice of the Fugitive in 1851 and the Provincial Freeman in 1853. The Provincial Freeman was started by Samuel Ringgold Ward and later edited by Mary Ann Shadd, the first woman editor of a Canadian newspaper. The Voice of the Fugitive was begun by Henry Bibb, who had escaped on at least five occasions from his master. It is significant that, at a time when newspapers were a rarity, Canada's Black community had two important publications advocating advanced views on the direction of Black society.

1854 Formation of the African Baptist Association of Nova Scotia.

1856 Formation of the British Methodist Episcopal Church (B.M.E.), an all-Black, entirely Canadian organization. Members of this newly formed body had belonged to the Canadian conference of the African Methodist Episcopal Church (A.M.E.). However, the strong American ties of the A.M.E., and the desire of the fugitives to be associated with British institutions, led most Black Methodists to withdraw and establish the new church. Rev. Willis Nazrey became the first bishop of the B.M.E. Church.

1858 Blacks migrated from San Francisco, California, to British Columbia on the steamer Commodore.

1859 Abraham Shadd was elected to the Raleigh town council. He was the first Canadian Black to be elected to public office.

1860 The all-Black Victoria Rifle Corps was formed to defend British Columbia.

1861 Outbreak of the American Civil War. About two-thirds of the Black population in Upper and Lower Canada returned to the United States to fight for the freedom of other Blacks. By the end of the century, the Black population in Canada numbered about 17,500.

Dr. Anderson Ruffin Abbott became the first Canadian-born Black to graduate from medical school (University of Toronto). He later served as coroner for Kent Country and chief resident physician at the Toronto General Hospital.

1863 The Emancipation Proclamation was passed in the United States.

1869 Mifflin Gibbs served as a member of Victoria's municipal government from 1869 to 1870. He was a delegate to the Yale Convention held in 1868 when British Columbia was persuaded to join the Canadian confederation. He was also a partner in a thriving business establishment, Lester and Gibbs, which gave the Hudson's Bay Company significant competition.

- 1882 John Ware introduced longhorn cattle into Canada and pioneered the development of the rodeo. A monument in his honour can still be seen in Calgary. His home has been declared a historic site.
- 1894-1913 Alderman William P. Hubbard, representing Ward 4 in Toronto, served thirteen consecutive terms as alderman; was controller and acting mayor of the city of Toronto; and was influential in founding the Home Service Association, Toronto Hydro, and Ontario Hydro. He was instrumental in establishing the Toronto Transit Commission and contributed to the development of Toronto as justice of the peace, school trustee, and harbour commissioner. His home still stands at 660 Broadview Avenue in Toronto and has been marked by a commemorative plaque.
- 1904 The birth of Charles Drew, a Black doctor born in the United States and educated at McGill University, who discovered a process for the storing of blood plasma.
- 1909 The first group of Oklahoma Blacks arrived in Saskatchewan.
- 1910 Delos Rogest Davis of Amerherstburg became the first Black to be appointed King's Counsel in Ontario. Davis was not allowed to go to law school because of his race. He distinguished himself, however, at the bar exams and was subsequently appointed King's Counsel.
- 1911 A public outcry against increased Black migration to the Canadian West resulted in the passage of Canada's first official restrictive immigration laws.
- 1916 The Nova Scotia No. 2 Construction Battalion was formed as a segregated unit to enlist Blacks for service in the First World War.
- 1919-24 There was a Black migration from Canada to the United States. Among the 2,065 who left were many talented Blacks.
- 1919 The Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters, a predominantly Black union, was recognized by the Brotherhood of Railway Workers. This led to the removal of the racial clause from the constitution of the Brotherhood of Railway Workers.

In the early 1900's, the railway companies hired many Blacks as porters. A good number of them had come from the United States and the West Indies. A community of Blacks linked to the railway developed in the St. Antoine Street district of Montreal, because Montreal was the headquarters of the CPR and regional eastern centre for the CNR.

- 1921-23 In the United States, Marcus Garvey, a Jamaican, began a world movement that fostered the development of Black pride and an appreciation of African heritage throughout the Americas. The movement also encouraged some Blacks to return to Africa, and, in Canada, it led to the formation of chapters of the worldwide Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA), which is today called the Universal African Improvement Association (UAIA). These organizations flourished with the movement of Blacks from rural areas to the cities of Montreal, Halifax, Toronto, and Vancouver. In the early 1920's, the UNIA became the voice of protest for Blacks in Nova Scotia and Quebec.
- 1939-45 During the Second World War, Canadian Blacks again enlisted in the armed forces. There were no segregated units, but many Blacks were assigned to the duties of cook and orderly. There was evidence of discriminatory practices towards Black members of the armed forces, though this was not universal.
- 1953 The Canadian Negro, a national newspaper, was established in Toronto.
- 1954 For the first time, a delegation of Black Canadians met with members of the federal cabinet to discuss discrimination against West Indians applying to enter Canada.
- 1955 The Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters won Blacks the right to be promoted to conductor.
- 1955-65 The third wave of migration from the Caribbean began. Because job requirements were oriented towards domestic labour, the majority of these migrants were women. Many highly qualified women entered Canada through this medium, seeing it as the only available legal avenue to achieve social mobility overseas. Many of these Black women were able to take advantage of opportunities for further education to improve their status in Canadian society. During this period, a total of 2,690 women came from the Caribbean to Canada under the Household Service Workers Scheme. Fifty per cent of them were from Jamaica. In order to increase their chances for acceptance in the program, some women did not declare that they had children whom they were leaving in their home country, since this fact would have been viewed negatively by the immigration authorities.
- 1955 Desegregation of services in southwestern Ontario (Dresden and Chatham) and elsewhere was influenced by the National Unity Association, a Black civil rights group, in union with the Jewish Labour Committee. The resulting act was called The Fair Accommodation Practices Act in Ontario.

