Official Discourses, Teachers’ Practices, and Inclusion for Minoritized Students: A Review of Works by Critical Theorists

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This paper examines scholarly literature on how critical theorists deconstruct official discourses mobilized by teachers’ practices, and its influence on inclusion for minoritized students. The review maintains antiracist and critical multicultural education lenses, as they lend insight to the ideology behind social justice and equity, and provide useful approaches to achieving successful inclusion. Through analyzing teachers’ practices and understandings of diversity, and utilizing critical discourse analytical methods, the analysis highlights predominant official discourses for inclusion of minoritized students within schools. The first section of the analysis explores prevalent everyday practices and conceptions of diversity among teachers, while the second section outlines discourses surrounding supports for inclusion. The author argues for incorporating more critical analysis and pedagogical stances toward matters of diversity within classrooms, serving to destabilize oppressive and prejudicial social and power structures entrenched within schools.

Keywords: inclusive education, minoritized students, official discourses on inclusion, teacher conceptions of diversity

In keeping with the steady upsurge of classroom diversity, and attempting to serve students with various differences, schools encounter challenges in establishing policies
and practices supporting academic achievement and successful inclusion for minoritized\textsuperscript{1} students. Complexities and nuances surface when deliberating issues of diversity and inclusion, further illustrating the importance of fostering inclusive education ideals and practices to better serve all students. This requires understanding embedded systemic prejudices, oppressive discourses, and injustices reproduced within educational institutions (Dei, 1996, 2007; Harper, 1997; Nieto, 2002).

Teachers, principals, and administrators committed to notions of equity and social justice invite diversity into classrooms and schools, yet acknowledge a lack of awareness, knowledge, support, freedom within the structures of curricula and schools, and preparation to adequately serve minoritized students (Gérin-Lajoie, 2008a; Keat, Strickland, & Marinak, 2009; Petrou, Angelides, & Leigh, 2009; Smythe & Toohey, 2009). Many educators also report concern trying to navigate best practices for working with minoritized students, emphasizing issues of time constraints and need for expertise, while managing demands for greater accountability (Jacquet, 2008). Taking into account these challenges, how do teachers’ everyday practices provide inclusive classrooms for minoritized students, in light of the need for more knowledge, resources, training, time, etc.? What are teachers’ underlying assumptions, understandings, and discourses pertaining to issues of diversity and minoritized students, and how do these influence inclusive pedagogy?

This paper examines scholarly literature on how critical theorists (i.e., critical pedagogy and critical race theorists) deconstruct official discourses mobilized by teachers’ practices, and its effect on the inclusion process for racially, ethno-culturally, and linguistically diverse students. In exploring teachers’ practices, it is pertinent to investigate their attitudes and assumptions toward minoritized students and notions of inclusion, as considering teachers’ perceptions of diversity, equity, and social justice, can inform how these impact pedagogical actions toward providing inclusive environments. Lastly, the paper describes supports for inclusion of minoritized students, and how these may be associated with ideals for transformative education.

\textbf{Conceptual Frameworks}

A critical multicultural and antiracist education perspective is maintained throughout this analysis. Both approaches challenge deeply entrenched power structures within schools, and draw attention to how social practices of power are enacted in school practices (Gérin-Lajoie, 2008a).

Emphasizing notions of social justice, critical pedagogy, and equity, a critical multicultural perspective acknowledges intersections of differences as existing within terrains of power and identity. It focuses on unveiling discursive practices that implicitly propagate power and privilege to particular societal groups and advocates reform of social hierarchies within schools (Gérin-Lajoie, 2008a; Jacquet, 2008; Ladson-Billings, 2003; Nieto, 2002). In promoting educational reform of hegemonic practices and structures, this frame also maintains “empowerment and resistance to forms of

\footnote{\textsuperscript{1}Minoritized refers to existing power relations and processes that marginalize particular groups within society, either socially, politically, or economically for not adhering to dominant groups’ norms and standards (Harley, Jolivette, McCormick, & Tice, 2002; McCarty, 2002).}
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subjugation; the politicization and mobilization of marginalized groups; transformation of social, cultural, and economic institutions; and the dismantling of dominant cultural hierarchies, structures, and systems of representation” (Henry & Tator, 1999, p. 98, emphasis in original).

