Start With the Child

Developing Potential in Education

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Canada

For Alex,

my inspiration

and

Brad,

my sanctuary.

"By disparagement, by starvation, by repressions, forced direction, and the stunning hammerblows of conditioning, the free, roving mind is being pursued, roped, blunted, drugged. It is a sad suicidal course our species seems to have taken."

"And this I believe: that the free, exploring mind of the individual human is the most valuable thing in the world. And this I would fight for: the freedom of the mind to take any direction it wishes undirected."

-John Steinbeck, *East of Eden*

Abstract

The Nova Scotian *Public School Program* has identified the development of individual potential as essential to their primary mandate. From personal classroom experience, I have found a considerable lack of attention to the needs and learning styles of many students, leaving them without the tools to uncover or capitalize on their particular potential or strengths. To discover how schools have ended up with a narrow view of student potential, I have researched the evolution of schools in Canada, a system that grew alongside a new and developing country. I also examine some of the individualities students are bringing to the classroom and what potentials are being overlooked. This thesis investigates systemic production and reproduction of racial, gender, ability, and class-based inequities through an education process that has seen little change since its inception over one hundred years ago. I conclude by discussing some of the changes that our school system must consider in order to meet the needs of all students' potential.

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Introduction

I was a frustrated student in public school in the 1970s and 80s. I loathed sitting for seemingly endless days at my little desk, staring at the clock on the wall, wishing I was anywhere but the classroom. Learning seemed like a long and repetitive process, something I was definitely not interested in. Exciting activities were always in short supply: running outside in the vast green yard, experimenting with the array of musical instruments locked away in the closet, visiting museums to relive Canadian history, carving wooden sculptures. As an elementary and junior high student, I experienced little in the way of empowering curriculum and believed the focus on "man and his world" was leaving out much of the story. Unfortunately, questioning the authority concerning topics or what I interpreted as missing or biased information was met with scorn. It seemed to me, at a very early age, that school was not designed for all of us. I continued to "play school" with my head low, motivated by the fear of not meeting school standards. I was aware of what happened to others who did not fit in; they were humiliated and labelled by teachers and students as failures. I found myself interested in those individuals who were not keeping up with school standards to find out why. Their reasons were many. Some had complicated home lives with parents who were not always there for support. Some were of cultures that found school a strange and confusing place. Others, like me, were simply uninterested in sitting quietly all day listening to the teacher impart their version of knowledge upon us.

Thankfully, in the higher grades there were activities outside of the classroom that allowed for the cultivation of other vital intelligences and individual needs. Sports

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teams, drama, newspapers and other extracurricular activities were places where I was able to feel recognized. Here, students were able to work together cooperatively and willingly spend hours perfecting and creating. Yet this work was given no academic accreditation. Our proficiencies would not be tested for in a provincial exam. Those who performed, created, invented or helped others were left with their provincial exam results as being the only official record of their worth and accomplishments in high school. But graduation was upon us and those who survived the system did not look back as we embarked on our new lives in the real world. The world of learning took on intrinsic value when a whole new world opened up through subjects that spoke to my personal interests and strengths such as Women's Studies, Family Law, Art History, Philosophy and Political Studies. There seemed to be so much to explore. I found myself drawn toward Education, wanting to work with youths and to offer support and guidance to those who could not connect with school, to ensure them that learning was in fact exciting and fulfilling.

The Bachelor of Education courses were progressive. We discussed and debated racism, gender issues, learning abilities, critical thinking, literacy and multiple intelligences. I was ready to be part of a system that now seemed to care about each and every child. As a teacher, however, it became evident that, though children are the "raison d'etre", schools are not following through on their promise to ensure that all students are given the tools for a successful public school experience. Much to my dismay things have changed very little, if at all, from my experience as a public school student. Many students who do not acquiesce to the sedentary classroom regime or fit

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into the narrowly defined parameters of success, especially competency in math and literacy, are quickly labelled problem or poor students. These students are discussed by teachers as being a drain on their teaching experience when there are those "good kids" who follow the rules and are "such a joy" to teach. Educators are quick to identify and label children as having a learning disorder, or social deficit, if they do not meet the educational standards. Students are made to feel inadequate and "stupid" for their lack of success and are given no options as to alternative ways of achieving success. Teachers continue to be praised by administrators for running classrooms in the traditional fashion, lecturing from the front with students seated in rows and passively listening. All students continue to be treated as one homogeneous mass, with an occasional add on activity to touch on multicultural or multiple intelligence issues. Subjects such as Art, Music, Wood Shop, Physical Education and Health have been removed or drastically reduced to allow for more time spent on Math and Language Arts. Class numbers are often in excess of thirty students, which has considerable consequences for managing and "disciplining" those who do not meet traditional classroom standards and who do not keep up with the growing number of curriculum outcomes. Students continue to complain that school is meaningless and routine while teachers complain that classroom challenges are growing. Many parents are frustrated with a system that does not address the increasing issues of bullying, racism or other individual needs of their child.

My research began as a personal quest: I wanted to understand why schools did not consider the individual learning needs and intelligences of students. According to the

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Government of Nova Scotia, the primary mandate of the public school system is to provide education programs and services that offer a stimulating and supportive environment to assist individuals in reaching their full potential. In fact, the word "potential" is used not only in the first sentence of the *Public School Program* document, but three times in the introduction. It outlines the major goals of helping all students develop cognitively, effectively, physically and socially to be a thinking, learning, physically active, and valued member of society. To reach these goals the Department of Education believes students must experience a diversity of educational experiences and develop in certain areas of learning called Essential Graduation Learnings, or EGLs. These areas include aesthetic expression, citizenship, communication, personal development, problem solving and technological competence. The Atlantic Provinces Education Foundation (APEF), which includes the departments of education of Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, Prince Edward Island, and Newfoundland and Labrador, has developed statements of what all students should know and be able to do with regard to each of these EGLs by the time they graduate.

Although these enlightened and inclusive goals are the foundation of the *Public School Program*, there is little evidence of their fulfillment in the education process. There certainly is no official testing to ensure that students are successful in the acquisition of these goals. With public criticism of school effectiveness on the rise, leaders are anxious to prove that students are in fact learning. Current business management techniques for public validation, such as the focus on accountability and data based decision-making, are the tools chosen to provide the quantifiable statistics that student

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learning is on the rise. This focus has resulted in a renewed interest in Math and Literacy, which lend themselves easily to standardized, "objective" testing. Resources and time are re-directed to those specific subjects that will be the focus of ranking and comparisons for political purposes. What remains is little educational energy in schools on areas such as aesthetic awareness, fostering a sense of community or "promoting individual, social, emotional, and physical well-being" through the development of individual potential (*Public School Program*, p. 7). There seems to be a wide chasm between what the education process should be, as professed by the *Public School Program* produced by the Department of Education of Nova Scotia, and what transpires in schools.

As many students struggle in the reality of an education system that is quick to rank and label, I wonder how we are developing individual potential, identified as an essential part of a student's education. Chapter One investigates the history of public schools in Canada and the importance placed on individual potential. Schools provided an essential role in a new and developing nation and were influenced by religious and political leaders. In Canada, as well as around the world, individuality was tempered with the economic stability and success of the nation. Public schools were critical in fostering patriotism for stability as much as providing an able work force. The industrial revolution, with its assembly line production model, influenced how education and youths were managed. This model left no room for differences and continues to have a stranglehold on how schools continue operate.

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Chapter Two focuses on what individualities students are bringing to the classroom and what potentials are being overlooked. Multiple intelligences, gender, culture and abilities are played out in many overlapping ways in schools. The traditional classroom continues to exclude many budding potentials as we focus on collecting data and ranking schools. Every aspect of accessing information and global communication has altered how we interpret and interact in our society yet teaching methods and school management has not evolved to meet a changing world. The process of educating our young people has experienced little change and continues to ignore individual potential. This chapter investigates systemic issues that produce and reproduce racial, gender, ability, and class-based inequalities that continue to hinder the success of student. Why is our education system essentially the same as one hundred years ago? There seems to be a universal belief that schooling in the present form is the only method of educating youths. Is spending six hours a day, five days a week, 10 months a year for 12 consecutive years, essentially confined to classrooms, the best way to educate students? Is sitting all day, everyday, with 30 other kids their own age a positive way for children to grow up? Most students begin school full of enthusiasm and wonder only to be disengaged and bored by grade 8. Students begin to see school as something that they must endure, a hoop that they must jump through in order to achieve the stamp of approval for successful continuation into adult life. Chapter Three explores what influences the education process that continues to hold students back from addressing their individual potential. Traditional views, political will and the desire for guaranteed student success obscure the bigger picture of embracing differences and a new vision.

The concept of making differences a resource and meeting a variety of needs must be a goal for individual and school success.

Difference defines who we are, but is often not appreciated, recognized or developed in our school. Both teachers and the system deem students a success or a failure, as they attempt to negotiate the education maze that professes to be offering them opportunities to identify their particular interests and abilities for personal success and growth. I was faced with this reality as a youth and was dismayed to realize that it continues to plague our schools. Many youths, parents and educators are frustrated with this narrow vision of education. Many students cannot articulate the reasons why they have experienced alienation and failure within the school system and blame themselves. For those youths who continue to be let down, miseducated and rejected because they do not fit the mold of what is required to be successful, we must reconsider schooling. Although this thesis is a personal journey I believe it is not idiosyncratic. It is based on my analysis of educational efforts of the past and present as well as what contemporary educators are saying about the realities of schools today. It appears that school reform is on the minds of many, but changes must benefit and value all students.

