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**Multiculturalism and Toronto's Africentric
Alternative School:
An examination of the policies, principles, and values**

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Abstract

In 2009, the Toronto District School Board (TDSB) opened the first publically funded voluntary school based on race in Canada to address the disproportionate drop-out rate among black youth. The Africentric Alternative School offers students an alternative schooling environment, incorporating an African infused curriculum. Much debate has been generated within the public concerning the school's compatibility with Canadian values. Those in favour of the school argue that by teaching kids within a racial parameter, they are more likely to graduate. Those opposed to the school argue that it is a step backwards towards cultural segregation. This paper asks to what extent does Toronto's Africentric Alternative School accord with the policies, principles, and values of multiculturalism? Relying on a mixture of normative and empirical analysis, the paper is divided into three chapters. Chapter one examines multiculturalism as a policy and conceptual framework using the work of Will Kymlicka, Augie Fleras and Jean Elliott. Chapter two examines the policies and debate surrounding the school. Chapter three examines the application of multiculturalism to the school. It is discovered through this paper that at the policy level, there are more similarities than differences between the values of multiculturalism and the school. At the conceptual level, the school does accord with the same values and principles of multiculturalism, yet it also accords to the same conceptual debates concerning multiculturalism. The findings illustrate that the debate around the school reflects a symbolic debate around multiculturalism. Some believe a holistic system can respect differences and promote equality, while others question if a holistic system can effectively address the needs of everyone. The debate surrounding the school focuses on the values and principles of segregation and inclusion, illustrating that the Africentric Alternative School embodies more than just a question of retention rates but rather a larger debate around multiculturalism.

Introduction

Canada is celebrated as one of the most culturally diverse countries in the world. According to the 2001 census, 18.4 percent of the country's population was born outside of Canada (Banting 2007). Furthermore, Canada has the highest per capita immigration in the world with most immigrants residing in Toronto, Vancouver, and Montreal (Banting 2007). Immigration in Canada has only increased since the country's creation and continues to do so; "racial minorities constituted only 3 percent of the total population in Toronto of 2.6 million in 1971, but by 2001 the figure had grown to 36.8 percent of 4.6 million...[it is] projected that by 2017 Toronto and Vancouver will likely be 'majority minority' cities" (Retiz 2007: 490). Today it is estimated that close to fifty percent of the population of Toronto is born outside the country and that 54.2 percent of Canada's visible minority citizens live within Ontario; 42.9 percent residing in Toronto (Fleras 2009). As immigration rates continue to rise throughout Canada, and especially in Toronto, questions over how best to manage diversity have become increasingly important. One strategy to manage diversity has been through the implementation of multicultural policies and practices. However, as a contested concept itself, the application of multiculturalism as a tool to manage diversity is not always easily utilized. One area in which the paradox of multiculturalism is being exemplified is in Toronto's education system.

As one of the most multicultural communities in the world, Toronto is presented with a number of issues related to diversity. The Toronto District School Board (TDSB) has recently decided to open Canada's first publically funded, voluntary school based on race. After much debate, the TDSB approved the decision to open an elementary Africentric¹ Alternative School in response to a disproportionate drop-out rate among black² students. According to the school's website, "a unique feature of the Africentric Alternative School will be the integration of the diverse perspectives, experiences and histories of people of African descent into the provincially mandated curriculum" (Africentric Alternative School, n.d). The creation of this school has come to represent a debate within the Canadian public (Anderson 2009). Specifically, the debate is being formed around the values and principles associated with multiculturalism. Proponents of the school envision the specialized racial focus as a means to achieving greater long term integration (Anderson 2009). Conversely, opponents of the school argue that it is threatening the values of multiculturalism by promoting racial segregation (Anderson 2009). Little academic work has been done on examining the debate through a normative lens. As a result, this paper will examine to what extent Toronto's Africentric Alternative School accords with the policies, principles, and values of multiculturalism.

Methodology, Structure, and Thesis

Through a mixture of empirical and normative analysis, this paper will outline the policies and conceptual framework surrounding multiculturalism and also the school. The aim of this paper will be to provide a normative and empirical analysis of the conflict surrounding the

¹ The term Africentric will be used interchangeably with the term Afrocentric due to the persistent use of both in the literature. However, the TDSB's official use is Africentric.

² The term Black (black) will be used in this paper as outlined by George Dei (2006) to include those who identify with the cultural and/or political sense of the word. It is noted that the term encompasses a diverse set of ethnicities.

school and to provide insight into Canada's multiculturalism model. In order to provide a logical assessment of the school's compatibility with multiculturalism, this paper will be divided into several chapters. Chapter one will outline a concept of multiculturalism defined by policies, legislation, and academic literature. Since multiculturalism is a contested and vast area of debate, this paper will focus on a liberal conception of multiculturalism as outlined by Canadian scholars: Will Kymlicka, Augie Fleras and Jean Leonard Elliott. These authors have been selected due to their influence in the literature as the foremost experts on Canadian multiculturalism. Chapter two of this paper will outline the details, policies, debate and literature surrounding the Africentric Alternative School. Chapter three will provide an analysis of chapters one and two in order to address the research question, by contrasting and comparing the policies, principles, and values of multiculturalism in general and the Africentric Alternative School in particular.

The creation of race-based schools as a mechanism to address diversity issues represents a new direction in education for the TDSB and subsequently for Canada. In combination with the growing number of students coming from different ethnic communities and the creation of a school catering to these differences, the use of race-based schools must be evaluated in order to assess if the general practice is worth pursuing in a multicultural country. The public debate has received little academic assessment which this paper will illustrate is necessary to understand the crux of the debate. It will be argued that the debate surrounding Toronto's Africentric Alternative School has come to reflect a larger debate around multiculturalism. The main reason this has come to be is because the school does accord with the same principles and values as those conceptualized within multiculturalism, so much so that it embodies similar conceptual debates. The Africentric Alternative School has thus been pushed to the focal point of a representation of a much larger issue surrounding one of the main paradoxes of multiculturalism: the balance between separation and inclusion.

Scope and Definitions

Before beginning, it is useful to outline the scope of this paper as well as some key definitions. The primary literature that will be used will be from Canadian academics and authors, with a heavy emphasis on literature post 1990. While a historical examination of multiculturalism will be provided in brief, it is not the purpose of this paper to evaluate the effectiveness of multiculturalism or outline in great depth all of its complexities. The use of multiculturalism for this paper is to outline the values and principles in order to weigh them against the values and principles of the Africentric Alternative School. A more thorough exploration of multiculturalism will be provided in this paper, but for the time being it can be defined as a contested conceptual framework involving the promotion of liberal principles including equality, fairness, diversity, equal opportunity, and integration. The term 'principle' will be understood as, "a fundamental truth or proposition serving as the foundation for belief or action... a rule or belief governing one's personal behaviour" (Stevenson 2008). The term 'values' will be understood as, "collective conceptions of what is considered good, desirable, and proper- or bad, undesirable, and improper" (Smith 2005: 617).

Since this paper will focus on providing a combined normative and empirical analysis, it is not the purpose of this paper to provide a specifically historical, sociological or psychological

perspective although each will briefly be touched upon. The main academic perspective intended in this paper will be philosophical. Lastly, the student drop-out rate, which is a significant measure of success, will not be available for years as the school has only been in place since 2009. Therefore this is a theoretical debate at this time, to be followed up by further empirical data as the school progresses.

Chapter One: Multiculturalism

According to Augie Fleras and Jean Leonard Elliott, “multiculturalism must be interpreted as a complex and contested policy that has evolved over time in response to social and political changes” (2007: 285). Similarly, Will Kymlicka argues that “multiculturalism was introduced without any real idea of what it would mean, or any long-term strategy for its implementation. In any event, the policy has undergone dramatic changes since 1971, adapting itself, often in an ad hoc way, to new needs and new challenges....” (1998: 40). This chapter will provide a discussion around the policies and theoretical conception of multiculturalism. The first part will present the federal and provincial policies of multiculturalism through a historical framework. The second part will then examine how Ontario has adopted official policies and legislation on multiculturalism. The third part will provide a literature review to frame multiculturalism. The purpose of this chapter is to provide the theoretical foundations of multiculturalism which will be applied to the Africentric Alternative School in chapter three.

1.1 Federal Policies and Legislation

Augie Fleras and Jean Elliott (1992) state, “the term ‘policy’ itself can be defined in different ways, but should at a minimum reflect an official and often (but not always) explicit statement of intent for conducting business according to certain principles and the practices that flow from these tenants” (69). A number of policies have been linked to the development of the Canadian multicultural framework which will be outlined below.