In line with an antiracist education approach, the present analysis recognizes the importance of interrogating difference, examining “how and when difference is produced and treated” (Harper, 1997, p. 201). Dei (1996, 2007) highlights the importance of exploring ideologies undergirding social systems of oppressions, and realizing its inceptions, purposes, and control of power and privilege among groups. Antiracist education suggests an analysis of oppressions and systemic prejudice within society and how these are mirrored in the educational arena (Dei, 2007; Gérin-Lajoie, 2008b).

Critical Discourse Analysis

Using the works of various critical theorists, this review analyzes official discourses surrounding teachers’ practices and understandings of minoritized students, and how this impacts inclusive education. As such, critical discourse analysis (CDA) serves as the primary mode of analysis. Although maintaining no chief consensus as a single method, CDA is perceived as a research approach to analyzing and interpreting texts (i.e., written texts, such as literature, or oral texts, such as talk). Aiming to address social problems, CDA searches for hidden meanings, biases, and ideological presumptions, revealing perpetuating and endorsed discourses of power imbalances, dominance of groups, prejudices, discrimination, and inequities within social, historical, cultural, and political contexts (Fairclough & Wodak, 1997; Luke, 1997; McGregor, 2003; Van Dijk, 2004). Discourses do not neutrally or apolitically exist within society and sites, but rather they create, legitimize, and control knowledge bases, power, ideologies, and social relations among groups and institutions through schools, communities, media, etc., establishing acceptable notions of public societal normalcy (Fairclough & Wodak, 1997; Luke, 1997; Van Dijk, 2004).

Seeking to understand and resist social inequity, CDA intends to unveil the ways in which language and texts “do things” to influence power dynamics within society (Fairclough, 2001; Luke, 1997; Van Dijk, 2004). Luke (1997) indicates that CDA is both deconstructive and constructive, as it intends to: a) interrupt and raise issues regarding power imbalances in daily texts; and b) infiltrate curricula allowing students opportunities to critically analyze discourses of what and how they are taught (e.g., critical literacy courses). As texts reside in institutions such as schools, students, teachers, and administrators use these texts to understand everyday school experiences and practices, as well as contribute to and construct their identities (Knight, 2008). CDA as a methodological approach fits the context of this review, as it deconstructs discourses of teachers’ practices, assumptions, and attitudes regarding notions of diversity and inclusion, and helps us understand how these cumulatively affect inclusion for minoritized students.

The author began her review by first selecting appropriate scholarly research literature (i.e., peer-reviewed publications) regarding teachers’ practices and understandings associated to inclusive education, diversity, and minoritized students. Key word search queries utilizing computer databases, such as EBSCO, ERIC, and Scholars
Portal, included the terms, “minority student,” “critical multicultural education,” “antiracist education,” “inclusion,” “diversity,” “critical pedagogy,” “teacher attitude,” and “teacher practice.” The author also reviewed various scholarly textbooks and peer-reviewed books. The review is comprised solely of works related to racially, ethnoculturally, and linguistically minoritized students. Further refining the search, works included those only from critical scholars and theorists who maintain critical multicultural and antiracist educational lenses. Ultimately, the analysis included 31 research studies and literature from Canadian and American contexts, spanning the period from 1993-2009. Initially, the search of research literature extended back 10 years; however, this timeframe was further expanded to include the works of influential and prominent scholars in the fields of diversity, critical pedagogy, and inclusion for minoritized students.

In utilizing CDA, the author first uncritically approached the written texts (i.e., research studies and literature) then followed with a subsequent examination using a critical lens (Huckin, 1997). She questioned each selected piece of work and its construction, contemplating addressed characters, noting initial responses, exploring alternate interpretations diverging from the status quo, and conducting a cross-comparison between the various works (McGregor, 2003; Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 2006; Wood & Kroger, 2000). In searching for meanings the author pursued explicit discourses, documenting repetitive phrases, terminology, metaphors, and symbols, while also monitoring for implicit discourses, attempting to understand how these meanings impact inclusive education (Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 2006; Wood & Kroger, 2000). Employing CDA effectively highlighted relevant recurring themes and patterns in the research literature, specifically for exposing social inequities in schools. Broad surfacing themes included: a) teachers’ conceptions of diversity; and b) possible supports to strengthen inclusion within schools.

