

Answering My Sister's Question: The Critical Importance of Education for Diversity in Those Spaces Where We Think We Are All the Sameⁱ

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This essay is a response to a question about school desegregation in Nova Scotia, Canada posed by my sister in 2008. I argue that the question itself illustrates the extent to which critical analysis of the politics of race in Canadian schools, particularly in rural areas, is seldom taken up. This feeds into a persistent mythology of a racially integrated, benevolent Nova Scotia where nasty problems of race were taken care of in the historic past. The reality in many rural regions of Canada is, I argue, quite the opposite and it may be precisely the friendly, homespun imagery which support the persistence of exclusive educational and social practices, as well as persistent regional economic disadvantage. It is in these apparently non-diverse places that diversity education is perhaps most desperately needed.

Recently my Canadian-born sister completed a law degree at college in the southern United States. In the course of her studies she was introduced to equity issues by one of her professors and class discussions comparisons were drawn between the Canadian and American legal system particularly with respect to school desegregation. Unlike the situation in the United States where it is well understood that official desegregation of schools in the 1950s did not end racial discrimination in schools and in society, this is not so much the case in Canada where racial politics have tended to be buried beneath a veneer of alleged tolerance. So it is not surprising that my sister had little understanding around the questions of school desegregation in her home province of Nova Scotia. Her question was simple: When were schools desegregated in Nova Scotia? She wanted to know about segregated schooling in Canada and in Nova Scotia particularly. When did it end? I am going to try and answer that question here.

Why Are All the Teachers White?

This question temporalizes the problem of school segregation. When did segregated schooling end? Given that Nova Scotia schools were officially desegregated not long after *Brown vs the Board of Education*, the answer ought to be 1954. I'm sure there will be few quibbles when I suggest that the establishment of a law doesn't necessarily lead in a straightforward way to eliminating the problem that law was meant to address. If this were so nobody would speed, illegal drugs would not exist, violence would be nothing more than a

memory, and of course, all children would have equal educational opportunities and no child would be left behind.

What my sister's question stimulates for me is the need to speak to the myth that race is not an issue in Canadian schools, and more importantly, that issues of diversity are less relevant, or irrelevant, in less ethnically diverse educational environments. In my view the question needs to be spatialized. Time has not taken care of unequal schooling. In many places people like Jonathan Kozol (2007) argue that schools are even more segregated now than they were in the early 1950s. Even outside the effectively segregated neighborhoods of urban and suburban real estate markets, segregation persists in the exclusivity of apparently genteel, liberally-minded, and allegedly desegregated, open spaces. Such spaces include my sister's virtually all-White law school in Mississippi and my virtually all-White teacher education program in Nova Scotia.

This fall I walked across the leafy campus of my university in rural Atlantic Canada where I work in teacher education to begin another year of teaching. I came to this university in 1977 as a boy from a small industrial town in Nova Scotia. I've been around this place for a long time. The place feels like home. I feel I belong here. I look out my office window at the magnificent view of Cape Blomidon and Grand Pre the fabled location of Longfellow's Evangeline and I feel right that as an assimilated Acadia, I am here.

As usual, I entered my classroom in the wood frame construction called Seminary House. "Sem" as it is called, is the oldest building on campus dating from the 1870s. On my way to the classroom I notice the old photographs from the Ladies' Seminary where in the same rooms in which we now conduct teacher education, 19th century ladies-in-training learned to sew, sit, paint, make cultured conversation, and to generally present themselves in a fashion appropriate to their station as wives of bourgeois men. All of the faces in the photographs are of White women. I also walk past a dozen or so class photos out of which stare hundreds of teacher education graduates all fresh-faced and eager to go to work in Canadian schools. Fresh-faced and for the most part White-faced.