Two historical pieces of federal legislation have contributed to the development of Canada’s Multiculturalism Policy of 1971. The first is the Canadian Citizen Act of 1947. It marked a new beginning for Canada. The Act gave a common citizenship to all those residing in the country as Canadian instead of British subjects. Earlier pieces of legislation such as the Indian Act of 1876 and the British North America Act of 1867 entrenched the special status of Aboriginals, English and French as founding nations. The 1947 Canadian Citizen Act outlined the first directives on immigration and the rights of Canadian citizens (Citizenship and Immigration Canada, n.d.). The special status of Aboriginals and French-Canadians greatly influenced the direction of Canada’s identity according to Kymlicka (1998). As immigration increased, the three groups (Aboriginal, French, and Immigrant) helped shaped the direction of Canada’s policies by applying pressure on the government in pursuit of their own interests (Kymlicka 1998). One often cited example of this is the Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism (RBCC) that took place during the 1960s. The Commission “concluded that Canada comprised a multicultural commonwealth of many nationalities but within the bicultural framework of the founding people” (Fleras 2007: 282). The second piece of legislation was the Bill of Rights of 1960. The bill “recognizes the rights of individuals to life, liberty, personal security and enjoyment of property... It protects rights to equality before the law and ensures

protection of the law; protects the freedoms of religion, speech, assembly and association, and the press; and legal rights such as the rights to counsel and fair hearing” (McConnell, n.d.). Later this bill would be fleshed out in the Canadian Human Rights Act in 1985. Both pieces of federal legislation contributed to the development of the 1971 Multiculturalism Policy.

The Multiculturalism Policy of 1971 marked the Canadian Government as the first country in the world to adopt a multicultural policy, which “affirmed the value and dignity of all Canadian citizens regardless of their racial or ethnic origins, their language, or their religious affiliation” (Citizenship and Immigration Canada, n.d.). According to Prime Minister Pierre Elliott Trudeau, who introduced the policy, the policy has four aims, “to support the cultural development of ethnocultural groups; to help members of ethnocultural groups overcome barriers to full participation in Canadian society; to promote creative encounters and interchange among all ethnocultural groups; and assist new Canadians in acquiring at least one of Canada’s official languages” (Kymlicka 1998: 15).

After the multiculturalism policy, a number of additional pieces of legislation were formed that would help pave the way for the Multiculturalism Act of 1988. The Canadian Charter of Rights (CCRF) and Freedoms in 1982 and initiatives such as the Employment Act in 1986, and changes to Canada’s immigration policies reaffirmed Canada as a cultural mosaic. The Charter entrenched fundamental freedoms, rights, and liberties. Section 27 of the CCRF states, “This Charter shall be interpreted in a manner consistent with the preservation and enhancement of the multicultural heritage of Canadians” (1982). The Employment Equity Act sought to correct issues of inequality in relation to the workforce by addressing issues of racism. Along with conversion of Canada’s immigration policies to a point system valuing education and skills instead of race or ethnicity, the adoption of the aforementioned acts and initiatives contributed to the legislation of multiculturalism as an act.

The Multiculturalism Act states that it was created for the “preservation and enhancement of multiculturalism in Canada” (Multiculturalism Act 1988). Sited in its preamble is reference to the rights and freedoms found within the Constitution of Canada, the Official Language Act, the Citizenship Act, the Canadian Human Rights Act, and the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination. The preamble concludes “the Government of Canada recognizes the diversity of Canadians as regards to race, national or ethnic origin, colour and religion as a fundamental characteristic of Canadian society and is committed to a policy of multiculturalism designed to preserve and enhance the multicultural heritage of Canadians while working to achieve the equality of all Canadians in the economic, social, cultural and political life of Canada” (Multiculturalism Act 1988). Among the stated principles and objectives of the Act are the following:

- (a) recognize and promote the understanding that multiculturalism reflects the cultural and racial diversity of Canadian society and acknowledges the freedom of all members of Canadian society to preserve, enhance and share their cultural heritage;
- (b) recognize and promote the understanding that multiculturalism is a fundamental characteristic of the Canadian heritage and identity and that it provides an invaluable resource in the shaping of Canada’s future;

- (c) promote the full and equitable participation of individuals and communities of all origins in the continuing evolution and shaping of all aspects of Canadian society and assist them in the elimination of any barrier to that participation;
- (d) recognize the existence of communities whose members share a common origin and their historic contribution to Canadian society, and enhance their development;
- (e) ensure that all individuals receive equal treatment and equal protection under the law, while respecting and valuing their diversity;
- (f) encourage and assist the social, cultural, economic and political institutions of Canada to be both respectful and inclusive of Canada's multicultural character;
- (g) promote the understanding and creativity that arise from the interaction between individuals and communities of different origins;
- (h) foster the recognition and appreciation of the diverse cultures of Canadian society and promote the reflection and the evolving expressions of those cultures;
- (i) preserve and enhance the use of languages other than English and French, while strengthening the status and use of the official languages of Canada; and
- (j) advance multiculturalism throughout Canada in harmony with the national commitment to the official languages of Canada (Multiculturalism Act 1988).

The Multiculturalism Act encompasses a number of stated values and principles. Among these are a commitment to preserve cultural heritage and to see diversity as an asset; promote equal opportunities; combat racism; promote integration; protect individual freedoms; encourage equality; and preservation of the English and French languages. As summed up by Fleras (1992), the Multiculturalism Act, "focused equally on cultural maintenance and social integration within a framework of equal opportunity" (76). Or as one author put it, "multiculturalism endorses a commitment to integration over separation, interaction over isolation, and participation over withdrawal" (Adams cited in Fleras 2009: 67).

In summary, a number of policies, initiatives and pieces of legalisation contributed to the formation and adoption of multiculturalism in Canada. An overview of the aforementioned federal policies demonstrates a commitment to a number of values and principles. However, the application of these federal acts and policies has not always translated into practice. As a starting point, a number of government functions are divided into provincial jurisdictions which may or may not have adopted their own versions of the stated federal goals.

1.2 Ontario Policies and Legislation

Since the focus of this paper will be examining a case study in Toronto, it is useful to outline the position of the Ontario government in relation to multiculturalism and diversity issues. The Ontario government adopted the principles of multiculturalism under the Ministry of Citizenship and Culture Act in 1982. Among the Act's stated objectives are "to encourage full, equal and responsible citizenship among the residents of Ontario and to stress the full participation of all Ontarians as equal members of the community, encouraging the sharing of cultural heritage while affirming those elements held in common by all residents" (Citizenship and Culture Act 1982).

In 1987, Ontario adopted the Policy on Race and Ethno-Cultural Equity. In 1993 amendments were made to the Education Act that would allow school boards to implement and create (upon approval from the ministry) their own anti-racism and ethno-cultural equity plans (Ghosh 2004b). According to the 1993 version of the Education Act, “Antiracism and ethnocultural equity policies focus on identifying and changing institutional policies, procedures and individual behaviours, and practices that may be racist in their impact... [the Education Act serves] a commitment to positive and equitable outcomes in all education programs and services for all students” (Education Act: 6).

Ontario established the Ontario Human Rights Commission (OHRC) under the Ontario Human Rights Act of 1981. The mission of the OHRC “plays an important role in preventing discrimination and promoting and advancing human rights in Ontario...[the OHRC] has the power to monitor and report on anything related to the state of human rights in the Province of Ontario” (OHRC 2011).

While a clear multiculturalism policy has not been set in Ontario, commitment to the same principles and values can be found through a number of other avenues, as the previous overview illustrates. The specific policies of the TDSB will be discussed in chapter two.

1.3 Conceptualizing Multiculturalism: Fleras, Elliott, and Kymlicka

Conceptualizing multiculturalism is a difficult task. This part of the paper will outline a conception based on the work by Augie Fleras, Jean Leonard Elliott and Will Kymlicka while providing a discussion focused on liberalism, equality, fairness, and integration.

Fleras and Elliott argue that a multicultural society is one that “involve[s] a belief that a society of many cultures is better than monoculturalism, preferred over assimilation as a policy alternative, and can prevail as long as certain ground rules are in place... yet, the concept of multiculturalism remains poorly theorized because of competing discourses, hidden agendas, and different levels of meaning” (2007: 277). While this can be interpreted as a weakness, the authors argue, “...many meanings can be absorbed without much fear of contradiction – and it is precisely this ambiguity that is proving both a strength and weakness in theorizing multiculturalism” (Fleras & Elliott 2007: 279). Fleras and Elliott have created a useful table to illustrate what they argue are different stages of multiculturalism in Canada.

	Ethnicity Multiculturalism (1970s)	Equity Multiculturalism (1980s)	Civic Multiculturalism (1990s-2000s)
Focus	Celebrating differences	Fostering equality	Living together
Reference Point	Culture	Structure	Society-building
Mandate	Ethnicity	Race Relations	Citizenship
Magnitude	Individual adjustment	Institutional inclusion	Community participation
Problem source	Prejudice	Systemic discrimination	Exclusion
Problem solution	Cultural sensitivity	Employment equity	Inclusiveness
Key metaphor	“Mosaic”	“Level playing field”	“Belonging”

(Fleras & Elliott 2007: 285)

Ethnicity Multiculturalism is based on four principles according to Fleras (2009: 64), “[1] Equality of Status: Canada does not have an official culture; all cultures are equal; [2] Canadian Identity: Diversity lies at the heart of Canadian identity; [3] Personal Choice: individuals have the right to identify with the culture of their choice; [4] Protection of Individual Rights: from formal discrimination through the removal of discriminatory barriers...”. Equity Multiculturalism focuses on the principles of “equity, social justice, and institutional inclusiveness... equity goals of antiracism, race relations, and removal of discriminatory barriers at institutional levels” (Fleras 2009: 65). Civic Multiculturalism focuses on social cohesion and encouraging civic engagement among the different groups of society (Fleras 2009).