**Teachers’ Understanding of Diversity**

Investigating teachers’ personal perspectives regarding diversity offers insight into existing inclusive practices for minoritized students. Becoming familiar with teachers’ conceptualizations, attitudes, and beliefs regarding students from minority status groups helps convey how and why teachers employ particular inclusive strategies within classrooms. Emerging themes include notions of colour blindness, “Otherness,” power relations, and celebrating diversity.

**Colour Blindness and Denying Differences**

Much of the research exploring teachers’ practices and inclusion for minoritized students sheds light onto discourses of colour blindness within the classroom. In the Greater Toronto Area (GTA), Gérin-Lajoie (2008a) examined 100 Anglophone and Francophone teachers’ and principals’ perspectives of student diversity within Catholic, English language, and French language schools. Some of her participants reported they did not notice or identify students based on ethnic, racial, and linguistic differences, but rather considered all students the same, regardless of background. Such colour blindness or ignoring differences within schools was also demonstrated within a Vancouver study of
38 elementary school teachers and administrators, participating in three language programs (i.e., Anglophone, Francophone, and French Immersion) (Jacquet, 2008). In examining teachers’ understandings of differences among students, Jacquet (2008) explained that participants from each group reported not noticing students’ differences, stating that it was a natural part of the school.

Wearing blinders as a classroom strategy when teaching and working with minoritized students is a predominant discourse within education. This practice of renouncing diversity is merely a “belief of the myth of sameness” (Knight, 2008, p. 91). As a means to further understand notions of Whiteness and White privilege within the educational system, Knight (2008) investigated the views and beliefs pertaining to diversity from approximately 73 White teachers in the GTA. Her findings indicate that participants speak of difference as either non-existent or irrelevant, as teachers indicated that students were not categorized based on diverse backgrounds, but rather perceived as equal and the same. Participants refrained from acknowledging that ideals of equal treatment based on sameness perpetuate systemic prejudice and discrimination within schools, silently normalizing and attributing power toward dominant groups (i.e., Whites) (Knight, 2008).

This colour blindness approach conveys a fantasy of “good and fine” classrooms, in which racism and discrimination does not and cannot exist. Within Knight’s (2008) study, a few teachers attributed classroom misunderstandings regarding racial conflict to students’ attention seeking behaviour or insecurity, rather than to experiences of racism. Simply ignoring differences or ignoring issues of race, ethnicity, culture, and language does not hide the reality that discrimination, prejudice, and intolerance subsists within school spaces.

Denying matters of diversity within schools undeservedly attributes blame toward minoritized students for educational struggles, rather than to the socio-political contexts in which the students reside, further perpetuating inequities within schools (Nieto, 2002; Sleeter, 2004). For instance, Sleeter (2004) explains that among a group of 26 White teachers attending professional development sessions over a 2 year period, a majority professed a sense of colour blindness within classrooms, yet, they associated particular ethnic groups (i.e., Blacks and Latinos) with deficiencies (e.g., inabilities, broken families, etc.) without considering systemically rooted societal injustices (Sleeter, 2004). Participants asserted that personal merit and work ethic determine academic success among minoritized students. Therefore, as a means to achieve equality, teachers denied critically understanding and confronting issues of diversity and discrimination, and removed colour and race from the classroom.