Walking into my classroom in the Fall of 2007 and in the Winter of 2008, the picture is quite similar to the ones in the hallway. My students, particularly in elementary education, are predominantly female. With the exception of a tiny minority of young women and men of colour, the vast majority of our student intake is White. But the apparent lack of diversity does not end here. Most of our students have also grown up in the predominantly rural anglophone

region of the Annapolis Valley and Southwestern Nova Scotia. My university is, in an important sense, the university of the landed gentry of this particular cultural geography. Acadia still asks applicants to list blood relatives who have attended the university on its admission forms. Most of my students, like me, feel as though they belong and it is precisely *our* sense of belonging that I want to trouble here.

In this essay I want to explore some of the social conditions that have created the classrooms I entered this year in a school system that has been formally desegregated for 53 years. Before addressing the question of diversity in classrooms like mine I think the first task is to deconstruct several myths, including the myth that Canadians are a gentle people who never did things like segregate people on the basis of race. This is the implicit backdrop for my sister's question. Here in Canada, most White people don't think about segregation as our problem; it is an American or a South African problem, but not ours. It is my argument that the continuing lack of diversity in most parts of rural Canada is not accidental, but the result of what Pierre Bourdieu (1990) calls a "habitus" or an unquestioned pattern of social practices that are so deeply embedded that they are seldom even recognized at a conscious level. These practices appear to those who enact them as natural and comfortable; they are the foundation of a "down home" folk sense of belonging. My classroom looks the way it does for a set of historical reasons that continue to generate the conditions of exclusivity which do not reflect the real measure of social diversity either nationally or indeed locally. Apart from the ethical questions about exclusivity raised by the situation, I am also concerned that this aspect of our program is making us less relevant to the increasingly diverse modern education system we serve.

Context: The Myth of the North

One of the most intriguing myths in contemporary North America is the myth of the north itself. This is the general notion that the further north one travels, the less difference race makes. In this myth, the "deep south" is the quintessence of xenophobia, segregation, conservatism, rurality, isolation, and racism while the north is depicted in this mythology as multicultural, industrial (and more recently technological), liberal, and open. One part of this myth is that there is a legendary land north of the American border which is even more liberal ... even, a little bit European and socialist. This Canada has gun control, allows gay marriage, has had socialized medicine for generations, generous welfare schemes, high taxes, etc. etc.

Canada is often understood as the place that rejected the libertarian ideas Thomas Jefferson brought home from France when that 18th century monarchy was on the cusp of imploding under the weight of its aristocracy and hereditary privilege. Canada remained a British colony and seemed to be proud of it. Combatants in the American revolutionary war who found themselves on the losing side and scuttled across the border in defeat came to be called Loyalists in their new homes. In many respects the Loyalists were simply people who made a bad investment in the global geopolitical market of the day, yet, before very long a mythology about this rag-tag group of military and economic losers had established itself.

Part of this myth is a connection with the idea of British liberalism and the abolition of slavery in Britain and its colonies at the beginning of the 19th century. This is, of course, ironic given that Britain was, from the end of the 16th century to the middle of the 20th, the preeminent international colonial power responsible for global military, economic, and cultural domination. But setting this aside, on the question of race at least, the British have been considered to have held the high ground formally abolishing slavery at the beginning of the 19th century

From the Canadian perspective the stereotype tends to look like this: the Americans are rich, but we Canadians are just. You are free, but we are fair. You compete in everything, we cooperate. You are big, we are small, not geographically, but in virtually every other way. America is a massive experiment in individualism while our country holds to gentler, more communal traditions. You hate big government because it interferes with individual freedom while we believe that big government insures a measure of equality.

All of this, of course, is myth perhaps best represented by our chief foundational frontier symbols. The American frontier symbol is the independent, tough, gun-toting cowboy; ours is a cop, the Mountie. Every now and again somebody decides that the sleepy land to the north is useful to score ideological or political points. The range of players here runs from the sublime to the ridiculous. On the sublime side, it is now evident that Americans will end up with some form of state-supported federal health care. At the ridiculous end of the spectrum we find documentary film-maker Michael Moore who has fallen in love with Canada and uses it as a foil to contrast American positions on gun control, violence, and health care. Incidentally, Canadians themselves actually buy this mythology. A recent survey on the subject of Canadian identity cited publicly-funded health care as the second most important value that makes Canada distinct (after the #1 value which is –“we’re not Americans”).