Fleras and Elliott’s table demonstrates the evolving nature of multiculturalism in Canada. What is interesting is the line in Fleras and Elliott’s table concerning the ‘problem source’. During the 1970s the focus was on combating racism and individual prejudices through the promotion of cultural sensitivity. This later shifted towards recognition of systemic barriers which gave way to initiatives tackling economic and social inequalities at an institutional level. From the 1990s onwards greater attention has focused on the growing fear of isolated communities. It could be argued that the common theme between all three stages is a commitment to liberal ideologies aimed at providing human rights and group rights.

Liberalism

Kymlicka (1998: 8, 25) defines multiculturalism as “Canada’s approach to the accommodation of groups formed by immigration” arguing that multiculturalism “is best understood as a response by ethnocultural groups to the demands that the state imposes on them in its efforts to promote integration”. Kymlicka conceptualizes multiculturalism as an evolving framework that provides an avenue in which the terms of integration can be debated and developed (1998, 2001). Kymlicka (2007) argues that Canadian policies surrounding diversity can be categorized into three ‘silos’; Aboriginal, French Canadian, and Immigrants. Each ‘silo’ contains their own “histories, discourses, legal frameworks and governance structures” (41). The impact of all three ‘silos’ was a push towards liberal ideologies (Kymlicka 1998, 2007). He

states, “Canada’s diversity policies, I believe, are liberal in their goals, their legal formulation and in their administrative implantation” (Kymlicka 2007: 42). The liberal surge in Canadian society can be attributed, he argues, to the increase of demands from the minority cultures within Canada. For the immigrant ‘silo’, a long period in Canada’s history promoted the assimilation of cultures into a British-Canadian model (Kymlicka 2007). As Kymlicka states, “[diversity policies] were primarily intended to contest inherited ethnic and racial hierarchies through the recognition and accommodation of ethnocultural diversity, inspired and contested by norms of human rights and civil rights liberalism” (2007: 62). For the immigrant silo, Kymlicka argues that the “key concepts include multiculturalism, citizenship, integration, tolerance, ethnicity, diversity and inclusion” (Kymlicka 2007: 40). Thus, it is easy to see why Kymlicka advocates a multicultural state based on three principles, “repudiating the idea of the state as belonging to the dominant group; replacing assimilationist and exclusionary nation-building policies with policies of recognition and accommodation; [and] acknowledging historic injustice and offering amends for it...” (2001: 150). Consequently, the push towards multiculturalism, “is likely to take the form of fighting any stigmas or barriers that prevent members of the group from fully integrating into the dominant society, or from being fully accepted as equal citizens” (Kymlicka 1998: 151).

Similarly, Fleras and Elliott also argue that Canada’s model resembles liberal tendencies, a liberal multiculturalism model aspires towards a multicultural governance that acknowledges the possibility of a Canada of many cultures as long as peoples cultural differences don’t get in the way of full citizenship and equal participation. Everyone is treated the same (equally) according to the universalism implicit in liberal multiculturalism; after all our commonalities as rights-bearing individuals outweigh any group-based differences (Fleras 2009: 82).

However, a paradox within the liberal multicultural framework exists, “On the one side is a liberal commitment to the individuality of autonomy and equality; on the other side is a society-building imperative to impose a uniformity of language, culture, and identity over a heterogeneous population” (Fleras & Elliott 2007: 276). Although contested, the principles of equality and fairness underpin multiculturalism.

Equality and Fairness

Kymlicka (1998) defines equality as “a multidimensional concept: it has economic, political, and cultural dimensions...” (68). Fleras and Elliott define equity as “the belief that true equality is based on recognizing the relevance of context, the importance of taking differences into account, and a balancing of individual with collective rights” (2007: 375). Equality can range from individual rights, to equal opportunities. As Kymlicka (2007) argues,

multiculturalism means the state should not explicitly identify with any particular ethnicity or religion but remain neutral and impartial when engaging its constituent individuals and communities. A multicultural model of governance endorses the notion that the state belongs to all its citizens, not just a single national group; the rights of all migrants and minorities to full and equal participation without forfeiting a right to ethnic identity; and recognition that all citizens have the same institutional access accord to the national group (Kymlicka cited in Fleras 2009: 45).

Furthermore, “The purpose of multiculturalism is to renegotiate the terms of integration...[the] aim [is] to promote fair terms of integration... [Multiculturalism] helps us debate what we can expect from immigrants in terms of their integration into mainstream society, and what immigrants can expect from us in terms of accommodation of their ethnocultural identities” (Kymlicka 1998: 58). Fleras and Elliott (2007) argue along similar lines, “multiculturalism is endorsed as an approach based on high moral principles of justice yet grounded in the honest pragmatism of doing what is workable, necessary, and fair” (276). Thus, at its root is a commitment to equality and fairness. As Hedy Frey, former Minister for Multiculturalism (1997) stated, “as a national policy of inclusiveness, multiculturalism activities aim to bring all Canadians closer together, to enhance equal opportunities, to encourage mutual respect among citizens of diverse backgrounds, to assist in integrating first generation Canadians, to promote more harmonious intergroup relations, and to foster social cohesion and a shared sense of Canadian identity” (quoted in Fleras 2009: 84).

However, not all support multiculturalism as a means to achieve equality and fairness. Hage (1998) argues that multiculturalism acts as a way to sustain the interests of the dominant class while getting the cooperation of minorities. Similarly, George Dei (2000) argues that multiculturalism upholds unequal distributions of power and wealth in the country by presenting an image of tolerance and equality but in reality is maintaining the status quo. Dei argues, “part of the contemporary challenge of anti-racism is to subvert Eurocentric definitions of rights, citizenship and justice...justice is not about fairness to all or simply treating everyone the same. Justice is recognizing the different ways individuals and groups have been historically disadvantaged” (2000: 312).

Integration

Fleras and Elliott (2003) define integration as, “A model of race and ethnic relations as well as a policy framework for managing diversity that involves a set of policy ideals and practices that stand in opposition to the principles of segregation...integration is concerned with incorporating minorities into the mainstream so that they can participate as equals” (359). Kymlicka (1998) defines integration as “the extent to which immigrants and their descendents integrate into an existing societal culture and come to view their life-chances as tied up with participation in the range of social institutions, based on common languages, which define society culture” (28). He argues that multiculturalism is a response to the process of integration. While Canada asks certain things from immigrants, immigrants also ask certain things from the government. Consequently, multiculturalism “has developed and evolved as a framework for debating and developing the terms of integration, to ensure that they are fair” (Kymlicka 1998: 40).

Integration is often viewed in opposition to segregation which involves an element of separation. However, Fleras and Elliott (2007) define separation in a more neutral fashion as “The process and practice of separating groups on the basis of race or culture. This separation can occur voluntarily or involuntarily, can involve formal or informal measures, and may be interpreted as empowering or disempowering” (363). The balance between integration and separation is a notion of multiculturalism that is often contested.

Neil Bissoondath (1994) argues that multiculturalism encourages separatism: “multiculturalism, with all its festivals and its celebrations, has done – and can do – nothing to foster a factual and clear-minded visions of our neighbours... it has done little more than lead an already divided county down the path to further social divisiveness” (83). The division comes from the policy’s principles, he argues, that focus on differences instead of similarities. By promoting and celebrating differences, Bissoondath (1994) argues that similarities are ignored and consequently cohesiveness is threatened. Similarly, Richard Gwyn (1996) argues that multiculturalism encourages ‘mono-culturalism’ in which groups separate themselves from mainstream society forming an “apartheid form of citizenship” (234). The resulting fear is a mosaic country in which minimal interaction between the cultural groups occurs. The fear of multiculturalism leading to separate ethnic communities has also been echoed in the 2000s.

In a 2010 article surrounding the global context of multiculturalism, Banting and Kymlicka outline some of the most recent criticisms and concerns of multiculturalism in Canada. Referring to a number of authors including, Allan Greg, Margaret Wente, Micheal Bliss, Robert Fulford and Jack Granatstein, Banting and Kymlicka summarize the main themes found among the authors:

Multiculturalism has demonstrably failed in Europe, producing greater segregation, greater stereotyping and prejudice, and greater polarization. These failures are inherent in the very idea of multiculturalism, which is built on stereotypical and isolationist assumptions about ethnic groups...there is growing evidence that these problems are emerging also in Canada (Banting & Kymlicka 2010: 47).

However, Banting and Kymlicka (2010) then proceed to outline the faults with these concerns. Referencing research done by the Institute for Research on Public Policy (IRPP), “having examined various facets of the issue – economic, political, and social – there is little evidence of the deep social segregation feared in parts of Europe...there is no justification for a u-turn in multiculturalism policies comparable to that underway in some European countries” (2010: 60). Furthermore, Kymlicka (1998, 2000, 2001, 2010) argues that there has been little evidence to show that multiculturalism is creating separate cultures. On the contrary, “there is little evidence that Canada is facing deep new divisions, pervasive radicalism or illiberal challenges to its core democratic culture” (Banting & Kymlicka 2010: 52). Citing residential tracking reports in Toronto, Banting and Kymlika (2010) argue that there is little evidence to show racial concentrations in poor ghettos either. Kymlicka (1998, 2001) contends that the evidence points to the opposite, that under multiculturalism policy, integration is quicker than without it.