Denying differences within classrooms romanticizes ideals of equal treatment and same opportunity for all students (Harper, 1997). Issues of meritocracy surface, as such practices mask challenges that many minoritized students experience within the school system (Harper, 1997). Additionally, disregarding differences devalues and discounts minoritized students’ personal experiences and qualities associated with their differences, portraying them as irrelevant and unimportant (Harper, 1997). Although colour blindness and denying differences are socially accepted practices by dominant groups—perceived as fair and unbiased frames—they exist as forms of discrimination reproducing social inequities and imbalance of power within schools.
Colour blindness also reflects an ideology of “democratic racism” (Henry & Tator, 1999, p. 90). Namely, educators purport notions of equality and fairness within classrooms by ignoring differences in order to justify their failure to confront issues of diversity and injustice. At the same time, this only perpetuates assumptions and differential treatment toward minoritized students. Such a philosophy presents opportunities to elevate liberal democratic views, while also maintaining discriminatory practices (Henry & Tator, 1999). Refusing race and racism within classrooms also serves to refute its deeply rooted systemic social practices, privileges, and powers within schools. Consequently, the need to transform these practices within educational systems is set aside, further marginalizing minoritized students.

**The Others, White Discourse, and Power**

Within the educational system, minoritized students are often perceived as the *Other*, maintaining “‘heritage’ from elsewhere and whose ‘foreign’ cultural values and practices remain static and based on their [i.e., educators’] past experiences in other countries” (James, 2001, p. 177). The notion of *Otherness* is a tacit assumption among teachers’ practices. Sleeter’s (2004) examination of White teachers’ understanding of race and diversity demonstrates that these teachers perceive diversity as intriguing customs or traditions to hear about, and if time allows, to teach about, placing minoritized students within this category of *Otherness*. These teachers identified minoritized students as “immigrants,” residing outside “normal” White discourse within social and school practices, failing to recognize the societal power, authority, and agency they themselves as White teachers possess (Sleeter, 2004).

Jacquet (2008) and Knight (2008) reported that teacher participants conceptualize diversity as the presence of ethnic groups within classrooms. For example, in describing diversity within schools, the teachers mainly focused on language, ethnicity, nationality, culture, and race. Jacquet (2008) suggests that this conceptualization creates a dichotomy within classrooms, whereby minoritized students become the ethnic *Other*, existing as “visible outsiders” (p. 66), whilst students from White majority groups remain as “invisible insiders” (p. 66). In identifying students as the *Other*, notions of Whiteness go unnoticed and remain the standard norm (Knight, 2008). In perceiving diversity as solely based upon race, ethnicity, culture, etc., minoritized students become marked by labels of “foreignness” or “Otherness.” This classification of minoritized students is associated with power relations, as dominant groups acknowledge racialized differences, but refrain from critically questioning the production and effects of these differences, thus excluding themselves from the political and organizational power structures that exist within schools and society. Consequently, dominant groups preserve their invisible privilege and power.

Highlighting issues of power and privilege, King (2004) describes notions of “dysconscious racism” (p. 72), explaining its complexities and contributions toward teachers’ understandings of diversity, inequity, and differences among minoritized students. Although cognizant of differences, this consciousness is fairly misconstrued, as teachers frequently refrain from critically challenging inequities and prejudices that arise when situating differences within dominant groups’ norms and privileges. Within her study of pre-service teachers’ beliefs pertaining to racial inequity, King (2004) indicated
that a majority of her 57 student teachers (98%) attribute racism and discrimination among Black students to either historical pasts of slavery, economic barriers, or unequal opportunities. These understandings demonstrate “uncritical ways of thinking about racial inequity [wherein] certain culturally sanctioned assumptions, myths, and beliefs … justify the social and economic advantages White people have as a result of subordinating diverse others” (Wellman as cited in King, 2004, p. 73). Fifty-six out of her fifty-seven students did not conceptualize inequity in terms of power relations within Whiteness and its norms, privilege, and supremacy status (King, 2004). As Sleeter (2004) contends, “Whites so internalize their own power and taken-for-granted superiority that they resist self-questioning” (p. 174).

In examining issues of linguistic diversity, Gérin-Lajoie’s (2008a) participants recognized minoritized students in French language schools as more successful in French language skills compared to their White peers, yet still identified minoritized students as the Other (Gérin-Lajoie, 2008a). Within English language schools, participants viewed minoritized students as being at a disadvantage for academic success due to a lack of English language skills (Gérin-Lajoie, 2008a). Linguistic diversity among minoritized students presented a sense of disadvantage, weakness, and deficiency, as these students did not adhere to prescribed “normal” or “traditional” standards within English language schools.

