

What Did the Multicultural Policies of the Last Century Promise that Need to Be Re-Imagined in Today's DEDI Post-Secondary World?

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Article abstract

This article is an expanded version of the 2023 Plenary Lecture at the Canadian Society for the Study of Education (CSSE) Conference held at the Congress of the Humanities and Social Sciences. This invited essay explores the extent to which the promise of DEDI's (decolonization, equity, diversity, and inclusion) policies and initiatives might bring about the imagined institutional changes in today's context. Contending that we have been here before, the essay reckons that changes will not come about simply through verbal rhetoric, targeted hiring, or training sessions where individuals engage in self-reflection on their attitudes, values, and behaviours, but through critical examination of institutional policies, programs, and practices that result in the removal of systemic barriers which have operated over the years to maintain the inequitable situation being addressed.



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Abstract

This article is an expanded version of the 2023 Plenary Lecture at the Canadian Society for the Study of Education (CSSE) Conference held at the Congress of the Humanities and Social Sciences. This invited essay explores the extent to which the promise of DEDI's (decolonization, equity, diversity, and inclusion) policies and initiatives might bring about the imagined institutional changes in today's context. Contending that we have been here before, the essay reckons that changes will not come about simply through verbal rhetoric, targeted hiring, or training sessions where individuals engage in self-reflection on their attitudes, values, and behaviours, but through critical examination of institutional policies, programs, and practices that result in the removal of systemic barriers which have operated over the years to maintain the inequitable situation being addressed.

Keywords: equity, diversity, inclusion, decolonization, Canada

Résumé

Cet article est une version augmentée de la conférence plénière de la Société canadienne pour l'étude de l'éducation (SCEE) tenue lors du congrès annuel 2023 de la Fédération des sciences humaines. Cet essai explore la mesure dans laquelle la promesse des politiques et initiatives du EDID (équité, diversité, inclusion, décolonisation) pourrait amener les changements institutionnels envisagés dans le contexte actuel. Soutenant que nous sommes déjà passés par là, l'essai estime que les changements ne se produiront pas par de simples rhétoriques verbales, un recrutement ciblé ou des sessions de formation où les individus s'engagent dans une autoréflexion sur leurs attitudes, leurs valeurs et leurs comportements. La résolution du problème devra plutôt passer par un examen critique des politiques et pratiques institutionnelles ainsi que des programmes menant à la suppression des barrières systémiques ayant maintenu l'iniquité à travers les années.

Mots-clés: équité, diversité, inclusion, décolonisation, Canada

Introduction

With the theme: “Reckonings and Re-imaginings,” the organizers of the recent (2023) Congress of the Federation of Humanities & Social Sciences (FHSS) invited (and likely expected) participants “to pause and reflect on the lessons we have learned” as we grapple with today’s changing world and “unprecedented times” (see Rancic, 2023). This reference is to the COVID-19 global pandemic, the worldwide protests for racial justice spurred by the death of George Floyd in the United States, and the escalating climate disasters—all of which we have been experiencing within the past four years, and likely would, as the organizers suggest, “have heightened our awareness of the urgent need for collective action to help us create a more equitable and sustainable world.” As such, they asked that we

begin the work of imagining and enacting the terms under which we might create a radically different world. What might it mean for us to commit to knowing and caring for each other across our differences, understanding that the world we want to live in tomorrow is dependent on the action we take

together today? Can we re-imagine a new set of social relationships grounded in decoloniality, anti-racism, justice, and preservation of the earth? This invitation for both reflection and action, requires a genuine investment in the project of learning and growing, a willingness to participate in active and meaningful co-engagement, and a commitment to exercising patience and care in doing the hard work of changing belief systems and the world.

The question is: Will the re-imagining bring us closer to the required equitable engagements and outcomes that the organizers hoped for—given that equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) discourses, pledges, and initiatives have long been a feature of Canadian public and private ecosystems? The fact is, since the 1970s, Canadian legislations and policies, such as the Multicultural Policy (1971), Canadian Multiculturalism Act (1988), and the Employment Equity Act (1986/1995), have been presented or used as scaffolds for programs and practices that would produce the accessible, equitable, and inclusive society and institutions we seek. So, how is it that over the years, racialized scholars have had inequitable access to participation in post-secondary institutions? Before delving into these questions, and with the assertion that inequity is systemic and rooted in history, in the section that follows, I identify some of the issues beyond occupational opportunities in post-secondary institutions that also permeate our current societal context with which institutions, and Canadians in general, are expected to contend.