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Chapter I

Education and the Individual

The study of public education in North America is a study of politics and power. The notion of individual student potential is not often touched upon in the literature that discusses the fundamental purposes and goals of schooling, yet its regulation is integral in the development of political power. As a resource for the progress of a nation, education had to be tempered with the possibility of awakening new and demanding expectations. The development of an individual's potential, or the shaping of the self, witnessed in developing democracies, found itself be confined within specific roles and acceptable parameters. A democracy in progress had to be continuously aware of the degree to which it was safe for education to foster civility, social justice and individual freedom, limiting the development of potential to those forms that were socially acceptable. Public education was essential for a strong future, a means to a specific end: to increase a nation's strength with a capable and knowledgeable workforce and to consolidate the population to do what was deemed right by the ruling party. Some believed this unifying effect, produced by a standard curriculum, would alleviate all political strife and employment needs. Citizens would learn to be patriotic by the transmission of standard knowledge that was produced by leaders and disseminated to equalize the masses. It was argued by many that everyone would benefit from a public system of standard education. All classes and races would find appropriate positions, resulting in increased opportunities for economic and social success in a growing nation. Historically, there have also existed many who have been very critical of this approach to democracy and of the ramifications it held for society at large. Critics

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continue to be concerned with how education is not living up to its promise to enlighten its citizens and allow for individual success. This chapter will discuss such criticism with regard to the concept of student individual potential in the developing school system.

The Birth of Public Schools

Before the days of public schools, formal education was seen as serving the specific purpose of training leaders for state and church. It was an exercise for the elite who could afford the luxury of not putting their children to work for the survival of the family. The Canadian experience was similar to that of the United States in that, prior to the industrial revolution, religious instruction and the moral training it embodied was the principal aim of schooling for children. Access to this formal education was primarily by well-off families who hoped that this elite schooling, provided mainly for boys, would secure the social status for their children's future. But for the majority of struggling Canadians in the eighteen hundreds, farming and survival was the priority in a new, harsh and dangerous climate. Because farming was a family affair, a child's contribution to all aspects of work was normal and essential. Even when children did have "free" time to possibly attend school, there were many other obstacles such as distance, poor road conditions or extremely cold weather (Axelrod, 1997, p. 12). There were also fees charged to access this education and families with many children simply could not afford to send their children to school. Through the efforts of religious organizations, parents, teacher-entrepreneurs and government authorities, a limited form of schooling in private homes, churches and primitive buildings emerged in the

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early nineteenth century in Canada. Most citizens, however, found their education in the family or place of work. There was little perceived need for the education of all citizens.

At this time, however, change was soon to strike Canada in the form of a powerful ideology that gave school a new importance in the social order (Lawr and Gidney, 1973, p. 40). Economic changes and the increasing social unrest in developing industrial nations throughout the world was making it clear by the mid eighteen hundreds that the education of all future citizens could be an important political tool. The "great democratic experiment" was under significant strain in North America with increased immigration of individuals who held a range of beliefs about god and education. Literacy and moral education became the "great panaceas of the age', producing an enlightened, politically stable, socially cohesive, economically adaptable, and individually moral population (Lawr and Gidney, 1973, p. 41). In Canada, the evolving political democracy depended heavily on Christian traditions, customs, laws and civility; traits that citizens would acquire through a controlled education system that became the venue of assimilation. Rapid urban progress and production innovations resulted in the movement of many citizens from the rural agricultural life to the promise of prosperity in burgeoning cities. This presented new challenges of employment training and concern for emerging social ills. Conformity for stability and the good of the nation was rooted in the push for a national system of schools in the North America. This permitted the promotion of a unified language, identity and morality within a developing nation. It was a method to control citizens from a central

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point for political stability that was promoted as an avenue for the possibility of social and economic improvement.

Political Stability

In North America there was an obvious inconsistency in the forces to establish a new order at this time, tempering liberty with social order. The social unrest in a new industrialized society, the French and American revolutions, and political struggles in European nations, unleashed new political demands. The development of government operated schools, which controlled the production and consumption of knowledge, were contradictory to the goals of the liberal revolution of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries (Spring, 1980). Political stability and cohesion were the keys to the increasing importance of schools. Nationality and acquiescence to authority became the central goals of the expanding public system of education which diminished the growth of true political liberty and individuality (Spring, 1980, p. 197). The *American Spelling Book*, published in 1783 by Noah Webster, was an example of the aim to train all Americans in the spelling and proper pronunciations of the national language. It earned Webster the title "Schoolmaster to America" as well as becoming the first vehicle for standardization. Webster, as well as others, believed that political harmony depended on a uniformity of language. Webster also wrote a comprehensive history of America, which created a national "mythology" essential in the promotion of patriotism (Spring, 1980, p. 5). Advocates believed that this form of education would promote self-empowerment through a standard knowledge base, which in turn would mean national empowerment.

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This time also marked a changing perception of the nature of childhood. In pre-industrial times children were often expected to work as young as seven years old. The notion of citizens and students developing to their potential was now a concern for industrialized nations and had to be regulated within the parameters of acceptable standards, liberty within acceptable frameworks. Children were viewed as the citizens of the future who had to be molded in the interest of the nation. The development of public education was the beginning of the politicization of childhood. Children were trained to behave correctly because their moral character was of utmost importance to the nation. Jean-Jacques Rousseau, a French political philosopher in the eighteenth century is credited as having an important influence on this emerging theory of educating the young (Spring, 1980, p. 9). Rousseau portrayed children as budding flowers who required nurturing and cultivation to blossom into effective adults. Rousseau's 1762 publication, *Emile*, stated that children must be trained early to think of their personal needs in terms of the state at large. Like Webster, Rousseau emphasized the love of nation and the sublimation of individual interests for the collective good.

Teaching Morality

As schooling began to develop throughout Canada, the expansion of public education was an important instrument of the church. More influential with respect to the actual administration of education for youths, according to Paul Axelrod, were the Christian theologians who believed that children were possessed with original sin and required constant discipline to save them from temptations (Axelrod, 1997). Accounts of

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education at this time stressed discipline (sometimes brutal), religion, recitation and memory work. Axelrod cites one alumnus of Cocagne Academy, a reputable school in Cape Breton, Nova Scotia, who recalled that schooling instilled "fear and truancy" and involved little more than rote learning and memorization (Axelrod, 1997, p. 21). It was argued that national unity required civil order and schools played a key role in cultivating morality, loyalty and deference to authority. "Unguided individualism" posed great social risks to those in power (Axelrod, 1997, p. 25).

It seemed that many Canadians were impressed with the rising economic and prosperity of their neighbours to the south. Americans had made great strides in public education, which were admired by some noted Canadian schoolmasters. Axelrod does note, however, that Americans were perceived as being "too individualistic, materialistic, aggressive and disorderly" while Canadians on the other hand were more peaceful, civil and traditional (Axelrod, 1997, p. 26). A uniquely Canadian education had to remain loyal to these values when striving for sovereignty as well as solving society's growing ills. The promotion of non-American textbooks, homilies to the queen and a controlled system of moral education was to be the remedy for political uncertainty as well as the increasing number of poor children loitering the streets.

The Great Equalizer

Educators and politicians sought a common Canadian nationality by addressing the needs of Protestants and Catholics as well as acknowledging the French and English. The landscape, however, consisted of a much more diverse population including First

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Nations people, African and European Canadians. Although there were those who promoted equality for all, "educational policy governing minority populations was driven by paternalism, prejudice, and political expediency" (Axelrod, 1997, p. 69). In the case of the First Nations people, residential schools, or schools isolated from family and culture, were the primary means to becoming "civilized" in the ways of dress, hairstyles, language and obedience. The results, from as early as the 1880s, were "the marginalization of First Nations' society and culture (that) predated the schools, and survived them" (Axelrod, 1997, p. 77). Another example of unequal representation of all citizens in the growing national identity was that of African American and African Canadian people. Slaves and immigrants were drawn to communities in Nova Scotia and Ontario with promises of freedom and a new start in the seventeen and eighteen hundreds only to be subjected to continued poverty and discrimination reflected in the dismal conditions of segregated Black-only schools, which remained in place in Nova Scotia until 1954.

It was argued by many that public schools were failing dismally in their attempt to become the great equalizer through standard knowledge and the education experience. In fact, schools were perpetuating and emphasizing differences in society while privileging the dominant cultural, linguistic and religious communities. The upper classes did not envision schools as providing or encouraging equality of opportunity for all classes and races. They were never really interested in integrating with the lower classes or immigrants, resulting in schools that were essentially middle and upper class institutions (Silberman, 1970). As the population grew and diversified, governments

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promoted assimilation as the answer to inclusiveness and equity for all citizens,

fostering habits of discipline and obedience. Educators believed that to place a child's

needs and interests above the needs of the country could only threaten the welfare of

the individual and society through "idleness and a morbid thirst for pleasure"

(Silberman, 1970, p. 60). The main purpose of public education, especially for the

lower classes, was to teach obedience and submission in the name of public peace and a

docile labour force. Yet for many, public schooling represented a threat to family

solidarity, values and culture as well as being a process that encouraged a disdain for

differences (Silberman, 1970, p. 55).