1.4 Summary

In summary, multiculturalism can be described as an evolving concept. As Canada grows, so does the conception of multiculturalism. The above discussion outlines a number of tenets of multiculturalism which can be summed up under the headings; Liberalism, Equality, Fairness, and Integration. While an exact definition of multiculturalism in the literature can be elusive, as Kymlicka (1998) states, “we should assume that debates over multiculturalism are debates about how best to understand and interpret shared goals of integration, human rights, and democracy” (122). Canadian’s commitment to the values and principles of multiculturalism are

evident in the 1997 renewal of the Multiculturalism Act under the Brighton Report (Kymlicka 2010). Additionally, the Spicer Commission (1991) outlines seven values shared by Canadians, “(1) a belief in equality and fairness; (2) a belief in consultation and dialogue; (3) the importance of accommodation and tolerance; (4) support for diversity; (5) compassion and generosity; (6) attachment to the natural environment; and (7) a commitment to freedom, peace, and non violent change” (quoted in Kymlicka 1998: 150). All of these values can be found within the discourse surrounding multiculturalism and will inform this paper’s discussion of multiculturalism as it relates to the Africentric School.

As Fleras (2009) summarises,

The ethos of Canada’s multiculturalism... reinforces a commitment to inclusiveness through promotion of social justice, identity, and civic participation, emphasis is focused on fostering tolerance toward difference, protecting a cultural of rights, reducing prejudice, removing discriminatory barriers, eliminating cultural ethnocentrism, enhancing equitable access to services, expanding institutional inclusion, improving creative intergroup encounters, and highlighting citizenship... with multiculturalism, Canada affirms the value and dignity of all citizens...regardless of ethnicity (83).

However, the paradoxes of multiculturalism provide grounds for debate, “On the one side, multiculturalism appears to reject the legitimacy of diversity for fear of isolating minorities into self-contained enclaves with their own separate power bases. On the other side, multiculturalism appears to endorse the need to take differences into account to ensure full participation and equal citizenship rights” (Fleras & Elliott 1992: 285). The multiculturalism debate is amplified when applied to the race-based school debate. On the one side, race-based schools represent isolating minorities. On the other side, race-based schools accommodate differences to ensure full participation.

Chapter Two: The Africentric Alternative School

This chapter will examine the case of the Africentric Alternative School. To begin, a historical look at the purpose of education in Canada will set the context. Part one will then provide an overview of the structure of Ontario’s education system as well as the facts about the Africentric Alternative School. Part two will briefly overview the relevant TDSB policies. Following this, the debate for and against the school as presented in the public and academic literature will be explored in part three. The purpose of this chapter is to outline the reasons for establishing the school and the debate surrounding its creation which will be analyzed in chapter three.

According to a 1998 survey conducted by Wall et al, a “majority of Canadians (51%) indicated that the role of public education is to provide a well-balanced general education to prepare children for a life and to assume the responsibilities of good citizenship” (Joshee & Johnson 2007: 21). While this may seem like an obvious statement, the role and purpose of education in Canada has gone through numerous debates and changes. In their analysis of education in Canada since the 1860s, Reva Joshee and Lauri Johnson (2007) identify several

stages of change for the purpose of education ranging from assimilation in the late 1800s to a focus on social cohesion in the 1990s. As Joshee & Johnson (2007) state “the overall mission of public education from its inception in 1847 was to instil patriotism in Canadian youth. Schools were meant to be a homogenizing force that would work with immigrant and native-born children and their families to create ‘good Canadian citizens’ in the image of British loyalists” (135). During the assimilation phase, it was believed that certain groups of people could not be assimilated and were sent to separate schools (Joshee & Johnson 2007). One group in particular were black students who were legally obliged to attend schools that were created separately for them. However, as Canadian values changed so did the purpose of education.

From the 1940s to the 1970s Joshee and Johnson (2007) identify a push towards cultural diversity, citizenship and identity with the aim to “develop a sense of Canadianism among members of the so-called ‘foreign born’ population and a related set of initiatives meant to educate the ‘old stock’ Canadians about the threat that prejudicial attitudes posed to national identity” (138). Influenced by the rhetoric of the post WWII era, “government policies began to refer to integration, rather than assimilation, as the Canadian ideal. Integration was meant to indicate a process through which immigrants would become part of the host society while maintaining some of their own traditions” (Joshee & Johnson 2007: 140). The adoption of policies such as the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms and the Multiculturalism Policy, gave way to a focus on social cohesion. Joshee and Johnson (2007) define social cohesion as “a response to the consequences of neoliberal policies and programs [with the purpose] to increase social solidarity and restore faith in the institutions of government” (147). Thus, education in Canada has undergone several changes since its inception. Education was once a tool for assimilation but has evolved into a tool for social cohesion.

Recent literature on the purpose of education in Canada has focused on the following themes, “(1) socialization, or transmission of culture, (2) self-actualization and individual self-development, (3) preparation for the workplace, consumerism, and citizenship, (4) improvement in Canada’s competitive edge, and (5) reproduction of the social order” (Fleras 2007: 325). Before examining the purpose and role of the Africentric Alternative School in greater detail, it is useful to explain the structure of education in Ontario and review the basic facts of the school.

2.1 Education in Ontario and the Africentric School

Education in Canada is a provincial mandate according to the British North America Act, later called the Constitution Act. Education styles, policies, and structures vary from province to province in Canada. In fact, “Canada has the distinction of being the only Western country with no federal office of education and no national educational policy” (Ghosh 2004b: 545). Since the Africentric Alternative School is in Toronto, Ontario, Ontario’s educational structures provide essential context.

Within Ontario there are four streams of publically funded schools outlined in Ontario’s Education Act. These streams are French Catholic, English Catholic, English Public, French Public. Furthermore, Ontario’s educational system allows for privately funded schools. Public schools receive most of their funding from public funds, while private schools receive most of their funding through tuition or private donations. Although some private schools can receive

public funds (see Ghosh 2004b), Toronto's Africentric Alternative School is a publically funded school. Consequently, unlike private schools in Toronto that cater to specific cultural or gender characteristics, the Africentric School falls under the public category. For example, in Toronto the Khalsa Community School was established in 1995. It has over 460 students "offering traditional instruction to students from Kindergarten to Grade 8, complemented with teaching of Guru Granth Sahib, Punjabi, Kirtan, Sikh Values and Sikh Culture" (Khalsa Community School, n.d.). However, the Khalsa Community School is a private school. Private schools, including universities, in Canada made up 4.6% of the total school population in 1995 (Ghosh 2004b: 546). Although this percentage is increasing, public schools remain the majority within Canada's school system (Ghosh 2004b). It is noted that Ontario's private versus public education system and faith-based publically funded schools, i.e. Catholic schools, are relevant to this topic since they also cater to student differences. However, since the issue at hand is whether or not a publically funded school based on race accords with the principles of multiculturalism, the accordance of faith-based or private schools with multiculturalism is a research project that requires its own investigation.

The Ontario Ministry of Education, a department of the Ontario Government, performs the following tasks: "decides the province's education policy; decides on funding to school boards; maintains a province-wide curriculum; sets guidelines for trustees, principals and school board officials; sets requirements for diplomas and certificates; and prepares lists of approved learning materials such as textbooks" (Ontario College of Teachers 2010). School Boards oversee publicly funded schools and are run by elected trustees. While trustees oversee financial and policy issues, school boards perform the following administrative functions "determining the number, size and location of its schools; building and equipping its schools, developing education programs; managing funds; supervising school operations; hiring and helping teachers; approving textbooks; and making sure its schools follow the Ontario Education Act" (Ontario College of Teacher 2010). The Toronto District School Board is Canada's largest school board, "serving 250,000 full-time students and approximately 155,000 students in continuing education... 24% of TDSB students were born outside of Canada...Toronto's elementary schools (Grades 1-8) can receive upward of 8,000 newcomers each year..." (Dei 2008: 47).

As previously mentioned, the Africentric Alternative School arose primarily in response to the 42% drop out rate among black students in Toronto's education system (Dei 2008: 47). The proposal for the school was brought to the school board in 2007 by concerned parents. Much debate was generated in the public (Anderson, 2009). The board narrowly approved the school in an 11-9 vote in 2008, and it opened its doors in the fall of 2009. The school runs from JK to grade 5 and the majority of the teaching staff is of African descent. While the school is not restricted to only black students or teachers, the majority who apply have black ancestry.

