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Beyond Intellectual Insularity: Multicultural Literacy as a Measure of Respect

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Authors' Note

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Abstract

We report on a national survey (942 secondary students, 10 school boards, 5 provinces) that measures what young people know about the histories and the intellectual, political, and cultural legacies of racialized peoples, globally and nationally, and where they learned it (school, media, family, community). Intended as a contribution to, and challenge of, existing frameworks for multicultural education, the research demonstrates the importance of in and out of school learning, and how the various sites of learning resonate differently for particular groups of young people. It demonstrates the key role schools can play for different youth in building, or augmenting, a consistent, common knowledge base.

Résumé

Nous faisons le rapport d'une enquête nationale (942 élèves du secondaire, 10 conseils scolaires, 5 provinces) qui mesure la connaissance des jeunes, de l'histoire et de l'héritage intellectuel, politique et culturelle des peuples racialisés, mondialement et nationalement, et où ils l'ont appris (l'école, les médias, la famille, la communauté). Conçue comme une contribution et un défi aux cadres existants pour l'éducation multiculturelle, l'étude démontre l'importance de l'apprentissage scolaire et extra-scolaire, et comment les différents terrains d'apprentissage résonnent différemment pour des groupes particuliers de jeunes. Elle démontre le rôle clé que l'école peut jouer pour les jeunes en devenir, ou augmenter une base cohérente de connaissances communes.

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Introduction

As the official multiculturalism policy in Canada approaches its 40th anniversary, we find ourselves at an opportune moment to re-examine the shifting premises, promises, and processes of multicultural education. We begin with the premise that while official multiculturalism policy may be in crisis in a post-9/11 securitized world and a national arena increasingly dominated by a neoliberal, assimilationist discourse of “social cohesion” (Armstrong & Joshee, 2009), “multiculturalism from below” flourishes in (mainly) urban spaces of lived relations (Bannerji, 2000; Walcott, 2003, 2010), and critical multicultural education continues to hold unrealized potential. In signaling this fraught and variegated political context, we distinguish between different formations of multicultural education. Hegemonic liberal multicultural education has been rigorously critiqued by antiracism and critical race theory for its depoliticized, reductive celebration of difference that ignores racial inequity while normalizing a white¹ Canadian “core.” We locate ourselves within the polysemic and internally contentious formation that critical multiculturalism has become, acting as an institutional placeholder for a broad range of equity-seeking, social justice-oriented pedagogies of social difference (see, for example, Brathwaite & James, 1996; Dei & Kempf, 2006; Joshee & Johnson, 2007; Kanu, 2006; Ladson-Billings & Gilborn, 2005; Mahalingam & McCarthy, 2000; May, 1999; Pinar, 2004).

This article reports on a national survey of 942 grade 10 and 11 students from 10 urban and “rurban”² boards in 5 Canadian provinces that takes stock of multicultural education in the 21st century context of youth's multiple and multi-media spheres of learning. The study was undertaken with a particular interest in building upon the goals of the 2002 Ethnic Diversity Survey (Statistics Canada, 2002b) to investigate the ways ethnic identification shapes participation in the social economic and cultural life of Canada, with a particular interest in education's potential to open up such participation in new directions and meanings. This survey is presented as an innovative research instrument measuring what young people know about the struggles as well as the intellectual, social, political, and cultural contributions of racialized peoples globally and nationally and where they learned it (school, media, family and community). Correlating demographic, survey-based, and school-based data allows for textured analysis of what young people are learning and assimilating from intersecting spheres of in- and out-of-school learning vis-à-vis a globally relevant curriculum. When all is said and done, our quantitative survey takes some measure of “multicultural literacy,” and points to lacunae and strengths in school curricula after thirty years of multicultural reform. It also demonstrates the street smarts of

¹ Following many whiteness scholars, we use the term *white* to reference not an absolute identity, but as a contextually specific *practice*, a contradictory discursive form of consciousness/ignorance, a form of property, and a position of power and status vis-à-vis racialized groups constructed through modernist discourses of racial purity, moral authority and legal entitlement to naturalize white ethnicity as an authoritative and neutral, *unmarked* norm (Ellsworth, 1997; Fine et. al., 1997; Frankenberg, 1993; Levine-Rasky, 2002; Roediger, 1991).

² This term refers to school districts that straddle residential areas both urban and rural.

“multiculturalism from below” whether practiced in family or community, or drawn from popular culture and media.

Why “Multicultural Literacy”?