Yet another face of the northern myth is that of freedom land. It is well known how abolitionists and activists in the antebellum South developed an intricate network of pathways and safe-houses to spirit enslaved peoples north out of the “deep south” toward a place that came to be known as Canaan land. It was reached by following Orion, the North Star, just off the handle of the “drinking gourd,” the Big Dipper. I do not want to diminish in any way the righteous heroism and sacrifice this all represented, but there is an assumption that once people reached Canaan land, everything was fine. In fact, in most popular historical accounts of the period, especially those written for school children, this is where the story ends. The North and Canada sit unchallenged as unproblematic symbols of freedom.

Contemporary examples of this include the flight of draft dodgers in the 60s and 70s and more recently of left-wing academics fleeing from what Henry Giroux, himself an academic defector to Canada calls (and these are book and/or lecture titles): *The Suspect Society*, *The Surveillance Society*; *The New Authoritarianism*; *The Age of Paranoid Politics*. Like the fleeing bad-guy brother in Bruce Springsteen’s ballad *Joe Roberts*, the Canadian border is the entry point to a hiding place where it is possible to escape the complexity, politics, and harsh justice of the US. The dark side of the myth is that Canada is a place that harbours criminals and terrorists because it is a country that is soft on crime, socially liberally if not morally lax, and insufficiently vigilant in policing its citizenry, in particular, its immigrants. Since 9-11 this imagery has become increasingly commonplace. Canadians now require a passport to visit the United States.

But is everything better once the beleaguered protagonist reaches Canaan land? A recent film by Nova Scotian documentary film-maker, Sylvia Hamilton takes issue with the educational content of this myth which returns me to my sister’s question. Canada has a long history of segregated schooling that dates back to the early 19th century or from the time when the Black Loyalists were first freed and given land on which to develop segregated communities. The same was the case for escaped slaves who arrived in so called Canaan land, primarily in Southern Ontario. Nor did the official desegregation of schools in Nova Scotia in 1954 lead to actual school desegregation. The last segregated school in the province was not closed until 1983. Hamilton’s film entitled the *Little Black Schoolhouse* (2007) demonstrates how segregated schooling was normal in Ontario and in Nova Scotia long after desegregation legislation. So much for Canaan land.

There is ample and convincing sociological evidence that the 40+ year experiment in integrated schooling has not produced integrated outcomes either on the basis of social class or race. In Ontario, young Black men, for example, are 3 to 4 times more likely to leave school before graduation than the general student population. In 2008 a group of activists in Toronto were able to get the Metropolitan Toronto School Board to fund a pilot project for a Africentric school. They argue that this is not a re-segregation of schools so much as a response to schools which continue to be segregated in everything but name. Ironically this is occurring at the same time that Canada is near the top of the scale in the global edumometer (Corbett, 2008), the OECD's Project for International Student Assessment not only in terms of performance, but also in terms of educational equity.

Education in the Great White/Bright North: Beyond Quelques Arpents de Neige

In the middle of the 18th century, around the time of the Seven Years' War, Voltaire famously characterized New France (later BNA, later Canada) as "quelques arpents de neige." What he meant was that this land was not only useless, it was cold and boring. Well, it seems as though cold, boring places like Finland and Canada are in the international educational spotlight these days. There is now considerable interest in the US and in other parts of the world in the Canadian educational system because it is touted to be both inclusive and high-performing. This is in large part due to the performance of Canadian children and youth in international standardized educational assessments, particularly the OECD's Project for International Student Assessment (PISA).