Centralization

As early as 1846, Egerton Ryerson, described as "a man who was to become Canada's

most influential nineteenth century schoolman", argued that an effective school system

required a strong central authority (Lawr and Gidney, 1973, p. 51). Central leadership

would allow for the standardization of a school system that would not only regulate an

efficient system but would aid in the political control in a geographically expansive

area. Educational leaders would be responsible for approving all teaching materials

used by schools throughout Canada to ensure they contained "no subversive political or

social ideas" (Lawr and Gidney, 1973, p. 51). Although the control of education was

under provincial jurisdiction, Ryerson, along with other "school promoters" including

Jean-Baptiste Meilleur in Quebec and John Jessop in British Colombia, collaborated to

create a national vision of schooling (*The Canadian Encyclopedia*, 2005). Ryerson also

traveled to more than twenty countries during 1844 and 1845 as he developed his

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proposal for the public school system, which was concerned not so much with the

acquisition of academic knowledge as the resolution of a wide variety of social ills (*The*

Canadian Encyclopedia, 2005). The central authority in each province had remarkable

power.

> It determined the character and content of nearly every aspect of schooling.
> It had at its disposal a wide variety of means to enforce its will. And it left
> local people with only the most limited role in making, or even influencing,
> the policy of their schools (Lawr and Gidney, 1973, p. 52).

The nineteenth century saw great changes with the growth of science and the industrial

revolution. The promise of higher living standards and more opportunities was

tempered with the reality of crowds, poverty and health concerns. Educational

reformers believed the standardization of schools and curriculum was the answer to

socially efficient citizenship. Schooling would instill the appropriate thoughts and

behavior in children to prepare them to take their position in a growing nation. This

Victorian education relied on a theory of learning that applied to all levels of schooling

and was known as "mental discipline" which focused on raising moral citizens by

means of a small group of academic subjects known as the classics (Lawr and Gidney,

1973, p. 91). With the booming Industrial Age and the popularity of scientific theory,

the world and all its components, both natural and human-made, were viewed as

discrete parts that worked systematically together, like the parts of a machine (Senge et

al., 2000). The assembly line became the backbone upon which all organizations could

be best managed. Never before could output be so uniform, efficient and rapid.

Individuals were trained to do precise repetitive tasks, making only part of the finished

product. Industrial-age thinking became the foundation of all organizations and

naturally became the only acceptable method for the management and operation of

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schools. The emerging school system was structured in the image of the assembly line, the epitome of modern society. The system was organized in discrete stages, or grades, which would be determined by age. Students moved from stage to stage at a uniform speed, complete with bells and a rigid daily schedule. School had developed into a well-oiled machine that thrived on structure and order and discouraged spontaneity and imagination (Senge et al., 2000).

A Change in Philosophy: John Dewey

By the beginning of the twentieth century Canada was in full transition into an industrial nation. There were those who spoke out about their increasing concern with the modern industrial system and its effects on education. Now that the groundwork for public education was in place, it became evident that a new pedagogy, a "New Education" was required for the twentieth century. There was a growing need for new subjects and new methods more appropriate to the demands of the day. This education would consider the development of the entire child, both academically and practically. The rigidness of discipline and uniformity, the preoccupation with abstract knowledge and the accumulation of facts for the promotion of the democratic ideal, was considered by some to stifle a child's growth and imagination and, therefore, society at large. Theorists believed that school and the industrial model was alienating individuals from their community and fragmenting their experience of reality. Many Canadian educators were interested in supplementing the mental discipline with subjects and methods that

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emphasized the importance of the individual child's growth and experience (Lawr and Gidney, 1973, p.159).

John Dewey, America's best-known and first major educational philosopher wrote extensively on the topic. Dewey argued that democracy was more than a form of government, but a "mode of associated living" that required the breaking down of the barriers of class, race and culture. Dewey recognized the importance of developing a child's individual potential to reflect the broader community and the dangers of blind obedience. Dewey wanted to see the education system do away with compartmentalized and fragmented experiences. He envisioned schools as a micro-community that represented society at large by considering diverse individuality and the various social environments that influenced a student's learning. Dewey saw students not as blank slates but as individuals with intrinsic capacities and potential for growth and invention.

In *Democracy and Education*, Dewey drew on Plato's philosophy when he stated that "(it) would be impossible to find a deeper sense of the function of education (than) discovering and developing personal capacities" (Dewey, 1916, p. 89). Yet instead, schools functioned by training youths like animals rather than educating them like human beings. Dewey felt that dogs and horses had their behavior modified because of interaction with humans, but the changes were external. He argued that a similar form of training was used with youths, learning to avoid negative consequences, which did not produce intellectual or emotional dispositions but rather automatic responses

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(Dewey, 1916, p.13). If students were to participate and share in activities motivated by tendencies they already possessed, the experience would then have emotional spirit and would be truly educational. The focus of education, however, continued to be on control since it was assumed that an individual's tendencies were naturally self-serving or antisocial. Dewey argued that systems of government and theories of state had been built on the premise that the subordination of natural impulses was necessary for the wider social aims and this view strongly affected educational ideas and practices. Education was a process of disciplinary training rather than individual development. But, according to Dewey, immaturity was not a state that represented a gap to be filled with adult concepts for maturation, but was a time of "dependence and plasticity" which required an environment that secured the full use of intelligence to its greatest possibility. "The short-sighted method which falls back on mechanical routine and repetition to secure external efficiency of habit, motor skills without accompanying thought, marks a deliberate closing in of surroundings upon growth" (Dewey, 1916, p. 49).

Dewey argued that a child has specific powers and to ignore this fact was to stunt or distort growth. He offered the view that education has operated under a false assumption about growth or development: that growth has an end instead of being the end. Because conformity with achievement limits and external standards was the goal, individual potential for uncharted growth had to be suppressed. This process resulted in a diminished interest in progress as well as a dread of the unknown and required external motivation to move through outcomes. Dewey believed that because growth is

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a characteristic of life, for all ages, education had no end beyond itself and that schools must mimic reality by creating a desire for continued growth. As in the production line of an industry wanting to create a unified output, so it was with schools that limited and restricted youth activity, limiting a diversity of experiences, to create a controlled and measurable output. This resulted in a narrowing of intelligence, according to Dewey, as well as a distortion of emotional life (Dewey, 1916, p. 85). The importance of continued growth, or lifelong learning, that capitalized on individual potential was central to Dewey's vision of education.

A good education, from Dewey's standpoint, would be grounded in the intrinsic needs and activities of the individual to be educated, not the topics which were "dear to the hearts of adults" (Dewey, 1916, p. 108). These ends, or aims, were so narrow that they did not capitalize on the uniqueness and requirement of youth and disregarded the notion that leaning was something that took place in an individual. Schools, therefore, had to foster an environment to liberate and organize a student's individual capacities. Dewey remarked that "until the democratic criterion of the intrinsic significance of every growing experience is recognized, we shall be intellectually confused by the demand for adaptation to external aims" (Dewey, 1916, p.109). Dewey strongly supported an education that took the distinctive differences of individuals into account when he stated that education in its then current form was destroying or stunting the true gifts and individual brilliance of students and was leaving a dull uniformity in its wake. A progressive education was required for social efficiency, as students would

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develop their talents to fit specific roles in the industrial world of work, trained on the basis of original capacities and not on the wealth and social status of their parents.

The notion of individual student potential and self-determination for the good of society was evident in *School and Society* (Dewey, 1900/1956). Dewey discussed the idea of allowing children to make decisions about self-direction based on an education that allowed them to be a part of an effective community. Because individualism and socialism were one in this process, Dewey believed the end result would be a more harmonious and satisfied society. "Only by being true to the full growth of all the individuals who make it up can society by any chance be true to itself" (Dewey, 1900/1956, p. 7). Dewey believed that humans had evolved from a history of ingenuity born out of individuality, cooperation and first hand contact, and he criticized schools and testing methods as little other than the development of competitiveness that thrived on the success of individuals meeting predetermined goals. The principle of school structure and discipline was devoted to reinforcing this end. The narrow and fixed image of schooling and youths overlooked an infinitely deeper discipline that comes from within each individual. Dewey noted that a change in the conception of schooling would require a change in the already well-established norms around learning and the individual, from one that considered students as passive recipients of information to one that supported an active, intensely distinctive process. Dewey argued that, though humans have individualistic needs and wants, they are also motivated to work with others cooperatively; therefore establishing a cooperative learning environment was also integral to New Education. Real learning was, for Dewey, a process of satisfying a

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personal interest by working with others, as well as alone, to overcome obstacles, to get to know subject matter, and to exercise ingenuity, persistence and discipline (Dewey, 1900/1956, p. 37).

In *Education and Experience* (1938), Dewey again discussed the dangers of enforcing rules of conduct and conformity as well as basing education on the transmission of standard historical information. Schooling was the acquisition of already established ideas found in books and in the "heads of elders" (Dewey, 1938, p.19). What was being taught was essentially static, a finished product with little regard for its origins and how it could change in the future. The main business of school up to this time was to transmit this knowledge to new generations, as well as reinforcing the habit of conforming to rules and standards. The resulting docility, receptivity and obedience, forbade active participation by students. Dewey believed that this form of education opposed expression and cultivation of individuality. The public school system operated under the notion that the acquisition of isolated skills and disconnected information was an end in itself, instead of being a means to an end. School was an organization that was very different from a child's life in the home, family, playground and neighbourhood. The time schedules, "schemes of classification", examinations and rules of order required compliance and conformity. Dewey believed that through these experiences of "mis-education" - education that stopped or distorted further experiences - possibilities for the future growth was restricted or dissolved.