While E. D. Hirsch first coined the term “cultural literacy” in his book of the same name (1988) as a regressive, Eurocentric and andro-centric canon of the cultural and historical knowledge “every American child should know,” it was subsequently re-appropriated into the celebratory and historically inflected “multi-cultural literacy” (Simonson & Walker, 1988). In their critique of Hirsch’s shrunken worldview, Simonson and Walker state that while some “omissions are the result of oversight, many result from a particular white, male, academic, eastern U.S., Eurocentric bias that severely limits [his]...concept of American culture” (xii). Simonson and Walker assembled a marvelous collection of essays by major authors—including the likes of James Baldwin, Paula Gunn Allen, Gloria Anzaldúa, Carlos Fuentes and Ishmael Reed—whose writing emerges from the experiences of racialized communities and diasporas in the U.S. Perhaps tongue in cheek, they, like Hirsch, also produced a list of important names, concepts, and items that represent multicultural literacy. Their list includes such names, concepts, and items as Chinua Achebe, Bill Cosby, dub poetry, karma, samba, Soweto, and Quetzalcoatl. With all due respect, we have departed from this model of cultural literacy as an inventory of must-know matters. Our research begins from postcolonial and antiracist understandings of Eurocentrism as not a series of oversights, nor simply bias, but an epistemological technology of domination: it is one that erases racialized and contestatory knowledge formations to produce histories riven through by their own silences (Coloma, Means, & Kim, 2010).

Our concept of multicultural literacy is focused on developing a means of measuring openness to contestatory knowledges, intercultural awareness, and respect as lived relations and processes. To explain, multicultural literacy³ depends not on the just-in-time recall of significant facts, but on a growing repertoire of knowledge, an appreciation for the global intellectual heritage of different disciplines⁴, a balanced learning regime (family, community, media, and school), and an apparent willingness or respectful desire to learn more.

Why this Study Now?

This research began with an examination of the implications of Statistics Canada’s 2002 Ethnic Diversity Survey (as well as the 2001 and 2006 census) for education. It must be said that we approached this review as educational researchers with a certain suspicion of discourses that promote multicultural and antiracist education as a response to an increasingly multiracial society. In our view, such arguments substantiate numerous false or dangerous premises. These include the presumption that: racism or cultural pluralism are

³ This conceptualization is distinguished from the usage of the phrase to refer to literacy and reading programmes based on multicultural literature (e.g. Center for Multicultural Education, 2010).

⁴ We write this with the recognition that the very organization of the different disciplines of academic knowledge, including the arts/science division, are as postcolonial scholars describe, a European particularism or local knowledge that has been recruited to global designs (Mignolo, 2000).

either not an issue or not a source of concern in ethnoracially homogenous populations; it is primarily for the benefit of or in response to the demands of racialized members of a school community or society that multicultural or antiracism education should be pursued; multicultural or antiracism education are sufficient to achieve national or global racial justice; multicultural or antiracism education are relevant only in the contemporary context of globalization, with its associated global cultural communication and population shifts.

This being said, it is still relevant to argue that the profound ongoing transformation within Canadian society resulting from changing demographics—including First Nations surpassing non-native population growth (Statistics Canada, 2008) as well as new immigration patterns—and an increasingly interdependent, globalized cultural economy underscore the need for research into the potential role of education in promoting the synergy and dynamic diversification these changes make possible. Specifically, this context poses an urgent challenge to educators wishing to build upon social diversity to develop a diversity of knowledge and understanding within our society as the basis of a larger movement to transform inequitable cultural and materials relations. Compounding the challenge is the uneven spread of racialized communities across Canada. While immigrants are of many racial backgrounds, it is worthwhile noting that according to Statistics Canada immigrants tend to prefer cities, comprising 27% of urban populations versus 6% of rural populations (Statistics Canada, 2002a, 2002c, 2010). In the case of Aboriginal communities, the opposite tendency holds true. According to the Canadian Institutes of Health Research (2003), over 50% of Aboriginal peoples live in rural or Northern Canada. Thus, Canada is an imbalanced mosaic, one with increasingly diverse cities on the one hand and, on the other, rural communities with small numbers of immigrant and racial minorities and large numbers of Aboriginal peoples.