Shifting fault toward students rather than toward educational systems disempowers minoritized students by firstly equating needs to differences, and secondly classifying them as subordinate victims rather than individuals with human agency (Gérin-Lajoie, 2008a). Identifying minoritized students as somehow inferior or “less than” students from dominant groups due to differences, unwarrantedly pigeonholes students with differences as students with needs. Concepts of neediness and inadequacy become securely fastened to the backs of minoritized students. In order for minoritized students to academically succeed they are continually compelled to “fix” their differences, closely conforming to approved and customary educational standards, therefore, victimizing minoritized students, rather than acknowledging the power, agency, and knowledge they possess and contribute to school systems. Furthermore, individualizing problems among the Other allows “insiders” within dominant groups to assert notions of individual rights and responsibilities, rather than recognizing collective responsibilities and rights among groups (Henry & Tator, 1999). By pointing fingers at minoritized students for academic challenges, those from dominant groups conveniently deny their unearned privileges and absolve themselves from responsibilities to incite change for social justice. This is especially true among those from dominant White groups, who sometimes lack “understanding of how White privilege secures benefits and privileges not available to all” (Knight, 2008, p. 104). Educational systems historically groomed and framed to serve students from dominant groups must address their responsibilities to serve minoritized students, critically examining current societal and educational rights.

**Celebrating Diversity**

One of the prominent official discourses of inclusion for minoritized students is celebrating diversity. For instance, schools frequently emphasize “‘saris, samosas, and steel-bands’” (Henry & Tator, 1999, p. 98), foods and festivals, or “holidays and heroes”
(Nieto, 1994, p. 397), in the hopes of promoting a sense of tolerance and acceptance within schools. Such an approach includes incorporating classroom discussions and activities on cultural heritage, food, music, famous historical individuals, and festivals (Knight, 2008; Nieto, 1994; Sleeter, 2004). Celebrating diversity is commonly perceived as an equitable and inclusive educational approach, whereas discussions of power, social justice, and antiracism are associated with more negative connotations (Solomon & Levine-Rasky, 2003). For example, Solomon and Levine-Rasky’s (1996, 2003) national study of Canadian educators across five urban school jurisdictions, reported that approximately 71% of their 35 teacher interviewees maintain negative and uneasy feelings in deliberating issues of antiracism. Although teachers may recognize and consider the challenges many minoritized students and families face, conceptualizations of social justice, systemic prejudice, and power structures are not part of the official discourse within schools (Gérin-Lajoie, 2008a).

Such discursive practices exoticize the Other, celebrating minoritized students’ unique beauty and colour, highlighting their “foreign” qualities (James, 2001; Knight, 2008). Additionally, celebrating diversity of the Other creates a dichotomy between “us” and “them,” perpetuating discourses of abnormality from the standard “norm” (Knight, 2008). Frequently these cultural celebrations entail outdated wall displays, books, and artifacts representing non-White groups, or brief discussions in academic subjects, highly favouring Eurocentrism (e.g., middle ages, New France, British North America, European Early Settlers, classic works of English literature, etc.) (Knight 2008; Sleeter 2004). Consequently, this propagates stereotypes illustrating divergent cultural paths in terms of progress, advancement, and industrialization between non-White and White cultures; that is, non-White cultures are static in nature, signifying immobility, while White cultures are dynamically developing, signifying a sense of mobility (Knight, 2008; Sleeter 2004). Furthermore, celebrations of diversity often lead to essentializations of cultural groups, in which these groups become homogeneously typecast, symbolizing particular ethnic traditions, beliefs, religions, practices, etc., once again, perpetuating cultural stereotypes (Knight, 2008). Maintaining views of homogeneity among cultural groups, rather than acknowledging heterogeneity externally between and internally within these groups, not only further exoticizes minoritized students, but it also serves to marginalize minoritized students who may not relate or fit within the essentialized stereotype.