- 1958 Dr. Monestime, a Black from Haiti, became mayor of Mattawa, Ontario. He served as mayor for twenty years (1958-78).
- 1961 Calvin Best, a Black Nova Scotian, was named president of the Civil Service Association of Canada.
- The Ontario Human Rights Commission was formed to administer the Human Rights Code, which was a consolidation of all the fair-practice statutes. A significant appointment from the Black community was that of Dr. Daniel G. Hill as full-time director of the first Human Rights Commission in Canada.
- 1962 Canadian immigration policy changed, with new regulations being introduced that emphasized the education and skills of the applicant as the main criteria for entry. These regulations resulted in what was known as the "point system," which came into being in 1967. These were regarded as favourable regulations by Blacks.
- 1964 An act to amend The Separate Schools Act was passed. It led to the removal of all references to separate schools for Blacks from existing legislation. Leonard Braithwaite, the first Black to be elected to a provincial parliament, was instrumental in the introduction of the act. The last segregated school in Ontario, in Essex Country, closed its doors in 1965.
- 1968 Lincoln Alexander of Hamilton, Ontario, became the first Black member of the federal parliament.
- 1969 Representatives of Black organizations and institutions met in Toronto and established the National Black Coalition of Canada, the first such national Black organization in Canada.
- 1971 Harry Jerome was awarded the Order of Canada medal of service "for excellence in all fields of Canadian life."
- 1972 Rosemary Brown and Emery Barnes became the first Black members of the British Columbia legislature.
- 1973 A general amnesty was granted to all non-status immigrants in Canada.
- 1974 Rev. Dr. Wilbur Howard, born February 29, 1912, in Toronto, became the first Black moderator of the United Church of Canada.
- 1975 Fifteen hundred Haitians were deported from Canada. The authorities did not accept their rationale for seeking refugee status under the Refugee Status Act.

- 1976 The Green Paper on Immigration, tabled in Parliament at this time, introduced controversial changes in immigration requirements, which were opposed by members of the Black community.
- Jean Alfred, Parti Quebecois member, became a minister of the Quebec legislature.
- Stanley G. Grizzle became Canada's first Black federal citizenship court judge.
- 1979 Lincoln Alexander, Member of Parliament for Hamilton West, became the first Black cabinet minister of the federal government as Minister of Labour.
- 1980 After twelve years' service as a member of Parliament, Lincoln Alexander resigned his seat to become chairman of the Ontario Workmen's Compensation Board. Today (1988) he is the Governor General of Ontario.

## APPENDIX G

### BLACKS IN CANADA

(Adapted from Govia and Lewis, 1988, pp. 37-39)

Provided in this section are the works that take a broad look at the history of black Canadians. Major topic areas are: Slavery in New France, black settlement in early Canada, blacks in Ontario, Nova Scotia and New Brunswick and the development of early black communities. Some of these works, example, Winks and Walker, provide some reference to blacks in the West, the problems with Canada's Immigration policy, the coming of the West Indians, and the relaxation of Canada's immigration policy.

Bertley, Leo. W.  
**Canada and its People of African Descent.** Pierrefonds, Quebec: Bilongo Publishers, 1971.

Bertley, Leo.  
**Montreal's Oldest Black Congregation: Union Church 3007 Delisle Street.** Pierrefonds, Quebec: Bilongo Publishers, 1976.

Provides an example of the role the black church played in the survival of blacks in the New World.

Craig, Gerald M.  
**Upper Canada: The Formative Years 1784-1841.** Toronto: McClelland and Stewart Limited, 1963.

Presents a comprehensive history of Canada.

Greaves, Ida.  
**The Negro in Canada.** McGill University Economic Studies, no. 16, National Problems of Canada. Orillia, Ontario: Packet-Times Press, 1931, 79-140.

Hallam, W. T.  
**Slave Days in Canada.** Reprinted from *The Canadian Churchman*. Read before Women's Canadian Historical Society, Toronto, April, 1919.

This booklet praises the humane treatment given to the slaves by their Canadian masters while giving a cursory look at the existence of slavery in several parts of Canada and in England.

Hill, Daniel G.

**The Freedom Seekers: Blacks in Early Canada.** Agincourt, Ontario: The Book Society of Canada, Ltd., 1961.

A well-illustrated account of blacks in Canada, focusing on the nineteenth century Ontario blacks.

Israel, Wildred Emmerson.

**The Montreal Negro Community.** (M.A. Thesis, McGill University, 1928.)

Landon, Fred.

**The Anti-Slavery Society of Canada.** *Journal of Negro History* 4, no. 1 (January, 1919): 33-40.

Discusses the formation of the association in 1881 whose task was that of aiding the fugitives.

Lawson, Hilary.

**Black Immigration to Canada, 1783-1975.** (M.A. Thesis, University of Waterloo, 1979).

Porter, Kenneth.

**Negroes in the Fur Trade.** *Minnesota History* 15 (1934): 421-433.

Blacks were involved in the fur trade not only as slaves and servants, but as independent entrepreneurs. Also deals with the fact that Indians perceived blacks as white men.

Potter, Harold H.

**The Occupational Adjustments of Montreal Negroes, 1941-1948.** (M.A. Thesis, (Sociology), McGill University, 1949).

Riddell, W.R.

**The Slave in Upper Canada.** *Journal of Negro History* 4, no. 4 (October, 1919): 372-95.

A look at the legality of slavery in Canada.

Riddell, William Renwick.