Many Canadian researchers attest that over a quarter century of state-supported multiculturalism and multicultural education has had a clear influence on predominant public values and attitudes towards ethnoracial and immigration-driven social diversity. Jedwab (2004, p. 1) argues, for example, that “[d]uring the past decade one public opinion poll after another has revealed that Canadians ... tend to equate multiculturalism with the country’s diverse demographic character that for the most part which they value.” While there is an apparent groundswell of enthusiasm for multicultural education in Canada, then, and while some provincial ministries of education, school boards, and schools have made substantial efforts to respond to the need for a diverse curriculum that reflects world cultures, aboriginal nations, and diasporic ethnic groups living in Canada, it is certainly the case that multicultural education is unevenly developed and applied across the country.

The national study we undertook combined questions on students’ reported awareness of the histories, struggles, and intellectual legacies of racialized people nationally and globally, and the diverse contexts and social relations in and out of school that mediate their learning (including family, community, peer culture, and popular or mass media). These concerns ground our analysis of the current state of multicultural education in Canada as experienced curriculum and authoritative discourse mediated by competing out-of-school knowledge formations. At the same time, we recognize the tensions and fault lines within the broad field of multicultural curriculum. The goal of transforming ethnoracial social inequality is conceptualized in particular ways, for example, by liberal culturalist and culturally reductive models of multicultural curriculum reform. Comprehensively critiqued as culturally reductive, these hegemonic models have prioritized goals of intercultural understanding and reduced white ethnocentrism,

“minority” cultural preservation, and identity affirmation (Pinar, Reynolds, Slattery, & Taubman, 1996). These premises ignore postcolonial and critical race theory analyses of the cultural and epistemological politics of curriculum as power/knowledge. The latter argue that, as a racial text (Castanell & Pinar, 1993), the curriculum perpetuates racism through the racial organization of knowledge within a Eurocentric frame (Goldberg, 1993; Kincheloe & Steinberg, 2007; McCarthy, 1998; Shohat & Stam, 1994; Mignolo, 2000; Willinsky, 1998).

Postcolonial and critical race theory have expanded our understanding of racism beyond surface manifestations of prejudice and discrimination to encompass a highly dynamic complex of ideologies, image repertoires and individual, institutional, and societal practices of symbolic and material marginalization and exclusion (Rattansi & Westwood, 1994; Goldberg, 1993, 2002; Dei, 1996; Henry & Tator, 2005), which is structured by deep Eurocentric beliefs and values. Through cultural production, including mass media, interpersonal relations, and institutional and societal practices, racial discourse works in the national arena to construct minoritized populations as marginal, foreign or even detrimental to a more “authentic,” normalized ethno-racial national identity (Gilroy, 1993, 2005; Mackey, 2002; Walcott, 2003).

More profoundly, race as a preconceptual principle within epistemological and moral orders underpins Eurocentric conceptions of the human, of human progress and civilization, and of the disciplinary order of academic knowledge forged in the modern/colonial moment of the European Renaissance, Enlightenment and imperial capitalist project (Goldberg, 1993; Mignolo, 1995, 2000). Under the guise of liberal pluralism, multiculturalism continues to be haunted today by this ontological and epistemological hierarchy that universalizes Eurocentric knowledges as the cutting edge of universal human progress while racialized and indigenous knowledges are marginalized as local curiosities, exotic cultural expressions and minor “contributions” (Banks & Banks, 2003). Positioned as non-scientific and petrified in tradition, these non-European knowledges are banished from the curriculum as irrelevant within a discourse that anthropologist Johannes Fabian (1983, p. 31) terms the “denial of coevalness.” Within this epistemological order, racialized migrant populations are premodern subjects requiring education and integration into the margins of modern civilized Canadian society (Goldberg, 2005; Gunew, 2004; Hage, 1998, 2007; Lazreg, 2000; Razack, 2008). Education thus plays a key role, postcolonial theorists in education argue (Willinsky, 1998; Coloma, Means, & Kim, 2009), within the colonial project of subject formation, cultural and knowledge production and nation building.

Concerns Informing the Research Design

From an educational perspective, then, the challenge of reform implies questions, not simply of the inclusion of racialized intellectual and cultural formations, but a transformation of the terms and relations of different formations within a multicentric framework. This concern is dramatically illustrated in the ways knowledge about racialized peoples circulating within official and popular cultural circuits works to reinforce this Eurocentric hierarchy of authority. Recent debates that spectacularize particular cultural practices are instructive in this regard. Practices such as the hijab, arranged marriage, or the right to wear a kirpan are reduced to irrational, dangerously ignorant, or curious stereotypes, proof of cultural backwardness and patriarchy, inspiring liberal feminist

concern for the preservation of “our” Western values of human rights, even by proponents of “tolerance” (on the Quebec “reasonable accommodation” and Ontario Sharia court debates for example, see Simone de Beauvoir Collective, 2007; Razack, 2008;). With an interest in the impact of such “new racisms” (explained below), the second of the three sections of our survey (Demographic, Knowledge, and Opinion sections) inquired into students’ awareness of particular cultural practices that have been the focus of moral panic in Canada.