Adding tidbits of culture to classroom practices and lessons frequently becomes tokenistic in nature, pushing its way into an educational system entrenched in Eurocentric and White ideologies (Sleeter, 2004). The practice of celebrating diversity artificially adds cultural content and information within unchanging curricula, and thus examining diversity becomes reserved for particular lesson plans or relevant subject materials, rather than across all subject areas; this is also known as the “additive” approach to multicultural curriculum (Banks, 1999). This picking and choosing of which pieces of cultures to celebrate, and where it fits within regular curricula or course subjects, is common practice (Jacquet, 2008). However, it conveys a notion of surface inclusion, as celebrating diversity does not authentically and critically confront hegemonic societal oppressions ingrained within schools. Rather than simply engage in celebrations of others’ cultures and diversity, Nieto (1994) calls for a deeper and critical understanding.
of the structures of culture within schools, where there is examination of differences, clearly emphasizing how power relations affect certain groups.

Support for Inclusion

In providing successful inclusive education for minoritized students, it is important to understand possible supports to assist teachers’ efforts toward truly inclusive classrooms. The inclusion process, although sometimes considered a daunting and overwhelming journey, may improve with more self-reflective practice, professional teacher learning, and critical positioning toward inclusive leadership, informing and reforming teachers’ diversity repertoires.

Professional Learning and Knowledge Construction

While acknowledging the importance of professional learning about diversity, many teachers rely on unreconstructed and unchallenged personal beliefs, assumptions, and experiences to guide inclusive practices due to reported lack of knowledge specific to ethnicity, race, and culture (Jacquet, 2008; Sleeter, 2004). Essential to practicing critical pedagogy is ensuring educators explore personal and political feelings and views pertaining to minoritized students (Niesz, 2006). As educators begin rethinking and reconsidering teaching values, beliefs, and habits, they may reform their educative practices. Transformative education requires that educators reflect upon their cultural and racial positioning within the educational system, and question how these influence systemic social oppressions and power structures within schools, critically deliberating and destabilizing personal teaching practices and philosophies (Knight, 2008; Young, 2007). Solomon and Levine-Rasky (1996) suggest teacher education programs develop a “multi-dimensional critical reflective practice” (p. 353), to prepare and promote examination and critical reflection of teachers’ conceptions, abilities, values, etc., regarding minoritized students and inclusive education. Moreover, ensuring that professional learning programs function as communities will better establish collaborative school cultures—cultures that build relationships, reflect on personal knowledge and experiences, as well as problematize and challenge assumptions related to inclusion and minoritized students (Ryan, 2006).

Predominant discourses within schools denote educational transference of knowledge, rather than transformation of knowledge. This transferring of knowledge is associated with teacher learning about diversity and inclusion. Within her study, Gérin-Lajoie (2008a) found that teachers and principals perceived training and professional learning pertaining to multicultural education as a key element in providing inclusion, preparing them for primary responsibilities as transmitters of knowledge. Similarly, teachers within Solomon and Levine-Rasky’s (1996, 2003) studies conceptualized antiracist and multicultural education as new knowledge to transfer onto students. Thus, the dominant discourses of inclusion appear to maintain notions of accountability, performance, and transferring of knowledge among teachers, principals, and students (Gérin-Lajoie, 2008a).

With a push toward academic standardization and achievement, teachers and principals frequently discount the effects of social, cultural, historical, economic, and
political factors on student success. In emphasizing accountability and transmitting knowledge, there is disregard for transforming knowledge, in which curiosity, debate, dialogue, risks, possibilities, and questioning embody classroom spaces (Freire, 1970/2006). Transforming knowledge within classrooms allows both students and teachers to critically explore, analyze, and discuss educational material and issues relevant to students’ lives. Transformational learning presents students with the agency and power to critically think and learn about diverse knowledges and worldviews from multiple lenses, rather than solely from the lens of dominant groups (Nieto, 2002). Challenging discourses surrounding educational knowledge—although perhaps viewed as an insurgence of “dangerous discourse” (Nieto, 1999, p. 195)—lends insight into societal structures that contribute to educational power imbalances.