**Slavery in Canada.** *Journal of Negro History* 5, no. 3 (July, 1920): 261-378.

Argues that slavery existed in Canada before the British conquest 1759-60, and cites the sale of a youth from Madagascar for 50 half crowns in 1628.

Rowan, Carl T.

**Negroes in Canada.** *Ebony*. 15 (August, 1960) 98-106.

Sheffe, Norman, ed.  
**Many Cultures Many Heritages.** Toronto: McGraw-Hill Ryerson Limited, 1975.

A section of the book gives a concise history of the presence of blacks in Canada from 1628.

Talbot, Carol.  
**Growing Up Black in Canada.** Toronto: Williams-Wallace Publishers Inc., 1984.

The author uses vivid anecdotes to speak to the issue of the black presence in Canada.

Tulloch, Headley.  
**Black Canadians: A Long Line of Fighters.** Toronto: New Canada Press, 1975.

This book gives an overview of the achievements of blacks.

Walker, J.W. St. G.  
**A History of Blacks in Canada: A Study Guide for Teachers and Students.** Hull, Quebec: Canadian Government Publishing Centre, 1980.

This study presents a concise account of the presence of blacks in Canada paying great attention to the waves of blacks entering Canada.

Winks, Robin W.  
**The Canadian Negro, A Historical Assessment Part II: The Problem of Identity.** *Journal of Negro History* 54, no. 1 (January, 1969): 1-18

The author highlights several problems that prevent blacks from presenting a unified front. He discusses the individualistic approach, geographic dispersal, a weak and indifferent middle class, and the small size of its community as contributing factors to the group's political effectiveness.

Winks, Robin W.  
**The Canadian Negro: A Historical Assessment.** *Journal of Negro History* 53, no. 4, (October, 1968): 283-300.

Argues that Canadians deny any racial discrimination against blacks preferring to see the problem as an American phenomenon.

Winks, Robin.  
**The Blacks in Canada: A History.** New Haven: Yale University Press, 1971.

A landmark work that discusses the presence of blacks in Canada from the 1600s to 1969.



## APPENDIX H

### BLACKS IN ALBERTA

(Adapted from Govia and Lewis, 1988, pp. 60-62)

Provides a look at the rise of racism in the United States after the emancipation of slavery, the movement of Southern blacks to Oklahoma, the rise of Jim Crow Laws, the movement of blacks to Western Canada, the problem of "Keeping the West White," and black settlements in Saskatchewan and Alberta.

Carter, Velma and Wilma Leffler Akili.

**The Window of Our Memories.** St. Albert, Alberta: B.C.R. Society of Alberta, 1981.

This well-illustrated book deals with the memories of blacks in Alberta whose ancestors migrated from the U.S. to settle in areas of the province during the turn of the century.

Dempsey, Hugh.

**Black White Man.** *Alberta Historical Review* 6, no. 3 (Summer, 1958): 7-11.

The Blackfoot Indians saw no difference between the black man and the white man except in terms of color. Henry Mills worked among the Blackfoot Indians as a laborer for the American Fur Company. He later married an Indian girl and fathered a son, Dave Mills who later gained "respect and prestige in the Canadian frontier" as an interpreter.

Franklin, Jimmie Lewis.

**The Blacks in Oklahoma.** Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1980.

Details the movement of blacks to Oklahoma, the age of segregation, and their readjustment.

Freuchen, Peter.

**The Legend of Dan William.** New York: Julian Messner, Inc., 1956.

The legend of Dan William lived on long after his death. Dan had the reputation of an outlaw – one who took matters into his own hands.

Grow, Stewart.

**The Blacks of Amber Valley: Negro Pioneering in Northern Alberta.** *Canadian Ethnic Studies* 6, no. 1-2 (1974): 17-38.

Provides a detailed account of the movement of blacks from Oklahoma between 1910-1912 to form a settlement in Amber Valley, Alberta. Interviews with many early pioneers are used to provide the background to their struggles with both the white Canadians and the harsh environment, and how they managed to enrich the culture and contributed to the racial diversity of the province.

Hill, Mozell C.

**The All-Negro Community of Oklahoma: The Natural History of a Social Movement.** *Journal of Negro History* 31, no. 3 (July, 1946): 254-268.

The plans to make Oklahoma an all black state is examined along with the development of the black communities in Oklahoma and the problems that followed Oklahoma's status as a state in 1907.

Hill, Judith.

**Alberta Black Settlers: Study of Canadian Immigration Policy and Prejudice.** (M.A. Thesis, University of Alberta, 1981).

MacEwan, Grant.

**John Ware's Cow Country.** Saskatoon, Saskatchewan: Western Producer Prairie Books, 1972.

The story of the legendary John Ware who was born a slave in the United States and rose to become one of the most famous cowboys in Canadian history.

Palmer, Howard and Tamara Palmer.

**Urban Blacks in Alberta.** *Alberta History*, 29, no. 3 (Summer, 1981): 8-18.

An objective and concise account of the presence of blacks in Alberta, tracing their appearances, their differing cultural backgrounds, and their experiences with racism. The article also mentioned the institutions they developed and maintained.

Richards, Eugene S.

**Trends of Negro Life in Oklahoma as Reflected by Census Reports.** *Journal of Negro History* 33, no. 1 (January, 1948): 38-52.

Provides background to the life of blacks in Oklahoma.

Shepard, Bruce.

**Black Migration as a Response to Repression: The Background Factors and Migration of Oklahoma Blacks to Western Canada 1905 to 1912, As a Case Study.** (M.A. Thesis, University of Saskatchewan, 1976).

Thomson, Colin A.

**Dark Spots in Alberta.** *Alberta History* 25, no. 4 (Autumn, 1977): 30-35.

The anti-black reaction of Albertans against the blacks moving in from Oklahoma led to a resolution passed by the Board of Trade in Edmonton. Thomson provides background material on the problems of racism faced by the new immigrants.