Nevertheless, the myth of Education North fits in with the other northern mythologies. It's kinder and gentler up there. The schools work better. What this myth obscures though, as does most reporting of large scale data, is that Canada is not monolithic. Canada contains within it sub-regions, cultural enclaves, minoritized populations and a wide range of diversity that is blurred by statistical instruments like the PISA. The PISA is like Canaan land and like Michael Moore's fabled land of peace and free triple bypass surgery.ⁱⁱ

While I suspect large scale standardized assessments of education, within the data on school performance we find these regional, ethnic, cultural and social class differences. The Canadian educational system is a matter of provincial and local control just as it is in the US. There are significant differences in funding that I won't go into here, but in Canada, education is

a provincial responsibility and there are thirteen separate provincial and territorial systems within Canada each with its own more or less distinct curriculum and educational legislation. In Canada, there is no national department of education.

In recent years some level of regional coordination has been achieved, but a national department of education is unlikely to emerge. In Canada we have at least 4 provincial systems that will probably never coordinate to any degree with the others. The differences between these places represents just some of the diversity of the Canadian social and political landscape.

First of all there is Quebec which is about 85 percent francophone. In fact, data from the recent census shows us that more than 60 percent of Quebecois are unilingual French speakers. Culturally, Quebec has been left alone by the political arrangements of the 18th century which allowed the Catholic Church to dominate education in the province until the 1960s. This was followed by what is called the “quiet revolution” which was a broad movement primarily within provincial governmental institutions to both modernize the province and to recognize and protect the French fact in Quebec in the face of English Canadian economic and cultural hegemony. While there are continuing struggles, the recent census shows some pretty good evidence that this has been a success. Quebec will not participate in any national curriculum initiatives for historical, linguistic and cultural reasons.

Second, there is the massive, relatively wealthy, highly industrialized province of Ontario sitting right in the middle of the country next to Quebec. If there is a colonial power in Canada, it is Ontario. It contains more than a third of the Canadian population (most of which lives within an hour’s drive of the US border) and the largest city with is one of the most ethnically diverse and vibrant places in North America and the world. Ontario will not likely participate in any national curriculum and educational governance initiatives because in an important sense, it conceives of itself as the country. Like New England, Ontario is the mythical cradle of the birth of the nation.

If Ontario is Canada’s New England, Alberta is Canada’s Texas. Oil wealth has generated an independent spirit, a conservatism, and an individualism that foils all of the Michael Moore stereotypes about Canada as a gay-friendly, gun-shunning, socialist paradise. Prime Minister Stephen Harper who is an Albertan once mused about the province setting up what he called a “firewall” keeping eastern and federal influence at bay while keeping oil money inside the province. On the education front, Alberta has also been developing a heavy regime of

standardized testing not dissimilar from what you have in most US states and in the United Kingdom. The system is exceptionally well funded by Canadian standards and Alberta consistently outperforms all other Canadian jurisdictions on highly publicized comparisons of school and system performance.

If Alberta is Texas, British Columbia is Canada's California, relatively warm and allegedly relaxed. It was established as a Pacific outpost of the British Empire in the last quarter of the 19th century. Today BC has become both relatively wealthy and ethnically heterogeneous with large and vibrant Asian minority populations. In recent years there have been a number of well-publicized educational debates between some of Canada's most socially liberal communities in Vancouver and on Vancouver Island and some of Canada's most socially conservative communities in the rural interior and in several new Canadian immigrant communities in and around greater Vancouver. BC has enough trouble agreeing with itself without imagining how it might integrate into a national education system.