Educational responses to institutional Eurocentrism and racism in Canada—liberal and critical multicultural education, integrative antiracism pedagogy, social justice education, and intercultural education—have, over the past 3 ½ decades, traced trajectories that reflect changing demographics, community activism, regional cultural policy, and geopolitical pressures. To be sure, multicultural curriculum development is not a form of identity politics which might “simply and obdurately reaffirm the paramount importance of formerly suppressed or silenced forms of knowledge and leave it at that” (Said, 2005[1991], p. 458). We are not suggesting a “curricular monologist” approach to multicultural education (McCarthy, Giardina, Harewood, & Park, 2005, p. 158) in which single historical figures, events, or authors might stand in reductively, or synecdochically, for entire diverse, complex collective affiliations, histories, and knowledge formations. Rather, we understand the Eurocentric curriculum in high school courses in the humanities, social, and physical sciences as an exclusionary racial text of narrow address that reinforces the inequalities in cultural and institutional authority amongst differently racialized groups (Pinar, 1991). This implies a particular focus on the diverse elements of critical multicultural and integrative antiracism educational practice in Canada, the U.S., the U.K., Australia, and New Zealand. These can be summarized to include:

Diversifying the Eurocentric curriculum by centring the perspectives, lived experiences, intellectual legacies, histories, and memories of under-represented, racialized communities within national and global societies; igniting students’ appreciation of the complex processes and negative consequences of racism/Euro-supremacy as they operate in interlocking systems of prejudice, discrimination (interpersonal and systemic) and privilege (as they intersect with other forms of social difference and inequity such as faith, language, class, gender, sexuality, ability, etc.); developing the critical thinking skills to deconstruct Eurocentrism and racist discourses in mainstream knowledge and a profound individual and collective commitment to actively challenge interpersonal, institutional and societal inequity; fostering positive, respectful feelings of identity, belonging, and interpersonal attitudes and social relationships among and between ethnoracial groups; and, modeling inclusive community within schools which promote full opportunity, high expectations and success for all students and ethnoracially diverse leadership, staffing and role models. (Banks, 2002; Cummins, 2001; Dei, 1996; Gollnick and Chinn, 2002; Grant and Sleeter, 1998; James, 1995; Joshee & Johnson, 2007; Ladson-Billins & Gilborn, 2005; Mahalingam & McCarthy, 2000; May, 1999; Nieto, 2004; Pollock, 2008; Sleeter and Grant, 2003)

At the same time, an understanding of the curriculum as a racial text reminds us that while much critical multicultural and antiracism education has focused on attitudinal correction or explicit prejudice reduction, there is an equal need for an expanded curriculum that esteems

and instills diverse global knowledge traditions and historical memories. Educational research has clearly demonstrated that there is dramatic impact on intercultural understanding, communication, and respect associated with multicultural curriculum reform that explicitly recognizes and learns from the achievements of communities of colour (Banks, 2002; Cummins, 2001; Gollnick and Chinn, 2002; Grant and Sleeter, 1998; Nieto, 2004; Sleeter and Grant, 2003). There is also a strong research base to the claim that multicultural curriculum reform enhances minority students' sense of national belonging, motivation, and academic success (Banks & Banks, 2003; Cummins, 2001; Nieto, 2004). Indeed, the diversification of the curriculum constitutes a primary focus of leading models of multicultural education (Banks & Banks, 2003; Dei, 1996; Gollnick and Chinn, 2002; Grant and Sleeter, 1998; Nieto, 2004; Sleeter and Grant, 2003).