Thomson, Colin A.

**Blacks in Deep Snow: Black Pioneers in Canada.** Don Mills, Ontario: J.M. Dent & Sons (Canada) Limited, 1979.

An account of the white racism that accompanied the presence of blacks in Western Canada is the major theme of this work.

Troper, Harold Martin.

**The Creek-Negroes and Canadian Immigration 1909-11.** *The Canadian Historical Review*, 53, no. 3 (September, 1972): 272-288.

An excellent article on the anti-Negro sentiments in Canada, in particular in the West. It shows how the policies helped to influence the immigration legislations in relation to specific ethnic groups.

Troper, Harold M.

**Only Farmers Need Apply. Official Canadian Government Encouragement of Immigration from the United States 1896-1911.** Toronto: Griffin House, 1972.

Canada, in attempting to lure the American farmer, faced the dilemma of how to exclude the black American farmer from settling in the West.

## APPENDIX I

### BLACK VOICES

(Adapted from Govia and Lewis, 1988, pp. 86-95)

This is a selection of essays, criticisms commentaries, analyses, novels, poetry, and drama that deal with how the blacks viewed their historical experiences in New World societies.

Andrew, William L.  
**Critical Essay on W.E.B. Du Bois.** Boston, Massachusetts: G.K. Hall & Co., 1985.

A review of some of Du Bois' work.

Anenes, Joseph C. and Godfrey Broron, eds.  
**Africa in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries: A Handbook for Teachers and Students.** Ibadan: Ibadan University Press, 1965.

An overview of African development from an African perspective.

Angelou, Maya.  
**All God's Children Need Travelling Shoes.** New York: Random House, 1986.

Provides her account of joining a colony for black Americans in Ghana.

Angelou, Maya.  
**The Heart of a Woman.** New York: Random House, 1981.

The book is basically about author's relationship with her son.

Angelou, Maya.  
**I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings.** New York: Random House, 1969.

Looks at the tragedies and triumphs of growing up as a black woman in the United States.

Arnold, Edward, F.  
**Some Personal Reminiscences of Paul Laurence Dunbar.** *Journal of Negro History* 17, no. 4 (October, 1932): 400-408.

The author fondly remembers poet, Paul Laurence Dunbar as being a gentle and humane man, deeply interested in the condition of his own people.

**Arnott, Kathleen.**

**African Myths and Legends.** London: Oxford University Press, 1967.

Tales are about the belief systems of Africans.

**Baker, Ross K., ed.**

**The Afro-American.** Cincinnati: Van Nostrand Reinhold Company, 1970.

Contributors present a provocative discussion on historical and contemporary themes in the lives of black Americans..

**Baldwin, James.**

**Nobody Knows My Name.** New York: The Dial Press, 1961.

**Baldwin, James.**

**The Fire Next Time.** New York: The Dial Press, 1963.

Recounts the author's early religious experiences and speaks out against the injustices done to blacks.

**Bame, Kwabena N.**

**Come to Laugh: African Traditional Theatre in Ghana.** New York: Lilian Barber Press, Inc., 1985.

An explanation along with two plays about "concert parties" which identify the musicals, theatrical and social aspects of Ghanaian life.

**Banks, William L.**

**The Black Church in the United States: Its Origin, Growth, Contributions and Outlook.** Chicago: Moody Press, 1972.

Looks at the impact and contributions of the black church in the areas of religious life and music.

**Berger, Terry.**

**Black Fairy Tales.** New York: Atheneum, 1969.

Land, people, and mood of the blacks of South Africa are dealt with.

**Bigsby, C.W.E., ed.**

**The Black American Writer: Poetry and Drama Vol. 2.** Baltimore, Maryland: Penguin Books, Inc., 1971.

The essays by both black and white writers examine the major talents and difficulties faced by black writers.

**Bigsby, C.W.E.**

**The Second Black Renaissance: Essays in Black Literature.** Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1980.

The author uses a series of essays in his examination of the cultural renaissance. He sees the beginning of the second renaissance as emerging around 1964 as there was a dramatic outpouring of literary, visual, and performing arts by blacks in the United States.

**Blassingame, John W., ed.**

**New Perspectives on Black Studies.** Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1971.

Several insightful and thought-provoking articles that define and question aspects of black culture are presented in this work.

**Bontemps, Arna, ed.**

**We Have Tomorrow.** Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1945.

The stories are written with the intent to inspire good career choices for young people.

**Brand, Dionne.**

**Chronicles of the Hostile Sun.** Toronto: William-Wallace Publishers, Inc., 1984.

These poems were written during the author's ten-month stay in Grenada and chart the revolution and the fight against imperialism.

**Brown, Claude.**

**Manchild in the Promised Land.** New York: The Macmillan Company, 1965.

A novel which centres on the theme of the struggle of a black man in his bid to attain equality in the United States.

**Chapman, Abraham, ed.**

**Black Voices: An Anthology of Afro-American Literature.** New York: New American Library, 1968.

The anthology traces the development of folklore, spirituals, poems, and prose of black Americans.

**Childress, Alice.**

**A Hero Ain't Nothing But a Sandwich.** New York: Coward, McCann & Geoghegan, 1973.

A brilliantly entertaining novel written in street vernacular about a 13-year old on his way to becoming a heroin addict.

**Clarke, Austin.**

**Amongst Thistles and Thorns.** Toronto: McClelland and Stewart Limited, 1984.

The novel is about a young boy who runs away from home and encounters unsavory characters. His encounters reveal the harsh realities of life.