The four provinces I have mentioned so far contain about 85% of the Canadian population. These four provinces are also the most heavily urbanized. And I have not even touched on the transformation of the ethnic composition of the major urban centres in these provinces that have in the last 30 years made cities like Toronto, Vancouver, Montreal, Winnipeg, Edmonton, and Calgary some of the most vibrant and multiethnic in the world. I worked with a colleague who taught in a Winnipeg high school 25 years ago where over 70 languages were spoken in the hallways on a daily basis. Since 1996 the single most prevalent first language spoken in Greater Vancouver is Chinese? These are also the four provinces that consistently score highest on the PISA. The point is that in the Canadian context, diversity may actually increase academic achievement. Diversity, large second language and minority populations have not diminished educational performance.

The remaining six provinces are, on the other hand, predominantly rural and home to a relatively small proportion of visible minorities including the four Atlantic Provinces, which remain predominantly anglo-European, populated for the most part by "born and bred" multigenerational inhabitants. These non-diverse provinces are persistently at the back of the pack economically and in terms of measures of standardized educational "performance."

So is it possible that academic achievement is actually enhanced by educational contexts which are truly diverse? Is it possible that achievement lags in contexts which are kept

artificially monoethnic either through a history of rural colonialism and xenophobia or through an urban ghettoization of racialized populations which today is driven more by real estate markets than by overt segregation?

Spatializing Educational Achievement

It has been my intention to problematize the myth of the monolithic socialistic northern kingdom. Both national-level diversity and relative homogeneity within particular regions contribute to a highly differentiated set of curricula and educational legislation across Canada. I have already alluded to the simplified north-south mythology that animates much of the racial discourse in the US. In Canada, the deepest educational “backwater” (Moreira, 2009) is where I work in the predominantly rural extreme eastern fringe of the country, the Atlantic provinces. We are always at the bottom of the heap when the standardized test scores are reported. I want to conclude by making the argument that there is an important connection between economic prosperity and diversity that is driven by two key equity anomalies specific to my home province of Nova Scotia.

The first anomaly is that in Nova Scotia, there are several socially marginalized and racialized populations which have been historically denied full access to secondary and post-secondary education. The one particular population with which I am most familiar are residents of coastal communities in the Southwestern part of the province. The area has a history of very high dropout rates which continue to this day to be 3 to 5 times the national average for males. This is the problem of social class which is spatialized within the province in the form of the persistent opposition between the relatively prosperous city of Halifax and the relatively poor rural areas. It is also spatialized within all communities in the form of localized social class structures that have established family and neighborhood based enclaves of wealth and poverty.

Second, there are African Nova Scotian and Mik’maq First Nations communities that have also been denied access to higher education and whose schooling was segregated in some communities until the early 1980s despite the end of official school segregation in 1954. In the case of First Nations children, large numbers attended residential schools in which they were routinely abused and treated as uneducable savages. The last and largest residential school in the province closed in the late 1960s. Today the reality is that the majority of African Nova Scotian and First Nations people continue to live in communities and neighborhoods that are not

integrated in any significant way into what might be called the provincial or national mainstream. They are actually geographically segregated on reserves and racially homogenous neighborhoods and communities. Within the province then, there are significant differences in educational access, high school completion rates, post-secondary participation rates which essentially mirror levels segregation, family income, and what French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu (1984) called cultural capital.ⁱⁱⁱ

The second anomaly is that Nova Scotia has 11 universities serving a population of slightly less than 1 million. Most of these universities traditionally served particular Christian denominational communities within the province. There are four Roman Catholic universities, an Anglican university, a Baptist university, one founded on nonsectarian principles but which soon came under the control of the Church of Scotland, and two more modern 20th century non-denominational institutions. So university education ought to be highly accessible to people in the province, at least those outside the marginalized communities I mentioned above. Well, not entirely. Nova Scotia also funds education at the lowest or second lowest level of any Canadian province and has done so for the past decade. University tuition in Nova Scotia is the highest in Canada, nearly twice the national average. Essentially what Nova Scotia has is a collection of private universities which draw well more than half of their revenues from private sources departing from the Canadian norm of public funding for university education. So even for those “traditional” university-oriented Anglo-white families have come to feel the pinch and are abandoning the universities for community college training or for universities in other provinces where university education is less privatized because it is better funded by the state.