Curricula Overload and a Sense of Burden

Inclusion of diversity in schools is often perceived as a method to insert cultural activities and festivals into unchanging curricula and programs (Harper, 1997; Jacquet, 2008). Hence, inclusion becomes viewed as a time-consuming process that adds additional work to already heavy workloads. Solomon and Levine-Rasky (1996, 2003) reported that teachers perceive antiracism and multicultural education as additional material to learn and add to their extensive teaching repertoires and daily schedules. Thus, including critical approaches of diversity within the classroom takes on a sense of curricular overload or burden. With feelings of pressure, accountability, and more time consuming demands, teachers often resist incorporating material pertaining to equity and diversity within classrooms (Solomon & Levine-Rasky, 2003).

To confront this resistance, one possible solution may be saturating schools with educators from minority status groups. These educators may most likely be familiar with issues, perspectives, and discourses of minoritization (Sleeter, 2004), while also reflecting societies’ diversities and knowledges (Dei, 1996; Nieto, 2002). Interrogating notions of equity and diversity may not be perceived by minoritized educators as curricular overload; rather they may naturally incorporate critical approaches of diversity into classrooms, recognizing these as necessary components to learning and transforming knowledge. Yet, such incorporation of minoritized educators does not necessarily prevent systemic prejudice, as they still must conform to dominant groups’ ideologies, values, beliefs, and practices, which frame the educational system (Ghosh & Abdi, 2004). As minoritized educators continue complying and adapting to dominant groups’ educational ideals, they may fail to foster their own critical consciousness toward systemic prejudice and injustice. It is the intent of many minoritized educators to empower minoritized students, offering these students ways to navigate terrains of a society ill-fitted for them, and “to dismantle hierarchies of power and oppression around the dimensions of socioeconomic background, language, ethnicity, race, and gender” (Walker as cited in Lynn, Johnson, & Hassan, 1999, p. 43). However, resting responsibilities on the shoulders of minoritized educators to generate social justice reform and provide critical approaches of diversity exonerates non-minoritized educators, especially those of White groups, from being accountable for learning about racism, marginalization, and inclusion. Non-minoritized groups retain power and privilege as they learn the stories and experiences of oppressions from minoritized people, never authentically grasping or as

**Inclusive Leadership**

Official discourses surrounding inclusive reform frequently appoint principals and administrators as leaders of inclusive educational change. Teacher participants in Solomon and Levine-Rasky’s (2003) study indicated a sense of relief when administrators presented direction, competence, and guidance supporting inclusion; participants considered inclusion a less menacing responsibility, and expressed reduced feelings of burden and fear. With greater access to resources, principals and administrators may have the capacity to support teachers through professional learning about diversity, creating paths toward a greater inclusive school culture (Gérin-Lajoie, 2008c; Ryan, 2006).

Commonly associated with notions of inclusive leadership is transformational leadership, as well as the encouraging of principals and administrators to serve as transformational leaders who develop a collective commitment, among all involved members, of change toward inclusion (e.g., see Ainscow, 2001; Leithwood & Jantzi, 1999; Leithwood, Jantzi, & Steinbach, 1999). Emitting charismatic qualities, transformational leaders hope to gain followers’ trust and pride in her/his ability to successfully lead school reform, despite obstacles (Gunter, 2001). However, Gunter (2001) indicates that ideals of transformational leadership are founded within “instrumental” and/or “scientific” (p. 95) perspectives, focused primarily on effective leadership strategies and its impact within organizations. Conversely, critical theorists contend that leadership is more about relationships and agency between individuals, rather than about leader agency, behaviours, and roles (Gunter, 2001; Ryan, 1998). Critical scholars argue that leadership initiatives should be concerned with issues regarding human agency and power relations, maintaining goals for social moral purposes, and change toward social justice and equity (Gunter, 2001; Ryan, 1998, 2006). Such a critical approach involves the contribution, decision-making, and collective voices of any member implementing inclusive change, including students, parents, and teachers (Ryan, 1998, 2006). Inclusive leadership that openly invites any member to participate in initiatives regarding social equity may stimulate proactive actions circumventing injustice and oppression within schools.