The school operates under the Alternative School Policy (see below). Consequently, the same provincial standards and requirements of all publicly funded schools are necessary for successful completion. According to the school's website, "a unique feature of the Africentric Alternative School will be the integration of the diverse perspectives, experiences and histories of people of African descent into the provincial mandated curriculum" (Africentric Alternative School, n.d.). The term Africentric comes from the principle of Africentricity which the Africentric Learning Institute (n.d.) describes as an "alternative understanding of the world and

includes the validation of African experiences and history... incorporating analysis and perspectives of African people”. The school is currently located within the Shepherd Public School and has a 2010-2011 enrolment of 160 students with a waiting list of 40 (CBC 2010). Enrolment has doubled since the first year it opened in 2009-2010 (CBC 2010). At the time of writing this paper, a proposal to expand Africentric schooling was put fourth then withdrawn by the TDSB. The expansion would have created a high school level Africentric Alternative School based out of Oakwood Collegiate. As of March 30, the TDSB had withdrawn the plans to expand for unstated reasons (Hammer 2011).

Unlike previous segregated schools in Ontario’s past, participation in this school is voluntary. In other words, as previously mentioned, designating schools for different races is not a new concept in Canada. Race-based policies existed in the past that mandated the separation of children based on race. Chan (2007) defined race-based policies as “policies that take up the concept of race as a category to regulate behaviour and provide a racialized consciousness because they legitimate ways of thinking about race” (131). For example, Ontario legislated race-based schools in the 1849 School Act (Chan 2007). Segregated schools were mandatory for black children, and the last segregated school in Ontario did not close until 1965 (Kymlicka 1998). While the motivation behind the segregated schools during the 1850s was largely attributed to discrimination and racism (Joshee 2007), the motivation for establishing Toronto’s Africentric Alternative School is to address continuing discrimination and racism within the school system with the aim of empowerment.

Black-focused schools, with the intent to empower black students, originally appeared in the United States. However, as Kymlicka (1998) explains, the differences between Canada and the United States in terms of race relations have been very different. Kymlicka (1998) identifies the main difference between Canada and the United States as the number of blacks in each country during official segregation: “the idea of Black nationalism has never taken hold in Canada. Because the Black community was small during the period of official segregation and discrimination, it never developed the same degree of institutional completeness as in the United States” (79). Similarly, Dorothy Williams (1989), a Canadian scholar on Black history, has similar sentiments arguing that two parallel societies developed in the United States – white and black – that did not develop to the same degree in Canada. Williams (1989) states, “American Blacks lived in a fully segregated society from top to bottom, that had its own Black universities, business, lawyers, newspapers, hospitals, tradesmen and labourers. But in Canada, where opportunities were purported to be equal, most Blacks, regardless of skills, tended to fit into one level of society – the bottom” (44). Thus, it is difficult to compare the purpose, success and use of Black-focused schools in Canada to those in the United States. In addition, the United States does not have the same multicultural policies as those in Canada (Kymlicka 1998).

According to a background paper on Africentric schools published by the TDSB, Black-focused schools have only been implemented in the United States, and even then “there were only limited examples in the literature of specific Black-focused or Africentric schools” (Manning 2008: 7). The closest Black-focused school in Canada is Nelson Whynder Elementary School in Nova Scotia. As Keith Leslie (2008) explains, “Nelson Whynder Elementary School has Africentric content and a primarily black student body, but it follows the regular provincial

curriculum and is not considered a black-focused school in the same vein as the one proposed in Toronto”.

2.2 TDSB Policies

The TDSB mission statement reads, “Our mission is to enable all students to reach high levels of achievement and to acquire the knowledge, skills and values they need to become responsible members of a democratic society” (Mission and Values 1998). Furthermore, among its stated values is a “strong public education system; and a recognition of the uniqueness and diversity of our students and our community” (Mission and Values 1998).

The TDSB’s Equity Foundation Policy (1999) states,

the board recognizes that certain groups in our society are treated inequitably because of individual and systemic biases related to race, colour, culture...the board is committed to ensuring that fairness, equity, and inclusion are essential principles of our school system and are integrated into all our policies, programs, operations, and practices... this inequitable treatment limits their [student’s] future success and prevents them from making a full contribution to society.

One way to address the many different needs of their student body has been through the TDSB’s Alternative School Policy.

Alternative schools “offer students and parents something different from mainstream schooling... [alternative schools are] unique, with a distinct identity and approach to curriculum delivery” (Alternative School 2007). Furthermore, the Alternative School Policy defines them as “Sites that are unique in pedagogy, forms of governance, and staff involvement, and have strong parental and/or student involvement; environments vary and provide an educational experience suited to individual learning styles/preferences and/or needs” (Alternative School 2007). Toronto already has 36 alternative schools ranging from gender-specific classes to athletic focused to no homework (Girad 2008). Although the Africentric School is not the first alternative school approved by the board, it is the first one based on race.

The TDSB is also committed to the value of cultural integration as demonstrated through several policies and practices. For example, TDSB’s character development mandate relies on community consultations to develop and foster a list of positive character traits within the schools, and their media awareness program teaches students about the harmful effects of stereotypes portrayed in the media (Equity Foundation 1999). Both demonstrate that the TDSB believes it has a responsibility to not only educate students academically, but also socially.

2.3 The Debate

In 1994 the Ontario Royal Commission on Learning reported,

Data [from the Toronto Board of Education] showed that 36 percent of black secondary school students were "at risk," based on their grades in English and

math courses; ...Even black students who have university-educated parents, or parents in professional occupations, or who live with both parents, continue to do disappointingly, according to the Toronto data... In a separate analysis, the Toronto board 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 percent of the black, 1987, Grade 9 students had left the system by the end of 1992 without graduating. Even among those whose parents were in semi-professional occupations, black students were more likely to drop out (ch.16).

The Commission found “almost every submission and presentation to the commission from the black community included recommendations directed to existing schools and school boards, a number called for the establishment of what have been called Black focused School” (ORCL 1994, ch.16). The call for change is not surprising given the high correlations between education levels and employment. Simply put,

children of economically deprived immigrant and radicalized minority groups are not doing as well in school as their Canadian-born peers, with lower achievement in test scores, grades, graduation rates, and college applications... When children leave school without the basic tools for job success or learning skills the underachievement affects everything from quality of life to social inclusion to self-esteem (Fleras 2007: 324).

Whether a supporter for the black-focused school or an opponent, all agree that the high dropout rate of black students in the public education system is a problem. The disagreement occurs over how to best address the problem. To understand the debate, the following section will outline the case for the school and the case against the school.

The Case Supporting the School

The support for the school has come from a number of different sources including the public, academics, teachers, students and the Ontario Royal Commission on Learning. The Royal Commission in 1994 supported the consideration of black-focused schools in their report. Specifically, section 141 of the Commission’s recommendations states, “That in jurisdictions with large numbers of black students, school boards, academic authorities, faculties of education, and representatives of the black community collaborate to establish demonstration schools and innovative programs based on best practices in bringing about academic success for black students” (ORCL 1994, ch.16). The Commission defines a demonstration school as “a school in which particular interventions are planned and carried out to boost the achievement of students. The hope is that lessons from successful models would then be replicated in other schools: challenging and reevaluating curriculum, innovative and engaging teaching methods, and stronger and mutually sustaining links between the school and its parents and community” (ORCL 1994, ch.16). The idea for the demonstration school is outlined in the Commission’s report, attributing it to the numerous presentations from the public and teachers as well as previous reports. Specifically, Stephen Lewis’s report on race relations (1992) was referenced.

Stephen Lewis (1992) outlined racism as the contributing factor towards the underachievement of black students in Toronto's schools,

What we are dealing with, at root, and fundamentally, is anti-black racism. While it is obviously true that every visible minority community experiences the indignities and wounds of systemic discrimination throughout south western Ontario, it is the Black community which is the focus. It is Blacks who are being shot, it is black youth who are unemployed in excessive numbers, it is black students who are being inappropriately screened in schools, it is black kids who are disproportionately dropping-out, it is housing communities with large concentration of black residence where the sense of vulnerability and disadvantage is most acute, it is black employees, professional and nonprofessional, on whom the doors of upward equity slam shut (quoted in Kymlicka 1998: 80).

Ratna Ghosh (2004b) echoes Lewis's sentiments arguing that despite multiculturalism policy and the attempt to recognize differences, many groups continue to be marginalized in Canada's education system. Ghosh (2004b) states,

While multicultural and intercultural education programmes theoretically give equal access to all ethno-cultural groups, they have not resulted in equal participation in the educational or in the economic sphere. Academic success is particularly difficult for those for whom the definition of knowledge and learning as well as the agreed-upon language codes are solely those of a dominant culture (563).

Ghosh and Abdi (2004) argue there is an importance in understanding what knowledge constitutes. They argue that knowledge,

characterizes the way we look at the world...where we are located in society affects how we understand the world. In traditional educational theories... insisted on one truth because it was assumed that there was one way of knowing, and knowledge was thought to be value-free...In critical pedagogy, of which multiculturalism must be an integral component, knowledge and power are inherently connected. Truth is based on different ways of knowing... (Ghosh & Abdi 2004: 22).