Ultimately, multicultural curriculum reform is differently (and arguably more) important for the entire student body, not only racialized youth. Indeed, it is our contention that teaching respect for racialized groups even while their vital and often foundational role within the development of intellectual and artistic traditions that constitute the "official knowledge" of schools is excluded or obscured ironically runs the risk of producing "schooled ignorance" ("I respect you, though I've no idea why you or your culture might merit such respect"). This research addresses a particular gap in current critical multicultural research: that is, evaluating the potential for a truly "pluri-versal" curriculum (Mignolo, 2000) to promote respectful and pluralist values, dispositions and social relationships amongst a diverse student population. By investigating the relation between youth's ethno-racial identity, their sense of ethnic versus national belonging and intercultural respect (reflected in explicit attitudes and informal social networks) (Q1-9), their knowledge of racialized groups' struggles/achievements (Q 14-38), and certain attitudinal indicators vis-à-vis racialized public debates or multicultural curriculum (Q39-43), our research links the substantial body of qualitative studies on social identity, attitudinally-focused multicultural pedagogy, and multicultural curriculum reform. More simply put, our research asks what multicultural literacy has to do with social identity and social values. As such, we are able to make recommendations in terms of the ways "multicultural literacy" (fostered through educational institutions as well as popular youth culture) might mediate and potentially transform the terrains of knowledge politics, cultural identity and intercultural appreciation.

The Multicultural Literacy Survey as Research and Learning Tool

The survey was organized into three sections.

The Three Part Survey

1. Demographic Data (9 questions)
2. Six Different Topic Areas (29 questions)
 1. Cultural Practices
 2. Literature
 3. History
 4. Science
 5. Math

6. Sports/Physical Education and Art

3. Opinion Questions (5 questions)

Central to our design of the research instrument was the recognition of the growing attention within contemporary scholarship and practices of multicultural education to include both the school and significant sites of learning outside it (Hoechsmann & Taylor 2005; Taylor & Hoechsmann, 2008). Nonetheless, the guiding principle behind the choice of the material tested was that it might, or should, be fairly widely and consistently taught in Canadian schools, some regional differences notwithstanding. Thus, based on an extensive review of provincial ministerial and board-initiated curriculum reform across the country, the first section of this survey was designed to measure students' knowledge of the diverse, global heritage and histories of different subject areas highlighted by current multicultural programs in Canadian schools.

With the participation of the Canadian Race Relations Foundation, we convened a meeting of young anti-racism activists to workshop an early version of our survey. The most significant outcome of this day-long workshop was to transform the survey from the traditional format where questions are posed and right answers must be selected, to one which offers some information and then asks the student to respond if they already knew this, and where they had learned it (they could acknowledge learning about something from multiple sites). Here is a sample question from the survey, some historical data typically taught in schools:

23. Harriet Tubman, a slave from Maryland, escaped to freedom in Canada in 1849. Later on she helped hundreds of slaves to escape the U.S. through the "Underground Railroad."

- a. I didn't know about her
- b. I learned about her at school
- c. I learned about her from a family member
- d. I learned about her from the media (newspaper, magazine, TV, radio, Internet, etc.)
- e. I learned about her from friends or community members

As can be seen, students are not "tested" and the goal is one of education and empowerment. On this question, for example, 79.2% of participants had heard of Harriet Tubman and felt they knew some of the information presented. Of these students, an overwhelming majority claimed to have learned about her in school (67.6%), while some had learned about her from the media (34.9%), far fewer from their family (10.1%) or from friends or community members (6.8%)⁵. Of the students who had known nothing of her, the survey may serve as an introduction and invitation to learn more.

The particular structure of the survey, then, is such that it teaches as it learns. Thus the survey is not simply a research instrument but a curricular activity. As a quantitative research instrument inspired by a pedagogical impulse and qualitative interest in knowledge not as static or inert but negotiated and dynamic, the resulting instrument design is of unique methodological interest as an instrument of assisted self-evaluation. We wish to

⁵ Survey participants could choose multiple selections from a-e; thus percentages for different letter-based responses can total above 100% but are valid for comparison.

highlight the specifically educational dimension of this design for its potential interest to numerous other fields of inquiry (e.g., health education, legal or civic education, adult education, education for human rights or civic engagement) in which the goals of engagement, discussion, collective deliberation, or “empowerment” outweigh concerns for experimental measurement alone.

In collaboration with ten urban and “rurban” school boards across the country, we conducted the survey of 942 high school students based on a random stratified sampling of schools in each board. Reliability was enhanced through a detailed Teacher Implementation Check. We have analyzed these surveys through quantitative and qualitative data analysis methods, including SPSS triangulation of responses. Univariate and bivariate analysis triangulated students demographic identifiers, diversity of family/social networks, years of Canadian schooling with knowledge claims in relation to different school subject areas, and responses to attitudinal questions regarding multiculturalism and immigration.