One result of these two anomalies is the classroom I faced this year. Despite some attempt to attract a more diverse student population, the inequities I have described above make our student intake largely mono-ethnic and increasingly economically privileged. As a result we face increasing challenges to educate teachers for the majority of “markets” which are now demanding graduates who understand difference and who are prepared to work in diverse environments. In some ways our work around issues of diversity is even more pressing precisely because our population is so homogenous and so unrepresentative of the larger multiethnic reality in population centers. It is in this larger multiethnic reality into which most Canadian children are being born. Schools are being built and teaching jobs are appearing but not so much in the aging, economically challenged, relatively racially homogenous communities of rural

Nova Scotia. Additionally, with our low birth rates and high rates of youth out-migration we are beginning to realize that immigrants and people who are called, “non-traditional post secondary students” are the province’s best hope to sustain both economic competitiveness and population levels needed to get the work done and sustain social programs.

So our challenge as teacher educators is to both educate our students about a world that does not exist in our university, but which most of us see coming. In some ways this world is already here as my university scrambles to recruit nontraditional and foreign students in order to maintain enrollment and solvency in an increasingly privatized funding environment. Our challenge is also to enter into policy debates about accessibility of post secondary education for members of historically marginalized communities. It is clear that the main market for professional teachers is in the multi-ethnic urban spaces of contemporary Canada and beyond as well as in challenged and changing rural spaces. Even in the most rural part of the province, a school superintendent recently questioned the extent to which we are educating our students for dealing with the social class diversity he sees in his jurisdiction.

It is also becoming increasingly apparent that those regions that are making the transition to the knowledge economy are those which contain significant elements of ethnic diversity. American economist Richard Florida (2002) recognizes this in his concept of the diverse “creative class” which exist in contemporary growth centers like Seattle, Vancouver, Boston and Toronto. Sociologist Robert Putnam (2007) has argued that this diversity in no panacea, it continue to present us with challenges. It does seem though that the least ethnically and racially diverse parts of the country are also the least economically vibrant. Florida says that they may be the best place to get factory workers, but unfortunately most factory work is now done off shore. The least diverse places also tend to be the lowest performing parts of the educational system. Diversity isn’t just the “right thing to do”, it may be an economic necessity in the emerging global reality. And in the wider Canadian context diversity appears to be positively associated with academic achievement and, as both the 2003 and 2006 PISA results show both high scores and a relatively equitable distribution of results by international standards.

As urban education systems in the industrialized or post-industrialized west become increasingly fragmented through various school choice schemes, I wonder if these educational systems will become increasingly less diverse. Are we heading for an educational configuration in which religious groups will study only with people who share their faith? Are we heading

toward a space in which affinity groups, disciplinary specializations, genders, sexual orientation communities, athletes and myriad other fragments of our societies will go to school separately in specialized schools? In urban Canada and in the US (not to mention in the UK) it is looking more and more like this is our future. And as our schools become more fragmented and less diverse, will academic achievement (even in the narrow test-driven ways we now understand it) actually begin to decline and become more unequally distributed (as is now the case in the UK and in the US) as a result?

The developments in Toronto to which I alluded earlier are both understandable and at the same time deeply troubling to me because I fear that the Africentric school signals a retreat from the grand dream that the public schools could be a place where everyone “fits in” and where the teachers themselves represent the diversity of the general population. The academics and activists who have lobbied for this Africentric school do not speak so much of overt name-calling, violence, or formal barriers to access. They speak of demographic educational achievement data that have been scarcely altered by two generations of formally desegregated schools. They answer my sister’s question by demonstrating that African Canadian youth are still getting an educational experience that is not the same as White and Asian children and youth. These young people do not feel “at home” in school and their parents are tired of waiting for things to change. It is not nasty, brutish, overt bigotry that causes some people to feel as though they belong in a place and others to feel as though they could never “fit in” there.