Racism has been a driving force for an Africentric school. Canadian academic George Dei has been very vocal in his support of black-focused schools. Dei explains that the Africentric school is a response to "High dropout rates, low motivation, teachers' low expectations of some students, stereotyping of blacks, religious minority and working-class students, a lack of respect for authority and a lack of student commitment to the community" (Anderson 2009). It is believed by many that by teaching students within the parameters of a racial identity, students will be more engaged with the larger education system. Dei contends,

The current school system looks at the world through European eyes... In 1979, I attended a meeting of the Organization of Parents of Black Children in Toronto. The

parents were speaking about the school system failing their children. In 2009, parents are *still* talking about this. It was time to try a new approach” (Anderson 2009).

As a mechanism for achieving higher graduation rates among black students, Kymlicka (1998), argues that race-based schools could be a “transitional step towards long term integration” (84). He argues that although the schools may seem segregated, they may actually improve integration of the black community into mainstream society in the long term (Kymlicka 1998). Consequently, these schools would be a means for integration and thereby combat the threat of long term separation of black communities. The argument purports that, if left as is, separation is more likely to occur due to the consequences of low graduation rates.

Dei (1997) has also conducted a large study in which he interviewed black students and parents regarding the school system. Students felt that the high drop-out rate was due to disengagement and the lack of representation of African role models in the school, thus they felt that an Africentric school with African teachers and counsellors would help them feel understood and better able to relate with the staff (Dei 1997). Parents in favour of the school believe that the school will help their children succeed and provide them with a better sense of identity and inclusion (CBC 2008a). They argue that the current system is failing to meet the needs of their children and that an alternative approach is necessary (Dei 1996).

The Case Opposing the School

Arguments against race-based schools have also come from a number of sources ranging from political figures to academics to the public. At the time of the TDSB vote, in 2008, the education minister of Ontario, Kathleen Wynne, expressed her opposition to the school but stated that there was little she could do about it, “The board is operating within education policy. They have the right under the education act to set up alternative schools, so they're acting within their purview” (CBC 2008b) Likewise, Dalton McGuinty, Premier of the Ontario Government, has also gone on record opposing the school, “I am disappointed with the board's decision...I continue to believe that the best way for us to educate our children is to bring them together so they can come together, learn together and grow together” (Macleans 2008). While McGuinty has acknowledged that the school board is acting within its right, he provided a warning to the school board, “If I get a proposal next week from Ottawa and a week after that from Windsor and the week after that from Thunder Bay ... if something takes hold here that runs clearly contrary to our vision of publicly funded education here in the province of Ontario then we will not hesitate to act” (Benzie 2008).

McGuinty, along with others who have expressed their concerns about the school (The Toronto Star 2008), has made another interesting point about the creation of the school. As McGuinty told Macleans magazine, “What is really troubling for me is what about the 30,000 plus black students at the TDSB who are not going to get into this school or these schools? How does this assist them in a very direct way in improving the quality of their educational opportunities?” (Macleans 2008). On a similar note, Dureen Lund (1998) states that “an obvious disadvantage to such an exclusionary approach based solely on the basis of one’s African heritage is that the public system will be robbed of many of those very teachers and students who could potentially serve as some of its most perspicacious critics” (195). In addition, he argues

that the separation of black students from the public system would further promote differential treatment of black students. Instead, Lund (1998) advocates an inclusive education system, “in which they [students] will work and learn in classrooms together with their African-Canadian peers... united by a common desire to reveal and challenge discriminatory policies and practices, they will live out the ideal of Canadian public education that fosters respect for diversity not through separation but through co-operation” (198).

The public voices that oppose the school argue that it represents a direction in education that is contrary to Canada’s values. Summed up, “The city’s influential newspaper, The Toronto Star, voiced the concerns of many when it said the idea smacked of segregation, which is contrary to the values of the school system and Canadian society as a whole... Radio talk shows and instant polls appeared overwhelmingly to oppose the project” (Carter 2008). As one black mother was quoted, “Martin Luther King and so many of our fathers fought to come together so black and white can be together, for us to sit in the front of the bus together. What we’re doing is all segregating each other. We should be one” (Lorne Small quoted in Carter 2008).

In Dei’s 1996 interview based study, some students also expressed fear of an Africentric school having a negative reputation and perpetuating conflict within the community (Dei 1996). Many felt that separation is a bad idea because it will segment students away from each other, and that other cultural groups will subsequently want the same for their respective groups, further dividing students (Toronto Star 2008). Numerous parents, both from the black community and outside the community, opposed the school arguing there is a benefit to keeping students together to help foster understanding and a multicultural community (Toronto Star 2008). They argue that separating students according to cultural background will segregate them from other cultures and promote differences instead of inclusion (Toronto Star 2008).

2.4 Summary

While the debate is split over whether or not an Africentric school is the best way to address the high drop-out rate among black students, both positions wish to see students succeed. The purpose of the education system is to fulfill a number of duties including the preparation of students with the means to integrate into the larger economic and social sphere of society, in this case a multicultural society. The policies outlined by the TDSB demonstrate the commitment of the school board to address the unique needs of students and to help foster the goals of education. The Africentric Alternative School, under the Alternative School Policy, is seen by its advocates as one method to address the high drop-out rate and the racism presented by the literature. The debate surrounding the school illustrates the need to clarify the extent to which it accords to the values and principles of multiculturalism.

Chapter Three: Multiculturalism and the Africentric Alternative School

This chapter will outline the extent to which the Africentric Alternative School accords to the policies, values, and principles of multiculturalism. Part one will examine the compatibility and opposition of the principles and values at the policy level. Part two will explore the values and principles of multiculturalism outlined by Kymlicka, Fleras, and Elliott as applied to the

debate surrounding the school. Part three will then provide an overview of what can be learned from the analysis.

3.1 The Policies

A number of principles and values are expressed throughout all three levels of policy (Federal, Ontario, TDSB). These include a commitment to diversity, equality, fairness, equal opportunity, and inclusion.

Diversity

Across all three levels of policy, cultural diversity is encouraged as something to be valued and promoted instead of something to discourage and/or fear or change. At the heart of the Multiculturalism Act (1998) is a commitment to the recognition and preservation of diversity described as an act to "...recognize and promote the understanding that multiculturalism is a fundamental characteristic of the Canadian heritage and identity and that it provides an invaluable resources in the shaping of Canada's future". An emphasis is made on the recognition, promotion and fostering of diverse cultures that make up Canada.

The Ontario government's commitment to preserving diversity is seen in the Citizenship and Culture Act (1982) which states a function of the Ministry of Citizenship and Culture is "recognizing the pluralistic nature of Ontario society...to ensure the creative and participatory nature of cultural life in Ontario by assisting in the stimulation of cultural expression and cultural preservation" (sec. 4). Similarly, the TDSB policy promotes diversity as something to be valued, stating in section 2.2 of its Mission and Values (1998) policy, "We value each and every student;...the uniqueness and diversity of our students and our community;... and learning environments that are safe, nurturing, positive and respectful". TDSB's Equity Foundation (1999) policy states, "The contributions of our diverse community of parents and community groups to our schools are valued and encouraged".

Equality and Fairness

Reference to equality is a recurrent theme throughout all levels of policy. The Multiculturalism Act (1998) states, "all Canadians, whether by birth or by choice, enjoy equal status, are entitled to the same rights, powers and privileges and are subject to the same obligations, duties and liabilities...[section e] ensure that all individuals receive equal treatment and equal protection under the law...". The Multiculturalism Act (1998) makes numerous references to the achievement of equality among individuals and groups as something to be desired. Additionally, the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms (1982) outlines a number of individual and collective rights, "Every individual is equal before and under the law and has the right to the equal protection and equal benefit of the law without discrimination and, in particular, without discrimination based on race, national or ethnic origin, colour, religion, sex, age or mental or physical disability" (section 15).

The Ontario Government's policy on Citizenship and Culture (1982) states that the role of the Minister is to, "stress the full participation of all Ontarians as equal members of the

community [and] to encourage full, equal and responsible citizenship among the residents of Ontario” (section 4). In the same way, the TDSB’s policy states, “[we the board are] committed to ensuring that fairness, equity, and inclusion are essential principles of our school system and are integrated into all our policies, programs, operations, and practices” (Equity Foundation 1999).

Equal Opportunity

Across all three levels of policy, equality is seen as not only a right but it is also something to work towards through the elimination of unfair barriers. Equal access and opportunity are outlined as principles. Stated in the Multiculturalism Act (1998), “every individual should have an equal opportunity with other individuals to make the life that the individual is able and wishes to have, consistent with the duties and obligations of that individual as a member of society...[section c states] promote the full and equitable participation of individuals and communities of all origin...and assist them in the elimination of any barrier to that participation”. The Multiculturalism Act also states its commitment to the UN International Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Racial Discrimination (1969) which states, “States condemn racial discrimination and undertake to pursue by all appropriate means and without delay a policy of eliminating racial discrimination in all its forms and promoting understanding among all races” (article 1).

The Ontario Policy on Race and Ethno-Cultural Equity is designed to identify and combat racism through institutional and policy changes. References are made to the principle of equality which is achieved through the elimination of discrimination. The Ontario Human Rights Commission’s mission is to enforce the policy and institutional prevention of racism through legal means. The elimination of discrimination is echoed by the TDSB’s policy,

The Board recognizes that certain groups in our society are treated inequitably because of individual and systemic biases related to race, colour, culture, ethnicity... [therefore] Procedures are in place at all levels of the system for implementing, reviewing and developing policies, programs, operations and practices which promote equity in the system, for assessing their effectiveness, and for making changes where necessary (Equity Foundation, 2007).