Current Social, Political and Educational Context, and Institutions' Initiatives

In addition to COVID-19, which has disrupted the lives of Canadians and exacerbated the health, education, and other inequities in societies, there was also the murder of George Floyd in May 2020, which incited worldwide protests led by Black Lives Matter (BLM).¹ There are also the ongoing calls by the Indigenous peoples of Turtle Island to address the colonial legacy of programs such as residential schooling. The political action pertaining to this colonial legacy even caught the attention of the producers of celebrated CBS television investigative program *60 Minutes*—in February 2023, correspondent Anderson

1 BLM is a social movement group that for years have been calling attention to the unjust and inequitable situation of Black people in Canada, as in other societies around the world.

Cooper reported on “Canada’s unmarked graves: How residential schools carried out ‘cultural genocide’ against Indigenous children,” reminding us that, starting in May 2021, archeologists have been unearthing unmarked *graves* at the *sites* of former *residential* schools (Gavshon & Roberts, 2023). This, as Anderson mentions, “brought new attention to one of the most shameful chapters of that nation’s [Canada’s] history” (Gavshon & Roberts, 2023). And, during the recent (May 2023) coronation of King Charles, there were news reports and images of Indigenous leaders standing beside the King after having had an audience with him where they discussed Indigenous peoples’ “relationship with the Crown...[and] his commitment to reconciliation.” Governor General Mary Simon is quoted as saying: “The King understands the importance of walking the path of reconciliation with Canada and Indigenous peoples.... Discussions like these are vital. They will start slowly, and grow, forming the pillars of a renewed relationship with Indigenous peoples that is based on respect and understanding” (Otis, 2023).

Within the past three years, protesters have also called upon Canadians to critically think about and question the people who have been memorialized and whose names are given to streets, buildings, and universities. For instance, names such as Dundas Steet in Toronto, and Ryerson, Dalhousie, Wilfrid Laurier, and McGill universities, have been called into question. So far, following student protests and the removal of the statue of Egerton Ryerson from the campus, Ryerson—now Toronto Metropolitan University—is the only university that has been renamed. Ryerson was the first Chief Superintendent of Education for Upper Canada in 1844, and his arguments in 1847 were used by the federal government’s Department of Indian Affairs to establish residential schools, or separate English-language boarding schools—run mostly by Catholic and Anglican clergy—to provide agricultural and industrial training to Indigenous children. Also, in the wake of Black emancipation from their enslavement, Ryerson proposed and administered segregated schooling (1850) for Black students, a practice that continued until 1965, when the last segregated school in Essex County, Ontario (one of two provinces to have Black segregated schools) closed. It is said that up until then “more than 50 elementary students in rural southwest Ontario were experiencing segregated schooling” (Bradburn, 2018). Some of the students in these schools, as Isaac Crosby told me (personal communication, April 4, 2023), were “Black Indigenous”; and as Oscar Baker (2021) writes in the article “Honouring Black-Indigenous Bloodlines,” “Isaac Crosby is Anishinaabe and Black, and he wants his family’s history to be seen” (para. 1).

Current concerns about—and in some cases, protests against—the use of Critical Race Theory in K–12 schools signal what might become of EDI or anti-racism initiatives in institutions. At Ontario’s Durham Catholic School Board, which introduced a “new anti-racism policy” in which terms such as “white supremacy” and “colonialism” were used, trustees and members of the public expressed concerns about the language (Follett, 2022). And at the Waterloo Region District School Board in Ontario, some parents expressed concern to trustees about teachers’ use of CRT as something that would contribute to their children internalizing “shame and guilt because they’re white” (Weidner, 2022, para. 6). Furthermore, critical race scholars, like Joshua Sealy-Harrington, assert that the “moral panic” related to CRT is “a well-funded and well-orchestrated political campaign” (Blackwell, 2022, para. 14). Moreover, Canadians’—like Americans’—challenges to efforts at addressing racism in order to achieve racial justice in K–12 schooling and higher education is likely to create and exacerbate racial divisions within schooling communities. Hence, the call for “universal approaches to education that focus on our common humanity” (James & Shah, 2022, para. 18) negates the role that demographic differences play in the lives of individuals.