**Clarke, Austin.**

**Growing Up Stupid Under the Union Jack: A Memoir.** Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1980.

Humor is used to underwrite the cultural ambivalence of a West Indian growing up during the colonial period of the 1940s.

**Clarke, Austin.**

**The Prime Minister.** Don Mills, Ontario: General Publishing Co., Limited, 1977.

This novel deals with the theme of the exile returning home to take up a position of power.

**Clarke, Austin.**

**Proud Empires.** London: Victor Gollancz Ltd., 1986.

This novel gives a view of life in Barbados during the 1950s.

**Clarke, John Henrik, ed.**

**American Negro Short Stories.** New York: Hill and Wang, 1966.

The book is the creative expression of well-known black writers.

**Clarke, John Henrik, et al.**

**Black Titan W.E.B. Du Bois.** Boston: Beacon Press, 1978.

A look at Du Bois as a leader who tried to replace Booker T's accommodating ideals for blacks with those of equal opportunity.

**Coombs, Orde, ed.**

**We Speak As Liberators: Young Black Poets.** New York: Dodd, Meade and Company, 1970.

The themes in this book focused on the common experiences of oppression suffered by black Americans.

**Coombs, Orde, ed.**

**What We Must See: Young Black Storytellers.** New York: Dodd, Mead & Company, 1971.

Angry themes about urban slums, abuse, and identity on one hand, and victory on another, pervade the pages of this anthology.

**Coulthard, G.R., ed.**

**Caribbean Literature: An Anthology.** London: University of London Press, 1966.

**Cromwell, Liz, ed.**

**One Out of Many: A Collection of Writings by 21 Black Women in Ontario.** Toronto: Wacacro Productions, 1975.

A collection of short stories and poetry by black Canadian women.

Dathorne, O.R.

**Dark Ancestor: The Literature of the Black Man in the Caribbean.** Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1981.

Discusses the cultural interrelationship between Africa and the New World.

Du Bois, Burghardt, W.E.

**Black Folk Then and Now: An Essay in the History and Sociology of the Negro Race.** New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1939.

This book attempts to shed light on the definition of the Negro as a race, his African roots, and the diffusion of men and culture to other parts of the world. The book offers intriguing information about some of the Pharaohs in Egypt who were black.

Du Bois, Burghardt, W.E.

**The Negro.** London: Oxford University Press, 1970.

The book attempts to pull together the many aspects of African history.

Du Bois, Burghardt, W.E.

**The Souls of Black Folk.** rev. New York: Dodd, Mead and Company, 1961.

Agitates for equal rights for blacks in 1903, when such views were not encouraged.

Elliott, Lorris, ed.

**Other Voices: Writings by Blacks in Canada.** Toronto: William-Wallace, 1985.

Anthology of poems, short stories, and dramatic pieces by English speaking black Canadians.

Erceg, Donald.

**The Image Is You.** Text by Robert Cole. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1968.

Candid photo shots that reflect the sombre mood of the black ghetto in Roxbury, Boston are the highlights of this book.

Ford, Nick Aaron and H.L. Faggett.

**Best Short Stories by Afro-American Writers: 1925-1950.** Boston: Meador Publishing Company, 1969.

The characters are a new breed of blacks who are portrayed as normal human beings, subject to natural emotional outbursts.



**Frazier, Franklin, E.**

**Black Bourgeoisie: The Rise of a New Middle Class in the United States.** Glencoe, Illinois: The Free Press and the Falcon's Wing Press, 1957.

This book is a sociological study of the values, behaviors and attitudes of a social class of black Americans, referred to as "black bourgeoisie."

**Hamilton, Virginia.**

**Zeely.** New York: Collier Books, 1967.

About a character who creates a fantasy about being a queen. (Juvenile)

**Hansberry, Lorraine.**

**A Raisin in the Sun: A Drama in Three Acts.** New York: The New American Library, 1978.

This drama deals with the ordinary black family's need and courage.

**Huggins, Nathan Irvin, ed.**

**Voices from the Harlem Renaissance.** New York: Oxford University Press, 1976.

A highly useful work that presents the Harlem Renaissance as a time of the awakening of black consciousness.

**Hughes, Langston and Anna Bontemps, eds.**

**The Poetry of the Negro 1746-1949.** New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1949.

Examines the black experience in the Western world.

**Hunter, Kristin.**

**The Soul Brothers and Sister Lou.** New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1968.

Intended for young people, this novel focuses on racial discoveries and shows how it leads to the identification with positive black values such as spirituality, close family relationships, and an enriching cultural milieu.

**Jones, LeRoi.**

**Black Music.** New York: William Morrow & Company, Inc., 1967.

A discussion of the development of jazz.

**Jones, LeRoi.**

**Blues People: Negro Music in White America.** New York: William Morrow and Company, 1963.

The thesis of the book is that blues is an American creation and is a result of blacks adjusting to their new environment.

Jones, Eldred D.

**Wole Soyinka.** New York: Twayne Publishers, 1973.

This book is a critical analysis of the writer's works.

King, Bruce, ed.

**West Indian Literature.** London: The Macmillan Press Ltd., 1979.

Provides a survey of the literary history of the West Indies.

Kochman, Thomas.

**Black and White Styles in Conflict.** Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1981.

An illuminating thesis on communication problems between blacks and whites.

Lee, Harper.

**To Kill A Mockingbird.** New York: Popular Library, 1977.

A Pulitzer Prize winning novel about a white woman's claims of being assaulted by a black man, and the subsequent polarization of the two races.

Montgomery, Ruth and Edna McGuire.

**Stories from 3 Islands, Haiti, Jamaica, Puerto Rico.** New York: Friendship Press, 1977.

The islands are seen through the eyes of the children. Cultural, historic, and religious strains are brought to the forefront.

Moore, Gerald.