A student's future possible development and achievement was a case for developing their individual potential. Dewey argued that, because of the education system, students were losing the impetus to learn. Expression and the cultivation of individuality was perhaps most feared by authorities yet was considered by Dewey to be essential for social justice and democracy in an unknown and ever-changing world. Dewey believed that learning had to be an individual experience in order to achieve the end result of intellectual and moral development. Instead students, disconnected from imagination and natural inquiry, equated learning to boredom, as well as making no connection to life outside of school. Enforced quiet, artificial uniformity and the mere outward appearance of attention and obedience was, Dewey felt, a highly artificial situation. School systems ignored the importance of personal impulse and desire, forcing the activity of children into channels which express the system's purpose rather than the purpose of the pupils. The challenge according to Dewey in the "new story of education" was how youth was to "become acquainted with the past in such a way that the acquaintance (was) a potent agent in appreciation of the living present" (Dewey, 1938, p. 23).

Dewey also argued that simply adding more experiences to a student's daily classroom routine did not ensure a positive educational experience and that some students were in fact experiencing a "mis-education". According to Dewey, everything depended on the quality of the experiences that students were having and how the learning experience encouraged judgment and intelligence in new situations. Though public schools were relatively new to North America, Dewey was concerned with the institutionally

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established and ingrained customs and routines of the education system. He felt that, as far as changes were concerned, "it is easier to walk in the paths that have been beaten than it is, after taking a new point of view, to work out what is practically involved in the new point of view" (Dewey, 1938, p. 30).

This sentiment had been discussed earlier in 1902 in *The Child and the Curriculum* when Dewey stated that the established habit of regarding the student as immature and undeveloped versus the educator as mature and all knowing was easier to maintain than discovering a reality where all interests thrived (Dewey, 1900/1956, p. 3). Getting away from fixed terms and doctrine and seeing from another point of view were fundamental for Dewey in the attainment of a real education. A youth's narrow world and personal interests were in strong contrast with the impersonal nature and divisiveness of the curriculum. The idea of school being broken down into subjects and each subject broken down into lessons where students proceed step by step, in a logical sequence, complete with standard evaluation required a student to be ready to "receive and accept". Dewey argued that a new approach would start with the child as well as end there. "To the growth of the child all studies are subservient; they are instruments valued as they serve the needs of growth" (Dewey, 1956, p. 9). Dewey did, however, realize and endorse the importance of curriculum in that it represented years of success and a guide to the present.

Though subject matter was the spiritual food for personal growth of youths, Dewey also saw problems with the system in which it was being presented. It entrenched

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conservative, traditional and routine schooling that suppressed the individual without which, it was believed, there would be chaos and neglect for authority. The lack of hands-on experiences forced students to rely on symbols that neither encouraged nor supported "organic" connection to real life. Externally determined curriculum permitted "no cravings, no needs, no demands" and resulted in a lack of motivation for learning, an education that was "mechanical and dead" (Dewey, 1956, p. 26). Dewey also noted that the curriculum was watered down to remove any really controversial or thought-provoking information and concentrated on what would be conducive to memorization. A good education, an education worth pursuing, should lead students to want to learn more.

Dewey believed that one essential and overlooked factor in the education system was the individual potential of youths and that at any given time it required exercising and realization. Though educators were proficient with regards to standards and curriculum, they were not interested in the power and capacities yet to be realized in students. For Dewey, as witnessed throughout his many writings, it was the dynamics of students not the subject matter that determined the force of learning. This philosophy was quite contrary to how education was being delivered in the early 1900's, a system that was promoting behavior modification and subject matter over individuality. Dewey believed that learning was active and involved a "reaching out of the mind" and that education was not about information but self-realization.

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Implementing New Education

Though, as John Dewey often noted, the education system was failing to meet the needs of the youths of the nation, there were educators in the early twentieth century who were coming onside to the notion of the individual potential of students and its positive influence on education. There was a desire to "replace an abstract, bookish, and impersonal concept of education with a new kind of learning based more on the student's interest and ability, and more closely related to his personal experiences and social environment" (Lawr and Gidney, 1973, p.179). The new science of psychology and the development of Child Study further supported those who fought for educational reform. Although such new ideas were not universally accepted, the principles of the new pedagogy were promoted by leading Canadian educators by 1920 (Lawr and Gidney, 1973, p.180).

Early 1900s

J.H. Putman was one Canadian who played a major role in the direction of education in Canada. Strongly influenced by child psychology and the theories of John Dewey, Putman, along with G.W. Weir, produced a report that "anticipated the shape of educational reform for years to come" (Lawr and Gidney, 1973, p.180). Putman, as inspector of the Ottawa Public School Board, initiated reforms that would meet the needs of modern urban life and added to the curriculum such subjects as nature study, hygiene, woodwork, cooking, calisthenics, and music (Wood, 1985, p. 61). According to Wood, Putman was concerned with the emphasis on a bookish curriculum and strict

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examinations standards in schools as well as the high failure rate of students. He instead believed that a broad curriculum of studies, with varied and interesting activities, would challenge students to succeed. Like Dewey, Putman realized that the activation of a child's intellect, both emotionally and physically, would ensure their full participation in their education (Wood, 1985, p. 65). The ultimate goal, therefore, was that the child would become a productive part of society.

In 1912, Putman established the Manual Arts School to cater to the many "subnormal" students who could not keep up with the academic curriculum and who would drop out of school by grade eight (Wood, 1985, p. 78). These male students would have the opportunity to gain experience for manual occupations and hard work. Later separate schools were developed for girls to excel in areas of practical home-management. The schools were considered a success, praised for their largely practical curriculum as well as segregating the "subnormal" from the academic stream. Despite their success, the schools were closed in 1918 due to financial reasons (Wood, 1985, p. 81).

By 1920 there were strong forces at play to shape educational reform. Educators, theorists, and society-at-large prescribed practical subjects and child-centered methods so that schools might enhance the learning process. However, implementing the educationally valid practices of the new education proved to be a political battle. A "persistent conservative tradition" of the influential and articulate rejected the child-centered ideals of this new pedagogy in favour of the purely intellectual approach (Lawr and Gidney, 1973, p.193). Intelligence tests were growing in popularity as a

method to "correctly" identify the academic potential of students and to prepare them for the future. These tests, discussed in more detail in chapter 2, further supported a narrow view of intelligence and educational priorities. Putman agreed with the scientific approach to proper placement of students. "He expected to see the time when all schoolchildren would be subjected to an intelligence test before being permitted to enter a high school course" (Wood, 1985, p.173). Wood notes that though the education that Putman supported was progressive in promoting a broader curriculum, it was, however, a conservative movement that strived to preserve traditional values. This was evident in Putman's address to the Canadian Education Association in November 1927 when he stated that the testing of "dull or backward" pupils was particularly important to establish the domestic servants, low-paid factory hands and manual labourers (Wood, 1985, p.173). Greater efficiency, increasing professional standards, bigger and better "school plants" and an expanded bureaucracy to mimic modern business practices become the interpretation of the new education in Canada.

With a change in economic stability after World War I, less money was allocated to schools in the 1920s. The Depression of the 1930s saw further devastation to public schools, a situation that did not turn around until the return of peace in the late forties and early fifties. Some educators continued to rally for changes throughout these politically and economically unstable times, though education was not the priority of many nations. In *Education Diagnosis*, published by the National Society for the Study of Education of the United States in 1935, it was professed that the state of schooling required review and revision (Whipple ed., 1935). It had been determined that many

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students who were "mentally and physically handicapped" or mentally and physically "normal" but who were "maladjusted" socially, morally or emotionally were being forced into a common mold that led to a variety of delinquencies and social inadequacies. Some of the factors cited that discouraged learning included inadequate and inefficient instructional material, restrictive exercises in reading, writing and arithmetic that discouraged variable rates of student progress, the influence of achievement tests on the quality of teaching and teachers who were not able to adapt subjects to the interests, abilities and needs of the students (Whipple, 1935, p. 50). All of these factors hinged on the lack of concern for the individual differences and interests of the students and were identified as major motivational concerns which, in turn, was the reason why many did not attain any satisfactory success. Classrooms operated under the assumption that all students should learn at the same lock-step rate regardless of their abilities and teachers were doing little to uncover the individual reasons for student failure to succeed. It was argued that each student responded to classroom instruction in a unique way depending on their individual background, abilities and interests and that it should not be taken for granted that all students were engaged and understanding through traditional classroom lectures.

It was noted that there were fundamental limitations to the guiding philosophies of education that led to the suppression of the individual for the standardization of the whole. With the teacher dominating the classroom and learning, social qualities such as self-direction, self-evaluation and self-control could not be properly developed and this restricted the cooperation essential for a true democracy. Schools, in this way, were not

encouraging the freedom of the learner and society to select intrinsically meaningful goals and creative ways to solve problems, but were forcing individuals to subscribe to indoctrinated ideas selected by the dominant group. "Because of the attempt to force all into a common mold, individuals having special aptitudes (were) overlooked and their potentialities (were) undeveloped, to the obvious loss of society" (Whipple ed. 1935, p. 58). The *Educational Diagnosis* advocated the clear and objective diagnosis of students to determine any factors that may be impeding their education, including emotional, social or environmental factors (Whipple ed. 1935). Another potential factor was the trivial and narrow curriculum endorsed by educators without any consideration for the wide variety of interests and intelligences in a classroom. Changes in traditional schooling and the anticipated higher cost of education adjusted to individual needs continued to draw fire from many who held positions of power, and the conservative tradition of education prevailed.