In the context of these occurrences, educational institutions are operationalizing, or attempting to operationalize, EDI policies and related programs, initiatives, and practices within a decolonialization framework (as such, some institutions use DEDI) that would produce increased access to and enhanced opportunities in education and employment for racialized students, faculty, and staff, particularly those who are Indigenous and Black. To this end, institutions have been engaging in undertakings that seemingly speak to their understandings of what needs to be done, or what is possible, in response to the inequities and racism which they are called upon to address. These include:

- being deliberate or consistent in saying a *Land Acknowledgement*—many of them specially fashioned for the institutions and appear on their websites;
- hiring “equity” consultants—many of them racialized, Indigenous, and Black—to investigate complaints of racism, or to advise on equity policies and/or about setting up inequity programs;
- providing unconscious or implicit bias training for their faculty and staff (in some cases this is mandatory);
- introducing targeted and/or cluster hiring of Indigenous and Black faculty;
- offering post-doctoral fellowship for PhD graduates who identify as racialized;

- establishing Indigenous and Black Studies Chairs and programs;
- investigating campus “security” or policing practices pertaining to racism and discrimination, and in some cases, initiating new policies and practices;
- hiring Vice Presidents (VP), Associate Vice Presidents (AVP), or Directors of Equity (many of them Indigenous, Black or racialized individuals);
- beginning to recognize or “celebrate” ethnic heritage occasions like Indigenous History Month, National Indigenous Peoples’ Day, and Black History Month; and
- becoming signatories to “The Scarborough Charter on Anti-Black racism and Black Inclusion in Canadian Higher Education,” a program resulting from national dialogues (2020/2021) that is designed “to redress anti-Black racism and to promote Black inclusion” (University of Toronto, Scarborough, 2022, p. 18) and hold institutions accountable to their commitments to equity, diversity, inclusion, and access.

Understandably, these initiatives aim to respond to the historical and contemporary realities of a colonial system of inequities and racialization, but there is no consensus or agreement within these institutions as to their need, relevance, and application. And on the basis of merit—as has long been constructed and applied to the Canadian population without regard to differences based on race and other demographic characteristics—invitations to and the presence of racialized individuals in post-secondary educational institutions are frequently questioned because they are perceived not to have met the “standard” that qualifies them for membership (see Spector, 2023). So, multiculturalism, employment equity, and anti-racism policies and programs of governments and other institutions have had little to no effect toward cultivating more culturally and racially diverse, inclusive, and equitable institutions framed by decolonization. Undoubtedly, we have been here before. For there have been events and actions before that would have precipitated social justice reassessments—some of which would have contributed to the establishment of multicultural, employment equity, and anti-racism policies and programs. So, how is it that we are not further along in realizing the equity we seek for racialized Canadians? What did the multicultural and equity policies promise that probably needs to be re-imagined in light of today’s changing world? These questions are taken up in what follows.

Multiculturalism and Employment Equity Policies and Programs: It's Been 50+ Years

Building on the 1971 Multicultural Policy, the Canadian Multiculturalism Act (1988) states that:

The Constitution of Canada...recognizes the importance of preserving and enhancing the multicultural heritage of Canadians...; the government of Canada recognizes the diversity of Canadians as regards 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 (Canadian Multiculturalism Act, 1988, paras. 2, 8).

The Employment Equity Act (1986; which took effect in 1987), and the revised Employment Equity Act (of December 15, 1995) with its Regulations (that came into operation on October 24, 1996) created a framework for employment equity that governed both private and public sector employers under federal jurisdiction, with the expectation that employers comply with all requirements of the Act by October 1997. Accordingly,

The purpose of this Act is to achieve equality in the workplace so that no person shall be denied employment opportunities or benefits for reasons unrelated to ability and, in the fulfilment of that goal, to correct the conditions of disadvantage in employment experienced by women, Aboriginal peoples, persons with disabilities and members of visible minorities by giving effect to the principle that employment equity means more than treating persons in the same way but also requires special measures and the accommodation of differences (Employment Equity Act, S.C. 1995, c. 44).

Elaborating on the notion of equity, Judge Rosalie Abella writes in the *1984 Royal Commission Report on Equity*:

Ignoring differences and refusing to accommodate them is denial of equal access and opportunity. It is discrimination. To reduce discrimination, we

must create and maintain barrier-free environments so that individuals can have genuine access free from arbitrary obstructions to demonstrate and exercise their full potential. (1984, p. 3)

So, for more than 50 years, Canada has had some type of government policy that aimed to facilitate cultural and racial equity, diversity, and inclusivity, and a number of universities and other establishments have received “awards” for their equity initiatives and practices. So, why the need for the initiatives listed above? Were employment equity programs not working all these years? Who has been benefiting from employment equity initiatives? How is it that employment equity policies did not result in programs and practices that produced a diverse workforce reflective or representative of the Canadian population? In particular, what has happened that Indigenous and Black faculty, staff, and students were not gaining access to post-secondary educational institutions as promised by the federal policies?