Conclusion: The Dark (or should I say the White) Side of Comfort

Ironically, it may be precisely the warm feeling of belonging that constitutes the subtle, nice, warm and cozy, “we-feeling” that routinely reproduces my classroom year after year. To put it even more bluntly, those who are most comfortable in the role of teacher in the system as it is presently constituted are a big part of the problem. My students are prospective teachers, gatekeepers, people who set the tone in schools. Helping our students in this apparently non-diverse educational space understand that their comfort, their sense of what is normal, and their sense of unacknowledged entitlement is problematic is, I think, the most challenging task in preservice teacher education in the apparently non-diverse context in which I work. My sister's question was genuine and its authenticity belies the status of the problem of ongoing school segregation in Canada. When did it end?, is a question that issues from a place of White

comfort, which includes the soothing idea that everything is now fine. Examining one's own comfort and the consequences of that comfort to those who do not share it is a painful process for young people who, "just want to teach," and do not want the painful complications involved in seeing education as anything other than a technical enterprise. The same is undoubtedly true of legal students looking to the law as a predictable space of codified truth where it is possible to hide from the complexity of contemporary living.

It is perhaps in these apparently non-diverse contexts that we need to work hardest around questions of equity and inclusion, not just because it is right to do so, but also because it will lead to better social, economic and political outcomes for everyone. Education is not a zero-sum game where we compete for a limited pool of scarce resources. There is plenty for everyone and when any formerly disadvantaged group gains, we all gain. Besides, we have so much to learn from one another even if the process is sometimes less warm and cozy than what is easy and familiar to us. This, I think, is Robert Putnam's point when he demonstrates that a commitment to diversity does not necessarily make life easier and more comfortable. The key popularizer of the idea of social capital whose famous book *Bowling Alone* (2000) raised questions about the decline of community and commitment, and indeed the value and importance of the "we" feeling it seems is beginning to see complexity in his early arguments. Ease, comfort and familiarity are in an important way the problem, not the solution. Simple tolerance of difference is only a starting point for the difficult work of realizing the grand dream of the inclusive public school and a strong democratic society. Putnam writes:

Tolerance is but a first step. To strengthen identities we need more opportunities for meaningful interaction across ethnic lines where Americans (new and old) work, learn, recreate, and live. Community centers, athletic fields, and schools were among the most efficacious instruments for incorporating new immigrants a century ago, and we need to reinvest in such places and activities once again, enabling us all to become comfortable with diversity (Putnam, 2007: 164).

Putnam points to schools as a site of hope for a new kind of comfort, a comfort with diversity. And yet, marketization, school choice, and high stakes testing seem to be pulling us in the other direction toward fragmentation and specialization. If we know anything from the last

40 years it is that inclusive schooling is hard work. Is it possible that this hard work, should we be willing to engage it, will actually result in better academic achievement in the end (even if we are unwilling to entertain more complex conversations about what academic achievement means)? This counters the popular opinion that school choice and market solutions are the only way to improve achievement. While our monocultural, fragmented spaces whether they be in rural villages or in exclusive neighborhoods or schools of choice, may be more comfortable for us, they may also take from us the strength, prosperity, richness, challenge, and deep learning that living with diversity can generate.

In 2007, in the small rural village of Herouxville Quebec made international headlines. The municipal council of the village passed a “code of behaviour” for immigrants which effectively outlawed a number of practices such as female genital mutilation, stoning, burning people alive, the wearing of a face-covering veil, and a variety of other practices the council members associated with immigrants. There were at the time (and I am sure this continues to be the case) no immigrant populations living in Herouxville. This move may seem bizarre, but in an important sense it perhaps a predictable result of cultural, ethnic, and racial isolation which is characteristic of many rural communities in North America.