The 942 sampled students were largely in grade 10 and born in Canada (79.7%), having attended Canadian schools their entire lives (82.4%). The sample reflects a good balance in terms of gender and ethnolinguistic diversity: only a slight majority claimed English as a birth or home language (59.7/51.3%); identified as white (55%); or claimed ethnically homogenous family or friendship circles (57.3/51.3%). While survey questions were designed to reflect topics notable for their consistency of inclusion in multicultural curriculum reform across the country, it is most likely that for students encountering these questions, the topics were not fresh in their memory. For this reason, the cumulative average score on the entire survey of 50.23% should be interpreted as strong. More interesting are the “top questions,” which received the highest response rates of knowledge claimed by participants:

13. An arranged marriage is a union between two people that is negotiated by or with their parents. It is a cultural tradition that is practiced in countries such as India and Pakistan as well as Canada (95.4%)
18. A haiku is a Japanese form of poetry that expresses the beauty or emotion of nature or everyday experiences in the fewest possible words and syllables (5, 7, and 5 syllables) (89.5%);
19. Anne Frank, a Jewish-German teenager, spent 2 years hiding from the Nazis with her family during World War II before they were discovered and sent to concentration camps. She died at 15, but her diary was saved and published in 67 languages (82.4%);
25. In the 1880s, over 15,000 Chinese immigrants helped build the Canadian Pacific Railway. Their pay was less than 50% of other workers’ and hundreds died. After the railway was finished, the Canadian government put a head tax on Chinese immigrants. By 1903, it was \$500 (about two years’ pay). In 1923, the Chinese Immigration Act limited Chinese immigration to Canada (81.7%).
23. Harriet Tubman, a slave from Maryland, escaped to freedom in Canada in 1849. Later on she helped hundreds of slaves to escape through the “Underground Railroad” (79.2%).

The extraordinary knowledge claims about haiku, Anne Frank, Chinese railway workers, and Harriet Tubman are drawn overwhelmingly from school experiences, as these are the highest scores in school-based knowledge claims as well. These are clearly canonical figures in Canadian curricula. On the other hand, knowledge claims vis-à-vis arranged marriages are overwhelmingly claimed from out-of-school knowledge bases, since these were also the highest scores in the categories of knowledge claimed from media, family, and community and friends.

The question on arranged marriages is one of several on cultural practices that form part of a Eurocentric discourse of knowledge construction that relegates racialized knowledges to the realm of folklore, pre- or anti-modern tradition, and consumable culture that are deemed irrelevant to the “real business” of academic and scientific advancement. As explained above, racism operates not only through the banishment of racialized knowledges from authoritative institutional spaces but also through the circulation of reductive, essentialized images of racialized practices as potential threats to “our” civilized values. Consequently, we hold that schools shouldn’t teach the ‘cultural practices’ of racialized groups as a topic: this would entrench a colonialist anthropological gaze and reduce racialized cultures to frozen, atavistic or folkloric objects of knowledge (see Balibar 1991; Barker, 1981; Gilroy, 1993; Miles 1989; Razack, 1995 on cultural racism or “new racism” as well as critiques of reductionist liberal multiculturalism). We find it encouraging, then, that it is in this section that out-of-school sources of multicultural literacy dramatically outstrip school-based sources (see Table 1).

Table 1

Average Score in 6 Subject Areas from 4 Sources

	# of Obs.	School (%)	Media	Family members	Friends/ community
Cultural practices	941	28.75	33.94	17.75	18.39
Literature	941	32.23	13.85	7.29	6.45
History	940	38.86	20.92	8.21	5.56
Science	936	26.58	12.39	6.38	4.51
Math	938	29.99	22.94	15.87	8.76
Sports, physical education and Art	938	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A

That schools are the primary contributors to multicultural literacy was a welcome finding for our participating school boards. Of course, the survey had been biased in favour of actually existing Canadian curricula, so this was not in fact an astonishing outcome. Nonetheless, it is an outcome that raises a challenge to Canadian schools, given their privileged access to our young people. When schools do teach particular material, it has

tremendous staying power in the minds and memories of young people. Schools represent the most consistent source of knowledge about the intellectual legacies, histories, and struggles of racialized peoples. This is evident not only in comparing different subject areas (see Table 1), but also in more fine-grained analysis. For example, we created two substantial sub-categories of questions focused on students' awareness vis-à-vis the struggles/achievements of members of African & African diasporic cultures, and of those of First Nations and aboriginal peoples of the Americas. Despite the fact that several of the schools surveyed claimed significant aboriginal populations, on cumulative and average score and across all information sources the surveyed students claimed greater knowledge of the achievements/ histories of African Diaspora. The cumulative average score in African Diaspora was 47.75% compared to 33.85% in First Nations (see Table 2).