The fact is, we reside in a culture structured by colonialism and related social stratification and racial capitalism with a multiculturalism discourse that fosters, “race evasion” (Yancy, 2023, para. 16) as Idil Abdillahi contends, which operates as a disservice to racialized people—for “evasion means (or can mean) ‘to avoid,’ ‘to ignore,’ ‘to dismiss’” which “no longer...should be entertained” (Yancy, 2023, para. 16). In this regard, this culture has not contributed to institutions in which individuals (regardless of class, race, ethnicity, gender, sexual identity, generational status) are able to access desired opportunities by which they might realize their aspirations, and ultimately fully participate in the society. If this is the case, what can we expect from some of the initiatives of these institutions? In taking up these questions, in the following section I will discuss two initiatives: unconscious/implicit bias training, and cluster and targeted hiring.

Bias Training and Cluster or Targeted Hiring of Faculty: Are They Helping?

Research indicates that “unconscious bias” or “implicit bias training,” which in some cases are mandated, are not effective (James et al., 2021; Lewis & Shah, 2021; Tamtik & Guenter, 2019). So, the idea that through such training faculty and staff might come to recognize the “unobservable structure in the mind” (De Houwer, 2019, p. 835) that unconsciously drives their behaviours cannot be achieved. For as Applebaum (2020) indi-

cates, using unconscious or implicit bias training to address issues related to race has not produced the expected benefits on the post-secondary education experiences of racialized students, in that the trainings do not address systemic and structural issues that negatively affect the educational engagement and outcomes for racialized students, faculty, and staff. Essentially, as Tate and Bagguley (2017) observe, the training leaves unexamined the various ways in which white supremacy, the legacies of colonization, and the white power structure have shaped, and continue to shape, the ways in which institutions foster racial stratification and racialization. Further, as Kundnani (2020) contends:

when training is introduced as a response to movements and campaigns, it enables the energy of those movements to be absorbed into a managerial process. Diversity and equality become part of the audit culture. Progress is measured through performance indicators. The initiative then moves from movements to management.

Like training, cluster and targeted hiring—the method used to hire particular scholars based on a common identity, scholarship, theme, or shared research interests (Muñoz et al., 2017), and to increase diversity and/or representation in institutions—the evidence indicates that this undertaking or performance alone has been inadequate in addressing the systemic discriminatory process that produced the faculty population in the first place. Here again, this hiring process is used to give the impression that universities are doing things to obtain a more representative faculty. But without changes to the institutional structure that is responsible for the existing composition of the faculty, this temporary measure—especially without needed institutional supports to enable successful participation in the system and equitable opportunities for advancement—will only produce a faculty population specific to that time. Furthermore, having gained entry to the institution through this measure, these faculty members are often expected to speak to, and for, the racialized community with which they identify. For instance, two Black scholars, who were recently hired as assistant professors at universities in central and eastern Canada respectively, called me on the same day in fall 2022 (one in the morning and the other in the evening) to ask my advice about what was asked (or expected) of them. In both cases, the colleagues talked about being asked to talk with their colleagues about how they might deal with or respond to issues identified by Black students in their program. And, I have heard from colleagues about having their photographs used on the university’s website as indication that the university is indeed building a diverse faculty.

Critics refer to some of the tasks that racialized faculty members are expected to perform and satisfy as “inclusion tax”—a reference to the cost being included in or becoming a member of the institutions. In the case of Black scholars, the term used is “Black tax” (Henry et al., 2017). Nevertheless, in attempting to address the issues of inequities, racialization, and discrimination, and disrupt white dominance, educational institutions must ensure that their practices do not result in “commodifying” racialized faculty, staff, and students. As Lewis and Shah (2021) contend, with reference to institutions’ attempts to bring Black students into universities, commodifying is a process that positions racialized individuals as providers of diversity that white students, faculty, and staff can consume. The idea then is to recognize racialized faculty for who they are and what they bring into the institution, not objectify them for the market value they can bring (Lewis & Shah, 2021, p. 198). Ascribing numerical value as a measure of diversity, as Lewis and Shah (2021) posit, is problematic, as it signals a market-orientation that is “surface level logic” (p. 192), and the diversity that their presence provides, gets translated into a “quota requirement” by which they are “tokenized currency.”