Mid-Century

Although schools saw a substantial increase in attendance in the 1950s, educational concerns focused on school buildings and teachers for the children of the post-war baby boom, and not on the ideals of the new education (Lawr and Gidney, 1973, p. 202). Writing in the 1950s, Paul Goodman commented on how far the reality of schooling was from the philosophical ideal of Dewey. In *Growing Up Absurd*, Goodman stated that youths had to give up their individualism and "magic" thinking to survive the education system (Goodman, 1956). Educators continued to operate under the assumption that students arrived as empty vessels ready to be filled with knowledge,

endlessly malleable to be shaped into acceptable future citizens. A system that

assumed that children started with a tabula rasa only to be socialized into whatever end

result was deemed necessary at the time was fundamentally flawed, according to

Goodman. In this way individuals were made to fit into the system wherever they were

needed. Yet those who had to deal with youth on a smaller than statistical basis knew

that there was a human nature factor that could not be overlooked. Goodman believed

that if educators persisted in trying to mold youths into predetermined and socially

endorsed roles, youths would rebel in eccentric, often unacceptable ways. To find

one's identity or personal calling and to make meaning of one's life was an internal

calling that educators ignored and suppressed. In not addressing this need, Goodman

believed that society was spiritually abandoning youth. Goodman stated that youths at

various stages had a potential not yet cultured and yet not blank. He discussed drawing

"it" out and offering "it" opportunities; not violating "it". What "it" was was not

definite. "It is what, when appealed to in the right circumstances, gives behavior that

force, grace, discrimination, intellect, feeling" (Goodman, 1956, p. 6). Goodman felt

the vagueness of this explanation was sufficient because he envisioned education as an

art, as individual as each student.

Goodman cited the social scientists of the 1920s and 30s as solidifying the need for

more emphasis on the process of socialization for political stability. He argued that

socialization by dominant systems resulted in a very limited view of society. The

rebellious or the initiators of change were regarded as those who had been "improperly

socialized" requiring "better bait or punishment" (Goodman, 1956, p. 11). The

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growing number of boys and young men who were, because of their rebellious nature, disaffected from society disturbed Goodman. He argued that youth had no opportunities for worthwhile experiences developing intrinsically meaningful goals. They lacked the opportunity to feel useful, needed, and purposeful, which resulted in disengagement. These anti-social behaviors, Goodman argued, were not a failure of socialization but a deliberate response to unacceptable outcomes. Equally devastating, according to Goodman, was the reality for those who decided to conform with given educational and societal expectation because they became "apathetic, disappointed, cynical and wasted" (Goodman, 1956, p. 13).

The issue pursued by Goodman continued to be one of individual development versus perceived national needs. He discussed the expansion of increasingly unnatural schooling, and alienation of the young in *Compulsory Mis-education and The Community of Scholars* (1962). The challenge remained to establish a free and competent society in rapidly growing cities and to cope with industrial and scientific change. According to Goodman, Dewey's approach, virtually ignored during the previous lean and rebuilding years, would solve these problems with an education that consisted of the practical learning of science and technology in a democratic community that encouraged artistic and individual expression. The young would then be exposed to the modern world and also possess the will to change it, promoting continuous scientific and social evolution (Goodman, 1962, p. 42). These ideals, of democracy and community, were twisted, toned down, or perverted, in Goodman's words, when considered for application to school systems, by conservatives and

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businessmen who feared what social changes could mean for those who held political and economic power.

The justification for compulsory education, according to Goodman was to protect children from exploitation by parents and employers and to ensure the basic literacy and civics necessary for a democracy. But what children were experiencing was a deprivation of freedom, freedom to grow and ultimately to change a system in ways they saw fit. Goodman went so far as to describe schools as "concentration camps" and a waste of youthful vitality (Goodman, 1962, p. 55). He described a system where, for 10 to 13 years, every young person was obliged to sit for long periods in a room, almost always too crowded, facing front, and doing lessons predetermined by a distant administration that had no knowledge of his or her intellectual or social interests. The system precluded individuality or spontaneity. If students attempted to follow his or her inner voice, they were quickly suppressed or expelled. Goodman said that if schools believed in freedom and a future of opportunity for the young, there would be no grading, no testing, except as a teaching method, and no "blackboard jungles" (Goodman, 1962, p. 57). The constant push for national tests guaranteed that class work would become nothing more than preparation for more tests, the national standard being an inflexible ruler. Goodman wondered if the test passers had necessarily learned anything relevant to their futures, or if there was any retention. He believed that the system was turning lockstep scheduling and grading to the point of torture and the schools singled out for being the best in the country were being run as if for delinquents. Education, Goodman believed, had to foster independent thought and

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expression, rather than aptitude and conformity. What youths needed were various

frameworks in which they could try out their ideas.

> The scholastically bright are not following their aspirations but are being
> pressured and bribed: the majority - those who are bright but not scholastic,
> and those who are not especially bright but have other kinds of vitality - are
> being subdued (Goodman, 1962, p. 57).

The voices of those who saw a need for educational reform were again making

themselves heard as society was enjoying economic growth as well as an enrollment

explosion in schools. There was overwhelming support for progressive pedagogical

reform with most of the studies based on ideas that had been in existence for decades

(Lawr and Gidney, 1973, p. 252). By the late sixties, the public and professionals

seemed to believe that there were unlimited resources for educational renewal and

schools began experimenting with "ungrading", learning through play and sensitivity to

the needs of the child (Lawr and Gidney, 1973, p. 257).

The 70s and Beyond

The reform movement and experimental philosophy of the 1960s was short lived,

however, as the sobering realities of underemployment and inflation of the 1970s again

emphasized the need for efficiency and productivity. Low test scores only served to

convince authorities that there had to be a toughening up of how school was

administered: longer school days, longer school years and an emphasis on core subjects

in the curriculum. Again critics identified the same old problems resurfacing with

schools and education as a whole. Theodore Sizer, in *Horace's Compromise: The*

Dilemma of the American High School, stated that "schools deserved a more

appropriate purpose than the over-warmed version of principles promulgated in 1918"

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(Sizer, 1984, p. 84). He believed that because the world at this time had become a culture of information, a shift away from industrial specialization, the job of education was to help individuals make sense of this information overload. Sizer saw education as a means to educate one's own intellect in any sphere of personal interest or importance. What education should be striving for was the effective use of one's own mind, without which individuals and society as a whole would be ineffective. Sizer felt there were too few rewards for being inquisitive. The "constructive skeptic" was unsettling for too many teachers and was usually considered disruptive. Students quickly realized what it took to survive in school and how to conform to what the system and teachers demanded. Sizer believed that the path of self-discovery could either be ignored, which led to docility, conformity or disengagement, or confronted, which took time and imagination. Schools that met individual student needs would require a fresh approach to how teachers and students work and learn with an emphasis on how to exercise and use the mind. Sizer referred to the "paralysis of imagination" and skepticism as conditions that restricted any real changes in how schooling was administered. Years of a narrow vision of what youth were capable of with regards to responsibility and self-direction had encouraged educators and politicians to continue focusing on standardized practices. Sizer believed that the education experience had strangled real learning and progress and could only be turned around by a personalized approach that took individual needs and strengths into account. These changes would be difficult to adopt, however, within a climate that viewed youth as having "poor discipline and little mental furniture" (Sizer, 1984, p. 89).

In his later book, *Horace's School*, Sizer discussed the resurgence of political interest in school reform in the 1980s (Sizer, 1992). Though some well-intentioned calls for reform were voiced, the traditional way of schooling remained intact. More curriculum and tougher testing was the acceptable remedy to falling international academic performances. Goodman had argued that schools represented stability, providing expected rituals of growing up and legitimized social class sorting and that real reform was simply too unsettling: "responsible people agree(d) with it, but also agree(d) to do little to address the failings...reform (was) for someone else's school" (Goodman, 1992, p. 11). School changes and reforms continued to have little to do with the concerns of individual students, their families and their communities. The emphasis on the individual student was the most important element that was consistently overlooked in the quest for increasing the success of schools. The traditional "One Best Pedagogy" that was created outside of youths with no connection to their needs and lives continued to be an end that remained vague in its purpose and significance, as well as discriminatory and undemocratic (Sizer, 1992, p. 32).

Dewey's Ideal Restated

The century ended with many theorists believing that changes in the way we do education are necessary for reasons of individual potential, social justice and the progress of society at large. Views vary, however, as to how these changes should take place. Many believe that higher standards, through tighter alignment of curriculum and testing, are the answer to improving student learning and democracy. Others believe

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that if real student success and school improvement are the goals then educators have to risk doing things differently. But risk-taking is not typical of schooling, in fact the prevailing school culture is one of caution (Barth, 1990). Philosophers such as Maxine Greene, Elliott Eisner and Israel Scheffler continue to advance ideas that espouse John Dewey's view of improving schools and student potential learning by doing more then paying lip service to diversity, in all its forms.