Table 2
Average Scores in 2 Additional Topic Categories of Questions

	Cumulative Avg. Score	school	media	family members	friends & community
African Diaspora (N=941)	47.75	33.65	19.94	6.31	5.35
First Nations (N=941)	33.85	24.07	10.11	5.11	2.78

While our survey indicates this trend of greater knowledge claimed vis-à-vis African and African diasporic intellectual, cultural and political legacies than those of indigenous and First Nations, we are left to speculate on the grounds for this finding. Certainly, a survey of the past two decades of commercial and popular media reflect the increasing prominence of African American cultural producers with substantial youth audiences and an interest in exploring African American and diasporic histories and achievements (filmmakers or actors such as Spike Lee, Denzel Washington, Will Smith; “conscious” music by RnB and hip hop artists such as Kanye West, Nas, and The Game). Youth growing up during the early post-Apartheid years may have also benefited from substantial media coverage of the inspiring and triumphant struggle against racism in South Africa. At the same time, as a white settler colony engaged in ongoing cultural genocide, colonization, and denial of claims to self-determination, there is a deafening silence or pejorative paternalism towards First Nations peoples in the media and in society generally (witness Canada’s exclusive distinction along with other white settler states of Australia, New Zealand, and the U.S. in refusing to sign the UN Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples; see, e.g., Warry, 2007).

Schools emerge, however, as the more important source of knowledge in both African diasporic and indigenous questions, particularly in comparison to the media. The average score of knowledge gained from schools in both categories (33.65% in African Diaspora; 24.07% in First Nations) was higher than knowledge gained from the media (19.94% in African Diaspora; 10.11% in First Nations), family members, and community and friends (see Table 2). The average score of 24.07% of knowledge learned in school on indigenous questions also demonstrates a certain consistency as it is closer to school-based scores in the five subject areas the overall survey average score. The importance of school as a source of knowledge regarding African diaspora is consistent in all demographic classifications: average score through school outperformed media by a margin of 10-17%.

Another observed trend is that, on the whole, participants claim greater knowledge of famous individuals than of the intellectual and historical legacies of entire populations (with the exception of the history of Chinese Canadian railway workers and the literary form haiku). For example, student participants on average claimed knowledge of Nelson Mandela at a higher rate than their average score on all questions concerning the historical struggles and intellectual legacies of African diasporic peoples (63.7% vs. 47.75). Students' knowledge claims vis-à-vis Nelson Mandela specifically exceeded their claimed knowledge of the key moment in the South African struggle against apartheid in which he participated and which is commemorated by the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination.

In another example, student participants on average claimed knowledge of Harriet Tubman at a higher rate than their average score on all questions concerning the historical struggles and intellectual legacies of Afro-diasporic peoples (79.2% vs. 47.75). Students' knowledge claims vis-à-vis Harriet Tubman specifically exceeded their claimed knowledge of the abolition of slavery from which she helped African Americans escape through the Underground Railroad. This differential is more pronounced in relation to knowledge students claim to have gained from the media vs. from school (a differential of $(34.9-11.3) = 23.6\%$ of knowledge learned from media vs. a differential of $(67.6-56.4) = 11.2\%$ of knowledge learned in school).

This last finding raises the question: for whom is school an important (and consistent) source of knowledge of the intellectual heritage and historical struggles of racialized peoples as compared to out-of-school sources? This group seems consistent with the finding in the previous paragraph. For example, the media were the most important cited source of surveyed knowledge for participants self-identified as White (22.39%), male (22.39%) claiming more than two cultural or racial backgrounds in their families (22.39%). In contrast, the media were less important (lowest average score) for self-identified students of colour (20.17%) born outside Canada (19.67%) with a home language other than English (19.31%). Rather, it was school that was most cited by immigrant ESL students of colour (students with a home language additional to English (35.13%); 4 years or more schooling in Canada (33.97%); and culturally diverse peer cultures (33.64%)).

Conclusion

As our research demonstrates, the media is not a uniform source of knowledge about the intellectual legacies, histories and struggles of racialized peoples. The bias towards Afrodiasporic versus aboriginal content and awareness we describe above is case and point, as is the media's focus on hot button and moral panic issues as they emerge in society at large. Youth appear to signal a tendency to retain knowledge about historical figures rather than broader historical data, a bias that can be accentuated in the media with its fixation on celebrities and stars. The point here is not to argue that the media is only a source of spectacularized and inaccurate information, but that the tropes of the individual "star"—whether that be Nelson Mandela or Justin Bieber—and of the "crisis" or moral panic—whether that be arranged marriage or the wearing of the kirpan—are central to the media. This is especially significant in relation to our third finding: that multicultural literacy is learned in different ways by different young people.