**Modern African Writers Wole Soyinka.** New York: Africana Publishing Corporation, 1971.

This book discusses the playwright's early beginnings and enthusiastically praises his creativity.

Morrison, Toni.

**Song of Solomon.** New York: Alfred Knopf, Inc. 1977.

A well-written novel filled with graphic characterization. Its universal theme of family bonds and conflict is poignantly conveyed.

Morrison, Toni.

**Tar Baby.** New York: New American Library, 1981.

A perceptive novel that delves into relationships between blacks and whites; blacks and blacks; women and men.

**Moses, Wilson Jeremiah.**

**Black Messiahs and Uncle Toms: Social and Literary Manipulations of a Religious Myth.** Pennsylvania: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1982.

Sees black messianism as a myth that has been used by both nationalist and integrationist to assist blacks in their struggle for equality.

**Myrdal, Gunnar.**

**An American Dilemma: The Negro Problem and Modern Democracy.** New York: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1944.

A comprehensive and objective study of blacks in the United States emphasizing their social, political, educational, and economic status.

**Nemiroff, Robert.**

**To Be Young Gifted and Black: Lorraine Hansberry in Her Own Words.** Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1969.

A riveting account of one of the most important playwrights of the early sixties who wrote the highly-acclaimed play, *Raisin in the Sun*.

**Patterson, Orlando.**

**Ethnic Chauvinism: The Reactionary Impulse.** New York: Stein and Day, 1977.

A controversial analysis of ethnicity which the author perceives as anti-humanistic and anti-universal.

**Richards, Henry J., ed.**

**Topics in Afro-American Studies.** Buffalo, New York: Black Academy Press, Inc., 1971.

The selection from a diverse pool of black talent represents an interesting interpretation of themes pertinent to the black experience. Topics include black nationalism, black renaissance, and negritude.

**Robinson, Wilhelmena, S.**

**International Library of Negro Life and History.** New York: Publishers Company Inc., 1969.

A riveting account of the cultural and historic milieu of black Americans.

**Sherlock, Philip.**

**West Indian Folk-Tales.** London: Oxford University Press, 1978.

Stories are about animals of the West Indies, especially the cunning spider Anansi, that tries to outwit other animals, sometimes succeeding, sometimes failing.

**Shucard, Alan, ed.**

**Countee Cullen.** Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1984.

Commentary and poems about one of the leading figures of the Harlem Renaissance in the 1920s.

**Sowell, Thomas.**

**The Economics and Politics of Race: An International Perspective.** New York: William Morrow and Company, Inc., 1983.

The chapter on "Blacks and Colored" raises questions about race and culture. Argues that culture gives the impetus to economic advancement, and citing the upward mobility of black West Indians over black Americans in the United States as one of the examples.

**Sowell, Thomas.**

**Ethnic America: A History.** New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1981.

This study looks at America's racial and cultural mix.

**Szwed, John F., ed.**

**Black America.** New York: Basic Books Inc., Publishers, 1970.

The authors deal with the issue of a unique black culture.

**Taylor, Theodore.**

**The Cay.** New York: Avon, 1969.

An exciting novel which deals with the struggle for survival theme in a black-white symbiotic relationship.

**Thomas, George B.**

**Young Black Adults: Liberation and Family Attitudes.** New York: Friendship Press, 1974.

The work is theologically based and seeks to analyze the structure of the black family.

**Walcott, Derek.**

**Selected Poetry.** Trinidad: Heinemann, 1962.

The theme of the poems are history, politics, and the landscape of the Caribbean islands.

**Walmsley, Anne, comp.**

**The Sun's Eye: West Indian Writing for Young Readers.** Jamaica: Longman Caribbean Limited, 1968.

The book draws on the rich and colorful environment, and the warm and volatile people to create entertaining prose and poetry.

**Watkins, Mel, ed.**

**Black No. 1 Review.** New York: William Morrow & Company, 1971.

This book provides the forum for the discussion of black culture by both black and white writers. Plays, poetry and prose analysis, and personalities are some of the topics covered.

**Wilson, William Julius.**

**The Declining Significance of Race: Blacks and Changing American Institutions.** Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1978.

A critical study of race and class in the American experience.

**Woodson, Carter and Charles H. Wesley.**

**The Negro in Our History.** 11th ed. Washington: The Associated Publishers, Inc., 1966.

All aspects of the life of blacks are discussed to show their influence on America's history.

**Wright, Richard.**

**Native Son.** New York: Harper & Row, Publishers 1940.

A gripping novel that portrays the sufferings of its main character, Bigger Thomas.

## APPENDIX J

### BLACK EDUCATIONAL STRIVINGS IN EDMONTON DURING THE 1980S AND 1990S

(By Bernadette Swan. Adapted from D'Oyley, 1994, pp. 114-120)

**K**ey education innovations for the Black youth in Edmonton have been varied in nature. Innovations included organizing and conducting special academic and cultural classes, summer camps, youth meeting, cultural dance groups and discussion on social and spiritual matters.

This paper discusses innovations conducted by a variety of local organizations, including the following: Edmonton Caribbean Cultural Association, National Black Coalition of Canada, Congress of Black Women of Canada, Caribbean Students' Association, The Alberta Black Heritage Studies Association, Harambee, Bethel United Church of Jesus Christ Apostolic, Shiloh Baptist Church, New Covenant Church and West Edmonton Seventh-Day Adventist Church.

#### **EDMONTON CARIBBEAN CULTURAL ASSOCIATION**

Between 1976 and 1982, this organization sponsored a project named Caribbean Association of Young People organized by Vilma Harvey, a school teacher and the key contributor; Etty Cameron, another local teacher and Ceon Henry, described as a faithful parent to the program.