Many of the young prospective teachers with whom I work in my own teaching practice were born and raised in communities that are not unlike Herouxville. Some of them wonder why their teacher education programs spend so much time engaging them in questions of diversity and social equity. Many plan to teach in “close-knit” communities that are not diverse and, they believe, do not have serious racial problems or problems of intolerance. “We treat everyone the same,” they say. If they should encounter visible minority students they will be colour-blind and treat everyone the same. Race is an issue for the American south or for the inner cities, not for them. Yet, in February of 2010 an interracial couple living in a rural community near Windsor in Hants County of Nova Scotia discovered a 2 metre cross with a noose around it burning on their front lawn. African Nova Scotians have long called the province the “Mississippi of the north”. It is clear that not everyone is treated the same and the myth of colour-blindness actually hides a seamy underbelly.

The Herouxville and Hants County incidents illustrate how down-home comfort and a shared sense of commonly held misperceptions transform seamlessly into overt racism. But the Herouxville incident is unusual because it took on a public face. Even more insidious is the way

that the exclusionary values that motivated the Herouxville municipal council routinely bubble away beneath the surface of public discourse in kitchen and in coffee shops, in those comfortable discursive venues where folks can and do say what they really feel in a space where they don't have to worry about being “politically correct”.

I have come to learn that one of these discursive spaces is our own teacher education program where there is considerable resistance to face the discomfort of recognizing one's own racism, a racism which is caught up in communal sentiments, attitudes and morality than in open bigotry. The Hants County incident serves as a stark reminder that the polite and somewhat invisible structural racism that I am describing in this paper continues to be paralleled by a lingering and nasty open bigotry. But open bigotry is just the tip of the iceberg. The history of rural education in Canada is, as Hamilton's film demonstrates, filled with silences about the way spaces of homogenous comfort have been manufactured through school and neighborhood segregation, unequal educational opportunities, a biased curriculum, and by generations of teachers who represented and unconsciously defended the hegemony of White supremacy. It is high time we changed. Our schools are still as segregated as the neighborhoods in which they function. They still produce predictably unequal life outcomes as they have for generations.

So when did segregation end in Nova Scotia? The answer to my sister's question is, I think: not yet. This is why equity and diversity education are so critically important in those places that contain little apparent diversity.

ⁱ This paper is based on an invited address delivered at a conference on teaching diversity in educational settings that are not diverse held at Mississippi State College, Jackson MS, 8 May, 2008. I would like to thank Professor Angela Kupenda for her comments on earlier drafts of this paper and for the invitation to speak at Mississippi State College. I would also like to thank my sister Carolyn Gramlich, JD.

ⁱⁱ In an even more bizarre twist, when David Letterman interviewed young Nova Scotian movie star Ellen Page, he expressed an interest in visiting the province while at the same time dismissing the province as some frozen northern backwater. Nevertheless the simple mention of a passing interest in visiting this part of Canada led the national news media into a frenzy of speculation and seduction attempting to lure Letterman to visit. As part of this campaign, the national broadcasting corporation sponsored a contest in which participants were invited to come up with the “ten best reasons why David Letterman should visit Nova Scotia.” This is strange enough. What was even stranger was the fact that the Premier of the province, Rodney MacDonald, himself a traditional Celtic fiddler submitted, on videotape, complete with fiddling and step-dancing, his own ten best reasons. Amongst his top ten was the idea that triple bypass surgeries are “free” in Nova Scotia.

iii Cultural capital is a fascinating concept that attempts to make the connection between linguistic and cultural practices of different groups within a society by understanding these things as a form of capital which is deployable in what Bourdieu called “fields.” In other words, things like the ability to speak a middle-class variant of standard English becomes a student’s capital which can be transformed into grades, assessments and credentials within the market of the school. What are considered to be intellectual “gifts” understood this way appear as social gifts which are given through normal socialization processes in middle class families. Children in other families also acquire different forms of linguistic capital which are transferrable and transformable in other fields, say, in the field of auto mechanics or the fishing industry.

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