Maxine Greene

Maxine Greene, like Dewey, believes that individuality is the gateway for learning and making sense of the present and future. Greene knows that a good education would recognize the enormous variety of human lives and ways of seeing the world. For all students, the school world is filtered through unique experiences and perspectives. Greene believes that schools should be allowing children to experience the possibilities available for their lives, not just what someone else deems necessary. This lack of internalization prevents learners from wanting to explore or to be initiators. Greene discusses the need for a more diverse focus in education to reach the multiplicity of student intelligences in *Existential Encounters for Teachers* (1967). Greene suggests that traditional methods of classifying a child according to age, social class, race or IQ, say nothing about a child's individual potential (Greene, 1967, p. 7). The end result of enduring the education system is a population that is complacent, bland and indifferent, ready to follow, conform, and think in stereotypes. In terms of individual potential, Greene envisions the goal of subjective achievement. The non-development of the self, the claiming of one's "crucial awareness", is for Greene the crux of the failure of the

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education system, and the boredom and meaninglessness that youths express. Greene believes that students must partake in a risk-taking education that allows for the development of the self. Youths who withdraw from the challenge of learning and growing must be urged into the "disquietude" of being responsible for their own destiny, according to Greene. The challenge for education is that this approach requires subjective achievements and does not lend itself well to standardized tests and traditional lesson plans.

Uniform, routine and mechanical is how Greene describes schooling devoid of imagination and individuality. In *Landscapes for Learning*, Greene states that the "back to basics" movement is in part a desire for parents to guarantee a clear and simple path to a successful future for their children, stemming from the "purposefulness and a clarity they can only retroactively possess" (Greene, 1978, p. 76). Hidden below the surfaces of distorted memories remain the barriers to learning and success such as poverty, lack of interest, racism and individuality. Yet the multiple inequities continue to go unrecognized by the masses who are, according to Greene, willing to "play the game, no matter how absurd the game may seem"(Greene, 1978, p. 78). What is required is a new approach to schooling; a "moral" education that involves educative conversations with the community of diverse partners that allows for all individuals to find meaning through their own, authentic, voices.

> If this is to become possible at all, the idea of what is basic must somehow be enlarged into a conception of the kind of literacy that enables each person, from his or her own center, to interpret his or her experiences by learning to look through the multiple perspectives available in the culture: those provided by other human life experiences, those opened by the disciplines, those made possible by the several arts. Of course skill mastery

is necessary; the schools have a great responsibility for enabling people to achieve it. But the demand for such mastery has somehow to be reconciled with the requirements of personal growth and futuring and with the requirements of critical thought (Greene, 1978, p. 80).

Greene believes that it is not acceptable to continue to repeat traditional ways of educating youth. The external manipulation of youths to meet predetermined goals does not take into account their need to find their voices as individuals and to create themselves as part of larger communities. Through a process of education that starts with diversity, students would be encouraged to be critical, engaged and open to the possibilities for themselves and society at large.

The empowering of students, according to Greene, is vital and happens through the use of imagination. Education is in this regard breaking through barriers of the fixed and finished, the predetermined and expected (Greene, 1995). A critical and independently real education would allow individuals to be free to "carve out" their world in new and unlimited ways. Greene, like Dewey, believes that through the imagination and the process of creating a self, students would have opportunities to try out many possibilities and see the world and themselves through "unaccustomed angles" (Greene, 1995, p. 20). As a way of starting with those students who have for too long remained excluded, neglected or treated as an afterthought in the traditional model of education, Greene endorses tapping into the imagination. The imagination and its endless possibilities for opening the doors to multiple perspectives will allow for a more complete picture of what it is like to be "human and alive"(Greene, 1995, p. 43). In order to do this schools must tap into the full range of human intelligence, not simply verbal and mathematical, through which youths experience and construct their world.

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Body movement, images, music, and interaction are all possibilities of how youths could better interpret their worlds. Greene feels that it is "wrong to neglect those potentials ordinary curricula do not permit us to heed, potentials that do not appear to contribute to the growth of technology or do not result in easy measurable achievements" (Greene, 1995, p. 179). What we should be seeking is multiple excellences and celebrating the multiplicity of intelligences.

Elliott Eisner

Elliott Eisner also discusses the negative effects that the back-to-basics movement is having on the education system in *The Educational Imagination* (1979). Eisner feels that the desire to have "basic", standard and testable educational objectives results in a curriculum that places all of its emphasis on those subjects that are most testable. Those fields that are not conducive to standardized tests are considered less important and therefore expendable: "At the kindergarten level, the playhouse is being replaced by the bookshelf; reading is tested and play is not, hence play is considered intellectually unimportant in school" (Eisner, 1979, p. 3). At higher-grade levels students are not choosing subject areas that suit their interests and aptitudes, but are opting for those that would improve their chances of scoring well on entrance exams or that would ensure acceptance into various institutions. Eisner questions why schools continue to pursue such simplistic and mechanical solutions to complex educational problems, such as failing national test scores. The curriculum machine, with its linear systematic activities and standardized testing, does not consider students' individualized, idiosyncratic role in learning or the "complex, fluid, halting,

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adventurous task" that the education process can and should be (Eisner, 1979, p. 8).

Scientific inquiry and the need to measure and analyze statistically in educational

research has only added to the desire for precision and public accountability. The

subjects that fit into the measurement tools are measured and those that are difficult to

measure are ignored. Eisner argues that in this way measurement is the method through

which educational quality is determined (Eisner, 1979, p. 10).

The message that we have been sending to students is that what really matters in their

education is test scores, according to Eisner (2001). The result is a means-ends

approach to educational planning that has little to do with intellectual exploration,

speculation and risk-taking. Eisner blames this narrow use of measurement, used to

assess the quality of product or performance of students, as the blinders that continue to

limit educational vision. No efficient alternative to the testing has been developed;

alternatives would be costly and time consuming. Yet the price to pay for not

providing many ways for students to demonstrate learning is an increase in

"commensurability", or comparability. Eisner questions the point of comparing

individual students when it is the student's individuality that family, educators and

community should be focusing on. Because the school system continues to focus on

commensurability, everyone continues to be on the same track with common

curriculum and assessment practices. A process that is concerned with individual

development would make commensurability an "inappropriate aim". Eisner believes

that schools should be presenting opportunities for students to formulate their own

purposes as well as cultivate personal talent. Students need to be given opportunity to

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work in depth in areas that relate to their aptitudes. The benefits of focusing on individual needs and potentials are personal and universal. Eisner feels that the work done in school should be rewarding in itself by focusing on the "joy of the journey". The resulting personal and humane approach would reverberate in a fresh and diverse societal vision. Expanding the parameters of what constitutes quality education will lead to greater equity for students and ultimately for society. Though some continue to dream of schooling as a process that pursues and values individuality, expectations that "everyone should be moving in lockstep through a series of 10 month years in a standard system and coming out at pretty much the same place by age 18" is the reality solidified with attaining standards (Eisner, 2001, p. 367).

Israel Scheffler

Israel Scheffler discusses John Dewey's vision of society, the individual, and education in his book, *Four Pragmatists* (1974). Scheffler points out that the foundation to Dewey's thinking is the idea of wholeness and how all aspects of the individual must be realized and accessed to fit into the greater picture through awareness and freedom of continual growth. The ideal society and therefore ideal democracy allows for the maximum growth of each person through their own activities and self-development. Schooling must therefore extend beyond the confines of the classroom to a larger context that promotes each person's dignity and allows for the free exchange of ideas (Scheffler, 1974, p. 240). Without a process to ensure the development of individual potential, the most basic of all freedoms required for a democracy, the freedom of mind, is unfulfilled. Scheffler states that the cultivation of individual intelligence under

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the conditions of freedom is not only the main task of education but essential for democracy. In this way, education should be viewed as the agent for fostering critical intelligence that "embraces the student's own purposes and potential activities as well as the urgent problems confronting the human community of which he is a part" (Scheffler, 1974, p. 244). In light of this goal, Scheffler argues that schooling dogmas such as curriculum and teaching methods, school organization and grouping, grading and testing, requires review and reconsideration. This is not to say that the educational past should be completely discarded but should stand, put most generously by Scheffler, as the wisdom of the past that provides a valuable guide to the future.

Scheffler supports the idea of individual potential in education, stating that the concept is theoretically accepted quite widely by parents, educators and policy makers in the contemporary world (Scheffler, 1985). Yet the realization of this ideal creates a complex and therefore unfulfilled goal. As educators strive to access students' potential, they may declare that some have certain potential while others do not. Scheffler argues, however, that an individual "now possessed of a given potential may or may not realize it in the future; but, also, a student now lacking such a potential may or may not come to possess it later on" (Scheffler, 1985, p. 10). Scheffler argues that the idea of a student's assessed potential being fixed is a myth and that ignoring individual changes is an educational deficiency. In this way, the realization of potentials is contingent upon the availability of resources and the "limits of ingenuity". The downside of not addressing the wide array of developing and dormant potentials is the shrinkage of potentials and the possibility that they may be gone forever. Scheffler

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states that the "child's curiosity, sufficiently blocked, may be dulled beyond

awakening. The impulse to question, thwarted repeatedly, may eventually die. The

flexibility of mind, adventuresomeness and confidence required for exploring the novel

are precious and fragile learning instruments that lose their edge with disuse and abuse"

(Scheffler, 1985, p. 12).

The resulting "hardening of the character" due to apathy, poverty, bias, misguided

policy and narrow-minded student appraisal, may not reveal an individual's full

intellectual capacity. Scheffler believes that this is not simply a concern for parents and

educators but for society at large since the attainment of individual success determines

the quality and direction of society itself. In Scheffler's words, the responsibility of

schools is heavy and relentless:

> Its task is not to indoctrinate a particular point of view, but rather to help
> generate those powers of assessment and criticism by which diverse points
> of view may themselves be responsibly judged" (Scheffler, 1974, p. 244).