Through bi-weekly courses, the primary objectives were to get children of African ancestry to interact, to learn their culture and heritage and to be familiar with their surroundings by taking field trips to various places in Edmonton.

The classes were held every second Saturday of the month from 2 PM to 5 PM, but on most Saturdays they went later because of students' interest in the material. Folklore, African and African-American poetry, art, stories of historical figures, such as Martin Luther King, Paul Bogle and Paul Robeson, and Black Music were taught.

The program's socio-cultural aspect helped the children adjust to and fit into this society. It served to encourage them to express themselves in the traditional society. The program also served to help children build confidence and self-assertion through expressive reading. They were exposed to Jamaican stories. They created drama and wrote

plays based on African characters. They also made sketches about the lives of Black people. Such activities had a great impact on them. During field trips, students visited the main educational facilities in the city, including Muttart Conservatory, the Citadel Theatre and the Provincial Museum.

During the unscheduled periods, students socialized and ate traditional Caribbean food such as ackee and codfish, sorrel, plum pudding, patties and Caribbean punch to become acquainted with the foods found in the Caribbean. Students were also exposed to African life through African dances, songs and stories. These were taught by Charles Tumwesigye and Alice Bitamba, formerly members of the Uganda National Dance Company.

The bi-weekly classes operated for five years at Alex Taylor School, a community-designated school, where the use of space was free of charge to community organizations. However, in the early 1980s the community designation was revoked because it was felt that there was not enough interest in the community to keep the school open on weekends. Thus, the group was without a place to hold classes because it could not pay the rent for another location. In an effort to keep the project functioning, the school was moved to the basement of a private home where it operated for another year.

The program proved to be beneficial to the students, six of whom went to the University of Alberta and the University of Lethbridge. One who was particularly influenced by the field trips credits the project with opening doors for him.

When asked if she sees a need for reactivation of the Saturday classes, Vilma is emphatic that, as an educator, she had to do more for the youth because they need direction. When she hears of incidents such as of what happened in Edmonton Centre, it tells her that her work is incomplete. It was alleged that on March 16, 1993, upon leaving a cinema in Edmonton Centre complex after a Rap comedy, Black youth threw rocks and injured a police officer. Police used mace to disperse the crowd. A number of Black youth were detained by the police. These Black youth belong to a gang "Niggas in Action" (Never Ignorant Getting Goals Accomplished).

Recommendations for innovative improvements for Black youth stress the involvement of parents. Parents must be reminded that children are not connecting because television does not pertain to Black life. Parents have to take more responsibility at home, set better examples and spend more time with their children at the library and at other educational facilities.

**NATIONAL BLACK COALITION OF CANADA  
(EDMONTON CHAPTER)**

In 1980 the National Black Coalition of Canada (NBCC) started a Saturday school for remedial school work. This initiative was organized by Kingsley Gilliam, then president of the NBCC. During 1983-87, the organization operated a summer school weekdays for 5 hours per day. The location changed yearly to reflect the residence pattern of the majority of the children who attended the courses.

According to Alwyn Brightley, a past NBCC president, the main purposes of the program were to help students who had difficulty focusing on the important things in their lives and to provide a cultural program lacking in the larger school.

The directors consulted with Black teachers about the content and methodology for the program. Parents were involved in motivating children to attend the summer classes. The students were encouraged to search out information on their own, to be focused on what they were doing. The cultural aspect of the program was tailored to introduce children to African and Black history.

The need for these activities was identified when Black youth were wandering idly around the community with nothing to do, clearly needing direction. It was found that youth 18 to 25 years of age often wasted 4 productive years and were 4 to 5 years behind average White youth. It was believed that Black youth needed special counselling on a one-to-one basis. Since too many of them rebelled against the classroom setting, it was felt that only competent, interested and dedicated counsellors should meet with them.

Recommendations for further innovative work with Black youth stress non-traditional counselling and the need to show Black youth how to achieve their goals.

**CONGRESS OF BLACK WOMEN OF CANADA  
(EDMONTON CHAPTER)**

According to Wendy Fraser, president during 1983, the Congress started an innovative project where boys and girls learned about Black culture through dance. A group called the Profile Dancers was born with the interest of instilling a sense of pride in young people, thereby building self-confidence. Although the group has changed, it is still performing: the dancers are always in demand.

During the period 1984-90, the Congress was involved in establishing a summer camp which provided Black children with the opportunity to learn about their culture. The camp, which was affordable,



sensitized youth to the fact that they have heroes. It also provided Black youth the opportunity to "hold their heads up and project their voice." This motivated Black children who returned to school asking to participate more in class activities.

At the summer camp, youngsters were taught songs, dances, poetry, Caribbean games, folk songs, crafts, sewing and the history of Black heroes such as Harriet Tubman. The camp ended with a concert where they performed and displayed their accomplishments. The concert and exhibition were attended by the parents and general public. There is need to activate this summer camp because "Children run into trouble with the law and getting them to stay in school is very important. We have to help them dispel their sense of hopelessness. There is need for more community-based activity [for] our young people."

#### **CARIBBEAN STUDENTS' ASSOCIATION**

Dwayne Eubanks, President of the Caribbean Students' Association, 1986-87, states that at that time the association conducted an innovative summer program. The objective was academic upgrading for Grade six, Junior and Senior high students. The focus was to help students with academic courses in which they were deficient, classroom work with which they had difficulty during the school year, working with the texts they used in the classroom.

Five teachers (men and women) volunteered. One teacher was hired to make home visits to help students with difficult assignments. The program ended when the Student Temporary Employment Program ended and when the student teachers, due to their own obligations, could not continue during the winter. Parents of the 28 students who attended the program requested that it be continued.