Citizenship

At all three levels of the governing bodies there is a commitment to recognizing differences and diversity along with a commitment to inclusion and common citizenship. The Multiculturalism Act (1998) states, “...advance multiculturalism throughout Canada in harmony with the national commitment to the official languages of Canada”. While diversity and differences are to be respected, the Act makes reference to a larger Canadian framework of identity based on official languages and the adoption of the principles of equality and multiculturalism. The strengthening of diversity as a fundamental character of Canada’s identity speaks to a larger frame of reference - the principle of inclusion and nation building as desired effects of the policy. A goal found within the act is the promotion of harmony achieved through equality and respect.

The Ontario Government's Minister of Citizenship and Immigration is to "provide services for successful economic and social integration of newcomers [and] promote greater social inclusion, civic and community engagement and recognition among all Ontarians" (2010). Similarly, the TDSB Mission and Values (1998) policy states "Our mission is to enable all students to reach high levels of achievement and to acquire the knowledge, skills and values they need to become responsible members of a democratic society." The TDSB's Character Development Mandate, and Media Awareness Program discussed earlier also show a commitment to developing Canadian citizens.

Overall, at the policy level, there are far more commonalities in the stated principles and values than there are differences. A commitment to diversity, equality, fairness, and the support for a common community are found throughout them all. The inconsistencies that do exist could be attributed to the means of recognizing differences.

While the Multiculturalism Act (1998) stresses recognition of differences within a framework of equality, the TDSB places value in addressing inequalities arising from differences by further differential treatment to combat inequalities. The Multiculturalism Act (1998) states "that all individuals receive equal treatment and equal protection under the law, while respecting and valuing their diversity". The TDSB states that existing inequalities may require unequal treatment in the school system in order to redress those inequalities, "alternative schools provide an educational experience suited to individual learning styles/preferences and/or needs...the board is committed to developing and promoting alternative schools as a viable pathway and program choice" (Alternative School 2007). The goal of alternative schools is to recognize differences and provide schooling environments that cater to these differences. These differences can range from learning styles, learning environments, curriculum changes, or grading changes. While the TDSB recognizes that differential treatment may be needed to correct unfair differential treatment, the Multiculturalism Act does not explicitly support this goal. While the Multiculturalism Act supports the fair and equal treatment of individuals and communities and the removal of racism, it does so in reference to supporting cooperation and inclusion, not separation. Yet, the Multiculturalism Act does recognize that some groups are treated unequally and that efforts should be made to correct inequalities. Similarly, at the federal level, the Employment Equity Act works in similar means by correcting inequalities through further differential treatment to include minorities in the workplace.

Nevertheless, the federal, provincial, and TDSB share a common commitment to preserving diversity, promoting equality, eliminating discrimination, and creating equal opportunities so that all individuals and groups are included in Canadian society.

3.2 Kymlicka, Fleras, and Elliott Applied

The following section will discuss the concept of multiculturalism as outlined by Kymlicka, Fleras, and Elliott in relation to the Africentric Alternative School. As previously discussed, the following principles were outlined by the authors: liberalism, equality, fairness, and integration. To assess whether or not these principles accord with the school, each will be applied to the Africentric Alternative School.

Liberalism

Kymlicka (1998, 2000, 2001) asserted that at the heart of multiculturalism is the promotion of liberal ideals of individual and group rights. As Kymlicka previously stated, a liberal form of government is one that combats existing forms of inequalities. In Canada, that has largely come about through minority groups challenging the current system. The Africentric Alternative School challenges the existing educational system by arguing that the regular school system unfairly promotes a Eurocentric worldview over other worldviews. As Dei (1997, 2000) and Ghosh (2004b) pointed out, despite efforts to eradicate all forms of discrimination, some forms still exist as evident in the disproportionate drop-out rate among one particular ethnic group. Similarly, the Ontario Royal Commission on Learning (1994) called for the use of demonstration schools to challenge the curriculum and teaching methods of existing schools so that they become more inclusive of the black community. The Africentric Alternative School can be seen as a tool to maximize individual choices and freedoms for the black community by providing black students a choice in their education. By creating the Africentric Alternative School, the TDSB also acknowledges that the current mainstream schooling system is failing black students. This could bring awareness to existing inequalities which results in further challenges to change the current system.

On the other hand, it could be argued that the school promotes illiberal principles. The Africentric Alternative School, as a solution to the problems within the current system, could actually remove the pressure and a degree of responsibility from the governing educational institutions to address the mainstream education problems identified by the black-community. The pressure for mainstream education to adapt to the needs of minorities may be diminished if students are removed from the mainstream system and placed within separate systems. Addressing the problems of the mainstream schooling system by creating a separate method of education delivery could remove the liberal progression of rights which develop through expressions of dissent and calls for change coming from minority groups. This can undermine the efforts to challenge the status quo within the mainstream education system and thus represents an opposition to Kymlicka's definition of liberalism as it relates to multiculturalism.

Equality and Fairness

Kymlicka, Fleras and Elliott describe multiculturalism as a concept aimed at promoting fairness within the parameters of promoting equality. While the Africentric Alternative School is directed towards black students, it is open to all. This is an important distinction that promotes equality and fairness that did not exist in the past when segregated schools were mandatory. Any child can attend the school if they choose. The stated mission of the Africentric Alternative School is to provide an alternative option for students – an option that is voluntary. The purpose of the school is to provide students with the option of being exposed to an environment in which black culture is infused into the curriculum and social activities. Thus, it respects the principle of fairness by promoting the recognition that some students may engage more with a system based on black culture. Many of the parents and students interviewed in Dei's study identified a lack of role models for black students as a problem within the current education system. The Africentric Alternative School provides black role models and an environment in which the student can identify. Ghosh and Abid (2004) summarized the importance of acknowledging that knowledge

is not value-free, that it encompasses a set of organizational structures which can shape how we see the world. Promoting equality and fairness through the option to explore alternative schooling methods only seems fair. Providing students with education options that provide different cultural references, when the mainstream education is argued to represent one culture, seems like a reasonable solution to promote equality and fairness. However, that being said, the school can also be argued to be in opposition to equality and fairness.

For instance, not all black children in the area will benefit from this school. Although the school is open to everyone, only students in the proximity of the school can actually attend. Also, there is currently a waiting list of over 40 students which continues to increase; a large number of black students will not be able to attend the school because of capacity. Thus, not all students, both black and non-black have equal access to the school. Additionally, the creation of a black-focused school can challenge the notion of fairness in another way. It would only be fair to create a number of culture-focused schools to provide more options that reflect the diversity of Toronto students. Thus, fairness could only be attained if each ethnic community also had an option to attend a school based on their own culture. The existence of only one race-based school catering to black culture can be argued to be unfair if other race-based schools were denied. In fact, at the time of writing this paper, proposals to the TDSB have been put fourth for the creation of a Portuguese focused school to combat the 33% drop out rate among its community (Nguyen 2011).

Integration

Fleras and Elliott (2007) defined civic multiculturalism as encompassing a focus on civic inclusion (See Table). The identified source problem within the civic multiculturalism stage was exclusion. The identified end goal was community participation. The Africentric Alternative School can be seen as a tool to reach this goal. The goal of the school is to increase long term integration by providing students with the best chance to graduate from high school. As Kymlicka (1998) states,

black-focused schools may actually be the last, best chance for avoiding the creation of a separatist black subculture...Whether black-focused schools would improve long-term integration is an empirical question. But we need to avoid the simplistic assumption that they necessarily promote separation, or that integrated schools necessarily promote integration...These schools are intended precisely to make it easier for blacks to succeed in the mainstream (84-86).

The school promotes integration by increasing the chances of students obtaining their degree and thus integrating into the larger economic, political and social society in the long term. Thus, the Africentric Alternative School promotes integration by equipping students with the tools for long term success in the larger community by obtaining educational credentials.

Yet, while the school promotes long term integration, it does not promote short term integration. Race-based schools limit specific groups of children from interacting with other children from different cultural backgrounds. Short term integration is compromised for the hope

that long term integration will result. Thus, the Africentric Alternative School does not promote short term integration.

3.3 Assessment: What can be Learned

At the policy level, the values and principles identified within multiculturalism are similar to those identified within the TDSB policies. Thus, the policies guiding the school are not in opposition to values and principles of multiculturalism. The TDSB policies promote the same ideals of liberalism, diversity, equality, fairness, and integration. At the conceptual level, the values and principles of multiculturalism are compatible with the school, yet they are also in opposition. This is evident in the evaluation of the tenets of multiculturalism identified by Kymlicka, Fleras, and Elliott to the school. For each principle that was compatible, it could also be argued to be in opposition. This demonstrates why Kymlicka, Fleras, and Elliott begin their discussions of multiculturalism by pointing out the contested and evolving nature of the concept in Canada.