Moving Forward

To address the need for individual and societal emancipation, many believe a school

restructuring is required that breaks away from simplistic formulas and the quest for

certainty and conformity. However, the discussion of untapped individual possibilities,

or potentials, and exploring the unexplored only serves to intensify the unease felt by

parents, educators and politicians concerned with economic stability and status. This

however, flies in the face of what John Dewey and others believe to be the answer to an

ideal democracy. The single focus to have students place in the top percentile on

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achievement tests and the continued myth of harmonious potentials has left a vast wasteland of untapped diversity, talents and energies in youths. The answer for many educators is to allow for maximum growth through the freedom for students to shape their own identity and address their individual needs by the deconstruction of artificial barriers that define limitations. Individual interpretations and choices, the freedom to develop, and the freedom of mind, are defining factors in the quality of human life.

The quest for certainty continues to fuel school change. Parents seek assurances that their children will succeed in an unstable and unforeseeable future. The contradictions between how schools conduct themselves and what parents expect of education continue to be debated and may play a part in the general inability to conceive of a better way of doing education. The resignation that paralyzes and prevents positive change continues to overlook diverse untapped possibilities. The education system has presented itself as meeting the needs of the individual student through the "one best pedagogy", but has failed with respect to accepting differences and using them constructively. Schools continue to force children to learn in ways that does not suit them by not respecting individuality and clinging to an inefficient pedagogy. The following chapter will investigate how individual differences including intelligence, culture, gender and special needs play a vital role in a student's success in the classroom.

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Chapter II

Potential to Learn

From the previous chapter one would wonder if there is any real learning taking place in classrooms at all. Many among us can attest to having had positive, even inspiring, school experiences that provided the education and guidance required to pursue a successful and prosperous future. These are the same individuals who see school as the foundation to future learning and often argue that it is the individual who is ultimately responsible for their own success. There are many others, however, who have walked away from their school years with quite a contrary outlook. Their "mis-education" has resulted in the termination of further learning and a negative regard for the process and its deliverers. How concerned should educators be with those individuals who do not fit into standard definitions of intelligence? What qualities are worthwhile for development and promotion by schools? What if we regarded those students who are not succeeding in the present system as having untapped, invaluable, potential? Would we then consider looking at the barriers for students in developing such potential? The present state of education leads many of us to believe that some needs are being met while others are consistently overlooked. This chapter discusses how various intelligences, culture, gender and special needs are areas that need to be fully utilized when considering the development of individual students potential. Keep in mind that students do not fit into tidy categories, that these potentials and needs are overlapping and that individuality is their strength.

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Multiple Intelligences

What is intelligence? Since the development of the intelligence test or "IQ" test in the

early 1900s and its continued universal acceptance, intelligence is considered

quantifiable, concrete and measurable. Through this test, it was suddenly deemed

possible to measure the actual or potential intelligence of all individuals. Intelligence

was viewed through a narrow lens and it was thought that it could be scientifically

uncovered and rated (Gardner, 1993). Naturally, the focus of schools corresponded with

this line of thinking. The one dimensional, testable, view of student intelligence would

be, and continues to be, reflected in a core curriculum that consists of information that

every student should master. The present push for standardization has rekindled the

frequency of assessments following the paper and pencil, "IQ" style of testing, to

reaffirm the "back to basics" movement in education, ranking all students on a

hierarchy of intelligence.

> Paradoxically, at the very time when IQ-style thinking has made
> unprecedented inroads into thinking about educational programs, the
> slender scientific base on which it was erected has almost completely
> crumbled. From a number of disciplines interested in human cognition has
> come strong evidence that the mind is a multifaceted, multi-component
> instrument, which cannot in any legitimate way be captured in a single
> paper and pencil-style instrument. As this point of view gains plausibility,
> the need to rethink educational goals and methods becomes profound
> (Gardner, 1993, p. 70).

Howard Gardner made the notion of intelligence problematic when he began to

research how societies throughout the world solve problems or produce products that

are of importance to a particular community. The sources of Gardner's research

included: "knowledge about normal development and development in gifted

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individuals; information about the breakdown of cognitive skills under conditions of brain damage; studies of exceptional populations, including prodigies, idiots savants, and autistic children; data about the evolution of cognition over the millennia; cross-cultural accounts of cognition; (and) psychometric studies" (Gardner, 1993, p. 16). The mass of information gathered led Gardner, as well as other researchers, to propose the existence of a spectrum of intelligences that includes many different abilities. Musical, kinaesthetic, spatial, and interpersonal competencies are examples of some of the idiosyncrasies of human existence essential in learning and in the development of the whole person, and, according to Gardner, these have been woefully overlooked in the attempt to educate, measure and rank students. Gardner presents a pluralistic view of the mind that recognizes a variety of cognitive strengths and problem-solving skills based on his theory of Multiple Intelligences, arguing that real learning takes place with the use of the whole body as much as it involves the mind.

Gardner believes all individuals have different potentials and strengths that, given the opportunity, will broaden and deepen their growth and possibilities for personal success and contribution to society. The theory of Multiple Intelligences is rooted in basic biological problem-solving skills and takes culturally defined systems of meaning into account. Biologically, research with brain-damaged adults demonstrates that some abilities can be lost and others can function proficiently. This independence of abilities allows for an individual to have a high level of ability in math, for example, and not so in language or music.

> I think of the intelligences as raw, biological potentials, which can be seen
> in pure forms only in individuals who are in the technical sense, freaks. In

almost everybody else the intelligences work together to solve problems, to yield various kinds of cultural end states- vocations and advocations, and the like (Gardner, 1993, p. 9).

Gardner argues that child prodigies also support the claim that there is a biological link to a particular intelligence. Gardner cites examples of autistic children who can play a musical instrument proficiently as a means of expression, but who cannot speak, as evidence of the diversity of intelligences. Gardner argues that society as a whole requires a repertoire of skills for innovative problem-solving in order to forge a successful future for the human race. Our schools, however, limit the development of innate individual potential and the diversity of skills because this holistic approach to education is not in line with the traditional academic pedagogy, as well as being a much less cost effective method.

Multiple Intelligences is not a goal in itself but a cognitive theory that approaches education by allowing students to capitalize on their strengths. By identifying appropriate ways to attain personal success within a shared vision of education, each student will have the opportunity to develop individual potential. Gardner envisions education as giving students a strong foundation in the academic disciplines including art, science, math and social science through the processes of system thinking (independent yet interdependent parts), shared vision, team learning and personal mastery (Senge et al., 2000, p. 558). Understanding the major disciplinary ways of thinking means establishing ways to think scientifically, artfully and mathematically. This varies greatly from "core knowledge", according to Gardner, who believes that the pursuit of "core knowledge" or "core literacy" to be void of sustained inquiry:

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superficial at best, and at worst, anti-intellectual. By recognizing the many strengths and multiple talents working in tandem, schools allow for greater individuality and encourage community by taking the pressure off deciding who is the smartest. Critics have accused this approach to education of not supporting rigorous study or high standards, yet to the contrary Gardner considers himself a "demon for high standards and demanding expectations" (Gardner, 1999, p. 25). Gardner is very concerned with education's obsession with linguistic and mathematical intelligences, stating that doing well in these areas does not guarantee success outside of school nor does it consider society's needs as a whole. Eliminating traditional issues of hierarchy with regard to subjects in schools would require a dynamic curriculum that produced and promoted economically successful and socially revered individuals in all areas of intelligence.

Gardner argues that although all humans exhibit at least a little of every intelligence, some individuals are more endowed than others in particular areas. Gardner believes that those who are deemed highly gifted, or "at promise", in the linguistic and mathematical realms are critical for the advancement of society and the evolution of knowledge, and are most likely to succeed. But it is those who are "at risk" in these intelligence areas who are most likely to fail. Cultures benefit from differences in intellectual proclivities to fill the various required roles, yet many roles are regarded as less worthy. Gardner feels that early intervention and identification of strengths can allow for all children to achieve success and be "at promise" by capitalizing on their strengths as well as changing how these strengths are perceived. A successful pedagogical program requires an accurate profile of individual learners. Assessment

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with this focus would allow for an individualized program customized for each and every student. These assessments would inform decisions for future careers as well as identifying areas of difficulty for the learner. Educators would then be equipped to suggest alternative routes to attain specific educational goals. Assessment in a variety of forms becomes a central feature of this approach to education, but not in the "standardized testing" way. As Gardner points out, good teachers do, to some extent, recognize individual differences in learning styles and try to be sensitive to difference when teaching. The formal identification and promotion of these differences, if multiple intelligences are acknowledged, celebrates the fact that all students do not have the same interests and abilities and do not learn the same way.

Variety is inevitable for this approach to education and therefore flexible assessment is required to match individuals to curriculum and methods of teaching. Traditional paper and pencil tests sample a small portion of intellectual abilities and reward a specific kind of "decontextualized facility" (Gardner, 1999, p. 31). Schools should develop intelligences and reach goals that engage individuals to want to be part of the community as well as the larger society in a constructive way. This would be an individual-centered approach to schooling that understands and develops a cognitive profile for each student yet also develops independent and interdependent thinking. According to Gardner, many students are proficient at most things and will succeed in the system as faulty as it is, but many others are doomed to failure because they do not fit into traditional classrooms or perform well on tests. An important aspect of multiple

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intelligence assessment is that it must include an individual's ability to solve problems or create products using materials in their area of intellectual strength.