Dwayne, who took the later years of his secondary education in Edmonton, says that "Black students are treated in schools as if they are stupid. The summer school where Black youth can see that they are accomplishing something is needed. Black youth need role models." He is convinced that there is a long-term need for the remedial program.

Augustine Merah & Associates have recently implemented a Rainbow Educational and Cultural Society which teacher remedial classes on weekends.

#### **THE ALBERTA BLACK HERITAGE STUDIES ASSOCIATION**

In 1985 this organization conducted a summer after-school program. According to Helen Lewis, a local teacher, the objective was to pro-

vide after-school instruction in mathematics and English to students who were deficient in these subjects. The program allowed two teachers to tutor students at their homes if necessary. It also assisted with upgrading high school certificates. Gordon Sadool, president of this association, makes the following recommendations:

- (a) From an early age, students should have some means to be knowledgeable about their culture and to learn where they can find authentic historical accounts.
- (b) Since anecdotal evidence suggests that students develop problems from the first grade, academic support should be given at a very early age. Later in school a means, for the Black students who are doing well, to exchange views and ideas with the Black students who are doing poorly should be provided.
- (c) Parents should receive counselling to cope with the stresses and strains of their employment environment which they feel may be due to their ethnicity. These stresses have a negative effect on the family.
- (d) Parents, especially immigrant parents, should be given information about the family's rights and obligations concerning the educational and justice systems.

#### **HARAMBEE**

Francine Govia, National President of Harambee, uses an innovative approach to give youth in Edmonton an opportunity to plan, organize and see their work come to fruition. This is done through the "Tribute to Martin Luther King" which started approximately seven years ago. The goal is to reconnect youth with the historical struggles of past achievers. Attendance at the program allows young people to explore what happened at different times in King's life. The program tries to bring the message to the level of the youth.

The idea for the King program was geared to building confidence of youth and empowering them. The realization that other people dealt with drastic situations successfully can be internalized to empower them to do the same. The aim is to prevent them from dropping out, to show them that protesting can change circumstances. It helps them to change circumstances they could protest. It helps them to know the difference between laziness and taking a stand to change things which are not just.

The program also aims to teach young people the non-violent approach. Martin was not the first who used this approach successfully, but he is someone they can use as a model from whom each can learn

how to deal with his or her protest. Youth should know the working of the political and social system and their rights within each.

Another innovative program by Harambee is in the Carrie Best Collection. This is a mobile library on Black history which included materials on literature, historical pieces, and works of Black writers from Africa, Europe and North and South America. The idea came out of the lack of available material while organizing a KWANZA celebration. There was a need for research material on the colonization aspects of who Black Canadians are. This mobile library will remain in Edmonton for an unspecified period of time. Reading sessions where children read and discuss materials are planned for Saturdays. The purpose for this exercise is to allow children to network with the books. Contacts are being made with the University of Alberta, Grant McEwan Community College, Northern Alberta Institute of Technology, the public library and school libraries in order to supply them with a data base on the material available from the Carrie Best Collection. This collection is open to the general public.

#### **Bethel United Church of Jesus Christ Apostolic**

In 1970, a daycare was started at the church by Norma Barnett, a registered nurse. Caregivers from this program went on to study early childhood at Grant McEwan Community College and to take academic upgrading at the Alberta Vocational Centre.

Marilyn McGreer, a graduate of Early Childhood and Family Studies from the University of Alberta, ran a Home Economics club for youth aged 12 to 25. The objective was to encourage females and males to further their education. Some courses taught were table setting, hospitality, nutrition, sewing and wardrobe planning. Many young people were introduced to church music, and the choir became very important.

Some young people from the church have gone on to further learning at Concordia College, Grant McEwan, the University of Alberta and the Northern Alberta Institute of Technology. Michael Grange, director of the youth ministry, reports that the youth meet on Tuesday and Friday nights. The objective is to uplift them spiritually with the end result of getting them off the streets. The choir performs at the penitentiary, youth juvenile delinquent Centre and Senior Citizens' homes. An education-related forum is held on Saturdays, unfortunately the youth who really need help are not always there.

The effect of the church on the family is seen through the strong family bond it has created in individual families.

**Shiloh Baptist Church**

Pastor Hopston Samuels of the Shiloh Baptist Church offers youth meetings on Friday evenings. The objective is to minister to the spiritual, social and physical needs of the young people. The youth also participate in sports of their choice, for example bowling, tennis and baseball. The basic concern of the church is their spiritual well-being. The church provides one evening during the month for the youth to demonstrate what they have learnt. They do this by organizing concerts and displays. Another innovative program provides community work for youth who are on probation.

**New Covenant Church**

Friday night is youth night when Pastor Eaton Ward operates a program that teaches moral and ethical ways of living through a relationship with Christ. He is concerned about the high dropout rate of youth.

**New Edmonton Seventh-Day Adventist Church**

Pastor Richard Sylvester, whose congregation is 95 percent Black, says the church has not addressed the crisis of Black people. Its position is that there can be no emphasis on one particular race when there are other races in this church. It does not address a Black philosophy.

The Black agenda has so far been left to the Black community. However, the church can no longer function oblivious to the community's problems. Pastor Sylvester advocates a marriage between the key players — the church, the family and the school. His recommendation for innovative programs for Black youth are to develop a network to facilitate twinning and mentorship for youth aged 15 to 25 years. Twinning involves pairing of young adults with successful individuals of like profession or occupation. Mentorship involves locating someone who works in a certain field in which the young adult is interested and arranging for this person to become the mentor for the young adult. Mentors should follow the young adult through to the work force.

## APPENDIX K

### NATIONAL COUNCIL OF BLACK EDUCATORS OF CANADA

(Adapted from D'Oyley, 1994)

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