Inclusive leaders can also serve as inclusive agents of change. Teachers, alongside other educative leaders, are called to serve as change agents, engaging in a critical pedagogy through critical multicultural and antiracist lenses within schools. However, official discourses portray teachers’ roles as knowledge transmitters, rather than knowledge transformers capable of leading change initiatives (Gérin-Lajoie, 2008c). Teachers seldom consider themselves as possessing the political agency within schools to confront topics such as prejudice, discrimination, and equity. These notions and understandings of teachers’ agency and role are embedded within the teaching culture, and continually perpetuate and dictate societal official discourses of teachers. Conceptualizing teachers as change agents contradicts the status quo of teachers’ roles (Gérin-Lajoie, 2008c).
For teachers to serve as inclusive agents of change we require reform at a systemic level within schools and society; change toward inclusion must begin from within the system and construct of education itself. Namely, perceiving inclusive reform in terms of institutional changes within pre-service and in-service training, educational policies, and strengthening leadership relationships between school stakeholders (Gérin-Lajoie, 2008c; McCarthy, Rezai-Rashti, & Teasley, 2009; Solomon & Levine-Rasky, 2003); inclusion must be integrally woven within the fabric of school cultures.

Conclusion

To strengthen equity and social justice within schools, notions of diversity must be persistent and invasive (Nieto, 2002). This entails that educational stakeholders seek insight as to how teaching, and discussions of differences, may become integral components of the everyday practices of educators. As teachers critically challenge the educational status quo, question existing social and power structures within schools, and consider their personal positioning, they may begin recognizing schools as institutions implicitly reproducing societal inequities.

Professional learning supports awareness and preparation for the critical analysis of diversity issues among educators. Educators may also reflect upon personal cultural capital, histories, and experiences, recognizing how these might contribute to supporting ideals of dominant groups (Young, 2007). In this way, educators begin deconstructing and reconstructing understandings of the self, of students, of knowledge, and of society. Young (2007) urges educators to “think outside of the box” and to situate themselves within the Other’s shoes, to engender the perspectives, possibilities, diverse worlds, and lives of others.

Critically thinking outside of the box—or the educational institution—requires extrapolating and sifting through its contents, contemplating how these have been historically constructed and governed by dominant groups to preserve and yield further supremacy. As educators analyze and confront issues of social justice and equity within school systems they become agents of change or “transformative educators” (Young, 2007, p. 124), continually rethinking assumptions and notions of the world of others, and incorporating critical ways of teaching and learning about issues of inclusion. For example, Dessel (2010) draws attention to two exemplary programs, which challenge systemic prejudices within schools and serve as best practices for educators: 1) cooperative learning programs (i.e., establishing heterogeneous groups of students from differing backgrounds and varying abilities to work as a team to complete school work); and 2) character development programs (i.e., deliberately incorporating critical discussions of social justice, prejudice, and oppression into schools, such as “The Facing History and Ourselves” curriculum) (p. 418). Research demonstrates that these programs ameliorate prejudicial attitudes, dismantle stereotypes, and build empathy toward others’ differences (Dessel, 2010). Such critical approaches to teachers’ practices synergistically transcend toward students, transforming their ways of receiving and interpreting knowledge (Young, 2007). Students, in particular minoritized students, become empowered, mobilizing their agency to critically explore educational knowledge, perspectives of diversity, and concepts of equity. In essence, transformative educators cultivate transformative students.
Yet, serving as a transformative educator poses challenges for many teachers, especially when considering teachers’ work environments, daily responsibilities, heightened level of accountability, and existing contradictions within the social structure of school systems. To address these challenges and foster successful inclusion, it is important to provide not only suitable pre-service and in-service training, professional learning opportunities, and inclusive leadership assistance, but also to continue with future research on inclusive educational policies, and ways in which to revamp and revitalize school structures. These may support teachers’ efforts toward becoming transformative educators and agents of inclusive change, leading to the elevation of consciousness and openness to transformative possibilities, inciting inclusive education for minoritized students.

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References

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