The Idea Is to Change Things to Ensure Equitable, Diverse, and Inclusive Universities

If indeed universities are to be responsive to the issues and concerns pertaining to inequity, racialization, and lack of representation of racialized people, in particular Indigenous and Black faculty members on their campuses, there must be a commitment to creating equitable and inclusive educational environments for all faculty. And, with the understanding that the current post-secondary educational institutions, with their structures and programs that have been working for some individuals but not others—particularly Indigenous, racialized, and marginalized students, faculty, and staff—it is essential, going forward, to re-imagine the institutional structures, policies, programs, research, curricula, practices, etc., that have excluded some racialized scholars, silenced their voices, stifled their potential, and limited their successes. To this end, universities must become a space in which racialized—particularly, Indigenous and Black—faculty members are welcomed to work with the increasingly diverse student population, some of whom will have their “first racialized professor,” or *finally* have a professor who “looks like” them, or an educator who has a course with study materials that are relevant and responsive to their

needs, interests, and aspirations; scholars who are committed to conducting research and working with communities (especially the communities with which they identify or to which they are connected); and scholars who are pleased to interact and collaborate with colleagues who respect and appreciate what they bring to the institution through their teaching, research, and service activities.

With their commitment to diversity and inclusion, institutions must know who their faculty, students, and staff are—in other words, know the composition of their population. To this end, data, including census data, is important to collect. Data should inform about the identities and backgrounds of everyone in the population (including those in leadership) in terms of their race, gender, sexual identity, citizenship status, disability status, and other factors, for these things affect how individuals navigate, negotiate, and read the university environment, take or exercise agency, attain their occupational or career aspirations, and take on leadership roles. It is worth noting that institutions will have to take time to build a culture in which all members of the institution believe that the data collected will be useful to their expectations, interests, and aspirations. This is particularly relevant when it comes to collecting data on race, since we live in a society—and, by extension, with institutions—that promote silence on race, or that encourages race to be evaded, avoided, and/or ignored, especially by the dominant racial group members. As such, the expectation is to have everyone—especially white individuals, not just racialized people—participate in answering questions related to race.

It is not just race and related issues that will need to be expressed in the culture of the institution with related understanding and acceptance of the values, norms, beliefs, and behaviours, but more generally, in every facet of the institution. In this regard, members will come to understand that the practices of merely having unconscious or implicit bias training, and/or seeking to bring racialized people—specifically Indigenous and Black individuals—into the institution through targeted or cluster hiring, are insufficient, as they leave unexamined and unchanged the culture of the institution that is responsible for the situation that is being addressed. As Tate and Page (2018) proffer, these initiatives tend more to provide universities with a convenient “alibi to diminish the recognition... and salience of white supremacy” (p. 143), as well as an illusion of recognition that something is being done to address the inequities and racism within the system. Not to be missed in this change process is the role and identities of the institutional leaders, for the leadership must also be racially diverse. It therefore means that the “lived experiences”

of deans, vice-presidents, provosts, presidents, and others not only inform their roles as administrators, but also the culture of the institution in significant ways. In this regard, the DEDI initiatives must also apply to leadership positions, for Universities Canada's (2019) national research report, *Equity, Diversity and Inclusion at Canadian Universities*, shows that:

Racialized people are significantly underrepresented in senior leadership positions at Canadian universities and are not advancing through the leadership pipeline. While racialized people account for 22% of the general population, 40% of the student body (both undergraduate and graduate), 31% of doctoral holders and 21% of full-time faculty, they comprise only 8% of senior leaders at Canadian universities in the sample. (p. 10)

And, while people of South Asian descent, followed by those of Chinese descent, “make up the largest group of senior university leaders...every racialized group analyzed is underrepresented in senior leadership” (Universities Canada, 2019, p. 12).²

In sum, much needs to be done if universities are to go beyond pledges and promises to ensure equity, diversity, and inclusion are realized in these educational environments. The fact is, change will not come about with rhetoric or through individuals' self-reflection, or by people sitting in training sessions hearing of individuals'—their own and others'—values, attitudes, and behaviours. Individuals live “in relation”—as we learn through Indigenous knowledge—to the structures and environment around us. Hence, changes that individuals are expected to make, will not be productive, unless the institution's policies, programs, and practices are not simultaneously examined, challenged, and altered as individuals do the same with their values, attitudes, and behaviours.

2 In terms of gender identity, 49% of the survey participants “identified as female, 51% identified as male and less than five senior leaders identified as gender fluid/non-binary and/or transgender” (Universities Canada, 2019, p. 12). And while people with disabilities account for 22% of the general population and were similarly represented (22%) among faculty members, only about 5% of senior leaders were people with disabilities. But as was noted: “this may also be due to a reluctance to self-identify and slight differences in how the Canadian Survey on Disability and our self-identification form define disability (Universities Canada, 2019, p. 10).

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