Emerging from the data outlined above are two broad profiles of students: one with diverse social spheres and family histories of migration and multilingualism for whom

school represents the most important as well as consistent source of multicultural literacy; and the other, with more ethnoracially and linguistically homogeneous social and family spheres for whom the media serve as a more important source of knowledge vis-à-vis the struggles and achievements of racialized peoples. This finding points to the importance of multicultural curriculum reform, since it is this second profile (students with only English as a home language, with homogeneous peer groups who identify as white) who scored lower on average on the survey.

We are, therefore, able to argue that multicultural curriculum reform can represent a vital intervention into the resources different groups of Canadian youth bring to their navigation of complex social and highly mediated cultural worlds. For the first profile of new or first generation (or transnational) multilingual Canadians, multicultural curriculum reform promises to enhance the role of schools in their development of a broad cross-cultural awareness, respect and widening expanse of knowledge framed within an appreciation for the global intellectual heritage of different disciplines. This taps into the touchstone of multiculturalism as official policy, that is, nation building (Kymlicka, 2001). Thus, for this profile, multicultural curriculum can be understood, not as a dry exercise in knowledge acquisition but as a process of becoming Canadian within a framework of multicultural citizenship.

For the second profile of youth inhabiting more ethnoracially and linguistically homogeneous social worlds, multicultural curriculum reform offers the potential for schools to intervene in out-of-school processes of learning about the world heavily influenced by myriad, often competing agendas. For youth with fewer self-declared intercultural relationships, schools present the possibility of counter-balancing what are clearly inequitable, selective foci in terms of the representation of different global knowledge and cultural formations in commercial media.

These findings reiterate in complex, nuanced ways what have long been claimed in the name of critical multicultural education (agendas of equity and common national values of pluralism). Clearly, “multicultural literacy” (fostered through educational institutions as well as popular youth culture) holds strong potential to mediate and potentially transform the terrains of knowledge politics, cultural identity and intercultural appreciation amongst differently positioned youth. This is particularly underlined by the finding that youth remember individual figures over social movements: there are serious implications for educators wishing to prepare and engage youth in broad, grassroots movements, be they for greater democracy, social or environmental justice. This research launches a call for education that emphasizes collective processes of social change in which youth might imagine and find themselves as vital participants.

The findings of our study demonstrate the importance of multicultural curriculum reform and the role played by schools in preparing Canadian citizens with the knowledge base which may begin to counter the Eurocentric hierarchical organization of knowledge that underpins complex systems of racism and Eurocentrism. An attention to diversifying the curriculum emerges as particularly urgent for schools in areas of low ethnoracial and linguistic diversity. In the absence of educational leadership, media step in to inform or misinform youth with limited experience dealing with cultural difference or interactions with people of different ethnoracial and linguistic backgrounds than their own. Compared to schools, media appear to be a less consistent and even-handed source that tend to focus

on particular “controversial” topics and comparatively powerful racialized groups in ways that are often reductive, essentializing and culturalist.⁶

Ultimately, this study underscores the continued urgency, if only partially fulfilled promise, of multicultural curriculum reform that centres the knowledges, memories, intellectual, political, and cultural legacies of racialized peoples within the hallowed and authoritative spaces of classroom teaching materials, academic sources and sources of academic assessment—that is, knowledge that counts in the institutionally sanctioned space of schooling. Yet, the study also presents some of the complexity of lived relations as they impact the teaching-learning relationship. It is not so simple to point a condemning finger at school administrators and teachers, or to assume that curricular reform will in and of itself enable significant change. Rather, it is important to recognize the swirling spheres of influence that inform young people’s worldviews and knowledge bases. First, are the competing sources of knowledge found in family, community and media. Second, are the life experiences of young people and their own biographical and cultural trajectories. Schools can no more ensure intercultural respect and knowledge bases than they can form equity-seeking ideological subjects. Like good horticulturalists, however, they can seed their gardens and fertilize their soil.

⁶ This conclusion is based on participants’ higher scores in knowledge from the media in the ‘Cultural Practices’ section focused on practices subject to reductive stereotyping, as well as the differential in media-based knowledge (versus school-based knowledge) claimed by participants about Afro-diasporic versus First Nations and individuals versus social movements.

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