The principles of liberalism, equality, fairness, diversity, equal opportunity, inclusion, and integration are evident in policy, yet when applied to the school these principles become subject to the same paradoxes that scholars on multiculturalism have identified. Essentially, the school demonstrates how the concept and understanding of multiculturalism continues to be plagued with normative ambiguity. The following section will explore what insights can be gained from the above analysis.

Insights gained

As a concept, multiculturalism presents a set of values and principles that attempt to promote equality, fairness, and diversity. As policy, these ideals can be easily encompassed in provincial, regional and institutional documents. This is evident in the number of policy documents supporting the ideals and practices that attempt to apply them. However, the practical application of these principles can be more difficult. The above analysis demonstrated that at a policy level, values and principles can be easily transferred to other policies, as in the case of the Africentric Alternative School. However, complexities ensued when the conceptual understanding of multiculturalism was applied. This illustrates the often difficult endeavour of translating policy into practice. The application of the values and principles of multiculturalism into practice is more difficult because of the debate over what those values and principles are and how they should be applied. That is, as a concept, multiculturalism's contested nature hinders its clear applicability to practice. For example, the Africentric school debate showed how different understandings of equality at the conceptual level have resulted in different understandings of its application. While some argue for equality as a long term goal (education retention), others argue for equality in the short term (social inclusion). Similarly, the multiculturalism concept of equality is debated. Some argue for equality as treatment (all should be treated the same), while others argue for equality as retribution (treated differently to reach equality). The unresolved debates found within the conceptual understanding of multiculturalism have been translated into the debate about the school. The principles and values of multiculturalism are vague enough that they can be applied in many ways that sometimes may conflict. This was shown through the above analysis.

The level of public understanding of multiculturalism is also evident through this analysis. Canadians demonstrate differences in their understanding and interpretation of multicultural policies and goals. On the one hand, the school debate shows how Canadians may not fully understand that the stated policies and concept of multiculturalism are the same values and principles as the school's. On the other hand, many Canadians may understand the concept but place limits for its use. As Fleras (2009) explains,

Canadians are prepared to accept multiculturalism if costs are low and demands are reasonable for assisting new Canadians to settle in, removing discriminatory barriers, learning about others, and promoting tolerance. Support is withdrawn when endorsement is seen as eroding Canada's sense of national unity and identity, challenging authority of core values, curbing the integration of cultural communities, criticizing the mainstream, or acquiescing in the seemingly un-Canadian demands of particular groups in utilizing multiculturalism as a smokescreen for illiberal practices (85).

Examining the principles of multiculturalism through the case of the school illustrates Fleras's point. While the ideals of multiculturalism seem to support the reasons for the school, the public was fiercely conflicted on the issue. The school was seen by some as a threat to Canadian values yet in a normative examination the school also supports many of Canada's ideals. The debate around the school illustrates that whether intentional or not, Canadians may have placed limits on the extent to which multiculturalism can be applied in public practices. To illustrate this point, consider what the heart of multiculturalism promotes – a cultural mosaic. It is believed that many cultures are better than one, and that the maintenance of many cultures does not necessarily threaten social cohesion. The opposite would be the 'melting pot' model in which one culture is promoted over the others. The application of a cultural mosaic model within the education system could be argued to embrace the notion of race-based or culture-based schools. A cultural mosaic model within the education system would foster the practice of having different schools for different cultures, instead of one school for all. However, in practice this idea is seen by many as a threat to social cohesion, demonstrating that a cultural mosaic is applauded at the policy level yet when applied to the education system it is called into question.

This question, the fine balance between separation and inclusion, has become the crux of the debate around the Africentric School, while it is also the crux of the multiculturalism debate. Whether a cultural mosaic is possible or even desirable continues to be approached with caution. For example, at the conceptual level an all-encompassing school is the ideal, but as the above discussion has shown not all believe this is workable. The high drop-out rate of black students is evidence that the ideal is not being achieved. The reality, according to the scholars previously discussed, is that a holistic education system tends to promote the culture of the dominant group instead of minority groups. Thus, the outcome is more aligned to a melting pot model. This illustrates the fine balance between separation and inclusion – how can one system effectively incorporate and foster diverse cultural communities and avoid one cultural community being unfairly promoted over the others. Applied to the education system, how can one agenda effectively meet all the needs of the diverse population it serves while respecting diversity and promoting a national identity? The Africentric Alternative School symbolizes this debate and questions the balancing act.

Combating racism is another important insight gained from this analysis that speaks to the use of race-based schools. The Africentric School is aimed at empowering black students in light of the acknowledged historical racism in the country. As an isolated case, the school is a corrective step to achieve the same equality as other groups by combating racism. However, providing race-based schools for all cultures regardless of historical injustices seems to further promote injustices, for example, creating white-focused schools. Applying the principles of multiculturalism to the Africentric Alternative School illustrates that the goal of the school is to correct injustices which can only apply to those groups who are socially, economically and politically disadvantaged. Thus, the application of multiculturalism calls into question the use of race-based schools as a general practice applied to all groups or just certain groups. If race-based schools are only provided to certain groups, questions of fairness can surface. Additionally, many students may not be able to benefit from race-based schools if capacity is reached or they do not live near the school. The general practice of race-based schools throughout the country could not be sustained in populations with small minority groups. Thus, the general practice of race-based schools is questioned for its ability to be fair to all. This points the argument towards the importance of addressing issues of inequality and fairness within the current education system, the same education system that reaches all students despite geographical locations. As Kymlicka (1998) explains,

Needless to say, these schools could never be a complete solution to the issue of racism in schooling...it is not a question of choosing to create black-focused schools or to fight racism within integrated schools. Whether or not black-focused schools are adopted, reforming integrated schools remains an essential task (86).

Neither side in the Africentric school debate disagrees that the high drop-out rate is a problem that must be addressed. The debate seems to split over the belief that the integrated public schooling system can effectively address the problem. Essentially, proponents of the school believe that the integrated system cannot address the problem, while opponents of the school believe it can. This is symbolic of how Canadians feel about multiculturalism. Some believe a holistic system can respect differences and promote equality, while others question if a holistic system can only practise token respect for differences and instead promote the status quo. The Africentric Alternative School has become the symbol of the debate. Interestingly, there is little evidence to show that integrated schools promote integration, or that race-based schools will promote higher retention rates (Kymlicka 1998). Yet, for the debate in the public, these facts seem to be of little importance even though they are of great importance to the problem – how to keep black youth in school. Instead the debate flourishes over the values and principles of segregation and inclusion, illustrating that the Africentric Alternative School embodies more than a question of retention rates, rather a larger debate around multiculturalism.

Conclusion

As this paper has demonstrated, the debate over race-based schools represents a larger debate within Canada concerning the complexities of multiculturalism. Managing diversity is an essential and evolving challenge in Canadian society, requiring continuous evaluation. As the country becomes more diverse, the goals and management of education will have to adapt to the needs and values of its diverse citizens. Conflict will continue to occur over values and goals,

shaped by the often vague and contested understanding of multiculturalism. That being said, this paper has outlined how race-based schools have contributed to the discussion of multiculturalism.

As a policy, multiculturalism contains a number of values and principles that support liberal ideals of human rights, diversity, equality, fairness, and integration. This paper has shown that the values and principles of multiculturalism can also be found within the policies of the TDSB. As a concept, Kymlicka, Elliott and Fleras outline multiculturalism as a liberal concept concerned with equality, fairness, equal opportunity and integration. However, scholars have shown the complex nature of each of these qualities. This paper has shown that the values and principles at the conceptual understanding of multiculturalism accords to same values, principles, and debates concerning the Africentric Alternative School. As a result, the paradoxes within multiculturalism are highlighted when the values and principles of multiculturalism are applied to the case example of the school.

At the core of multiculturalism is a belief that many cultures can flourish under one encompassing identity. Canadians pride themselves on their diversity and have taken measures to support the belief in a cultural mosaic through legislation and practices. Yet, the idea of race-based schools has challenged the belief in a multicultural mosaic. While the Africentric Alternative School does accord to the same values and principles of multiculturalism, the debate over its creation and existence illustrates that the application of a cultural mosaic model may have limits.

The management of diversity within Toronto's education system will only increase in complexity as immigration rates continue to rise. Disproportionate drop-out rates among certain cultural and ethnic communities suggest there is a problem with mainstream education structures. While all problems that contribute to drop-out rates may not lie solely with the education system, many believe the education system is contributing to this phenomenon. Working towards a solution to address the drop-out rate is essential. An all encompassing education system would most likely be ideal, however, this paper has shown that it may not be able to effectively address the needs of all students.

The future of race-based schools will largely depend on its ability to deliver what it is believed it is capable of doing – retaining youth in the system. In terms of values and principles, race-based schools promote the positive and negative aspects of multiculturalism. Consequently, from a normative perspective, race-based schools open up the need for dialogue not only concerning publically funded schools based on race, but also concerning multiculturalism. After all, multiculturalism was originally created as a means to address the conflicts associated with cultural differences. While the concept is contested and ever changing, it provides the theoretical space to negotiate the reality of living in a cultural mosaic.

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