Assessment for multiple intelligences would result in an individual profile of intellectual propensities and allow for success in further learning, rather than a test score that simply ranks a student within a population. Gardner believes that many intelligences are overlooked and many individuals are casualties of the single-minded, single-funneled approach to education. Traditional tests are biased in favor of the linguistic and logical intelligences. The decision to move away from uniform schooling would require models that use individual profiles to maximize the educational achievements of each student. New assessment must be "intelligence-fair", "developmentally appropriate" and result in direct strategies for success (Gardner, 1999, p. 72). Gardner describes the need for "assessment specialists" who would recommend appropriate courses of study or best strategies for mastering uniform curriculum. This information would empower students by allowing them to know their own strengths and allowing them to make informed decisions when choosing a future course of action. Students may choose courses that suit their intellect or determine an appropriate approach to a required subject. According to Gardner, a necessary component in an intellectually inclusive education would be the connection to community in order to find ways for students to experience vocational or avocational roles that build on their strengths. Instead of "crystallizing experiences" happening by chance outside of the school curriculum, students should have many opportunities to

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discover how their individual strengths are important and required in the outside world (Gardner, 1999, p. 73).

A multiple intelligence approach to education would be valuable to all students, especially to those who display a nonscholastic profile of intelligences, according to Gardner. It has already been established that those students with high linguistic and mathematical intelligences are most likely to do well in school and are able to pursue a variety of opportunities. Those with intelligences that do not fit into the traditional model of importance, on the other hand, should be provided with opportunities to realize their potential and the right to develop their particular interests and talents. This does not mean that students would not study traditional areas of the curriculum, but that they may do so in untraditional ways. Society and culture play a major role in determining the extent to which an individual's intellectual potential is realized.

> Just as societies change so do evaluations of skills. Who would now value the massive feats of rote linguistic memory so prized before books were widely available? Perhaps, if computers assume (or consume) an increasing proportion of the domain in which linguistic and mathematical skills are exercised, our society may evolve into one where artistic skills are the most highly valued because computers handle everything else! (Gardner, 1993, p. 36).

It is important therefore to challenge the notion that the importance placed on current forms of intelligence is fixed and that all children should come to the classroom equally equipped for learning a specific curriculum in a specific way. What we should be striving for is an education process that capitalizes on the diverse forms of understanding through the development of multiple strengths.

Humans have been trained or educated generally in one of two contrasting ways. One method is apprenticeship, where individuals become hands-on participants in learning activities. The other is formal scholastic settings, where individuals learn by listening, reading and memorization for the purposes of homework, examinations and "later life" (Gardner, 1993, p. 139). Today we know that the scholastic approach has come to dominate our approach to learning as it exercises "near-stranglehold" over other activities taking place in schools. The means of assessing this kind of learning has resulted in traditional testing to an excessive degree, according to Gardner. The "testing industry" seems to now have a life of its own and in no way represents a reflective society. Those students whose strengths lie in abilities that demonstrate diverse intelligence are not given the opportunity for success in this testing environment. Assessment should take place to gather information about the skills and potentials of individuals, providing useful feedback for a student's future. Assessment should therefore be a part of the learning experience without the need for explicit recognition or labeling on anyone's part. It should become a part of the learning landscape, not set apart from other classroom activity. As in an apprenticeship, the teacher and the student would always be assessing. There should be no "teaching to the assessment" because the assessment is ubiquitous. Gardner believes the use of universal formal tests might disappear completely in the future because it is an instrument that is not "intelligence-fair" (Gardner, 1993, p. 175).

Education in a student's early years should emphasize opportunities for children to discover and foster their own interests and abilities. The exclusive focus on linguistic

and logical skills can short-change those with skills in other areas of intelligence. It is evident in adult roles that spatial, interpersonal or bodily-kinaesthetic skills are often the keys to success. Yet linguistic and logical skills continue to be placed on a pedagogical pedestal in our schools. Gardner discusses the idea of using "pods" of differing abilities for apprenticeship experience, along with a competent teacher, to master a craft or discipline of interest. The groups would include students of various ages to encourage learning and teaching for all participants while engaging in productive work. The pods would focus on activities such as architecture and animation, to cooking, entrepreneurship and journalism. Gardner believes that the work that would take place within these apprenticeship kinds of environments would be "real" so learning and genuine understanding is enhanced. It is also important that these groups or pods are linked to the community, with outside specialists taking part in the learning for demonstrations and enhancement. Work would be documented in portfolios and would illustrate individual strengths and weaknesses, mastery of facts, skills and concepts, quality of work, and so forth. This process, versus test-taking, a skill that is of little value outside of school, would encourage students to develop their individual potential through working on projects of personal interest. This process would replace extrinsic motivation with intrinsic motivation for learning which would have profound effects on engaging students as well as increasing levels of overall learning and understanding, a goal considered most important to the present Halifax Regional School Board.

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There is a definite pressure to "uniform" all schools. Identifying a basic set of competences and a core body of knowledge which the greatest number of individual can attain as efficiently as possible, with the most gifted rising to the top, is cost efficient and easily regulated. This system ensures the same curriculum for all students, the same methods of teaching and standardized methods of assessment. Students, teachers, and administrators can all be judged by these common standards. Although there will be improved literacy levels in students and certain basic disciplines will be mastered, Gardner believes that the continued standardized approach will produce more problems than it will alleviate. An education system based on "IQ-style thinking" and the proliferation of standardization has resulted in the "testing tail wagging the curriculum dog" (Gardner, 1993, p. 70). A uniform system with traditional teaching and assessment practices provides little room for individual difference and the growth of individual potential. In a nation built on a wealth of diversity, many students continue live on the margins of the educational experience. Such experiences includes a rich cultural diversity and that constitutes another source of untapped student potential.

Multiculture

Many Canadians believe that educational practices, curriculum, texts and pedagogies, do not speak to the wide variety of human experience, or to the culturally diverse history of events that has shaped society. It is argued by many that race is a political construct created for domination and dehumanization and that it is a relatively new

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phenomenon. Prior to the 1700s, identity was based on traditions such as culture, language, and history (Watkins, Lewis and Chou, 2001). If there is, in effect, only one race, the human race, educators must analyze the history, purposes, consequences and structure of the racial paradigms in school systems. Because a relatively small and privileged group has decided what constitutes official knowledge, schools traditionally focus on a very narrow view of the world. This knowledge is presented as "value-free" and objective and as not favoring any culture over another. In reality the experiences of many cultures are overlooked, trivialized and ignored. Ratna Ghosh believes that our multicultural society requires an understanding of multiple realities and how differences and inequalities are constructed (Ghosh, 1996). Recognition of differences, cultural or otherwise, is essential for empowerment and, therefore, for the education process. Ghosh refers to culture as being the way groups of people respond to their environment, and its parameters are in constant flux. Cultural characteristics include differences in gender and ethnicity, as well as economic status, religion and lifestyles. Ghosh believes a multicultural education would encompass all differences found in society and is necessary to reveal power structures and inequities. Education must uncover how prejudices are learned and perpetuated and give students opportunities to challenge ideas and norms. Teachers and administrators must evaluate how they deal with differences in social and pedagogical interactions. Subjects and perspectives avoided or ignored become lessons learned outside of the official curriculum, solidifying how students define themselves and each other.

Culturally responsive pedagogy is an approach to education that utilizes students' backgrounds as assets in learning and requires all educators to include diversity in every aspect of their lesson plans for an effective and meaningful education. Multicultural education is a right to difference and recognition. Studies have shown that social stratification and the power it represents in schools have an impact on the construction of student identities. The assumption that all students are treated equally with one standardized curriculum set in place by the dominant culture is in effect ignoring differences and therefore does not amount to equal opportunity. The importance of a culturally inclusive education is not only important for students to see themselves reflected in curriculum outcomes but also to present an education that reflects our global interconnectedness. Multicultural education is not only for minority groups; it is important for all citizens to reflect and challenge the inequalities within the "democratic rhetoric of social justice"(Ghosh, 1996, p. 2). Multicultural education involves a change in curriculum that reflects a more comprehensive picture of culture and the world. Being accommodated as a mere aside to the regular program, or non-recognition, does not instill in all students the positive self-concept required for success in school and beyond. Ghosh believes that a multicultural philosophy must permeate the school curriculum so that all students can be empowered to face the future with a desire for individual success and democratic cohesiveness.

Positive self-concept and identity are major aims of multicultural education, vital ingredients in empowering all students. The focus in education should be to create conditions that "allow the transformation of student's potential power into actual power

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or empowerment" (Ghosh, 1996, p. 8). Education that empowers involves real learning, a process of inquiry and discovery that does not involve pre-packaged information found in schools today but meaningful personal experience. Like Dewey, Ghosh argues that meaningful experience leads to empowerment and requires the creation of conditions that bring students into a state of ability, confidence and motivation. Conversely, students who are "disabled" by mis-education may never recover academically or emotionally. School must encourage multiple voices.

George Sefa Dei echoes this position when he describes the "crisis of knowledge" today, and how the production, or the reproduction, of knowledge must consider a diversity of voices (Dei, 1996). Dei describes an anti-racist education where participants "negotiate" in knowledge production that demands the voices of all, including marginalized groups. This version of knowledge is more of a negotiable or "open space" concept than the traditional production of knowledge and its reproduction permitted through the education system. "Knowledge is itself a site of struggle and not a given quantity. This notion of negotiation then disrupts dominant traditions and demands that the voices of marginalized groups be heard from the outset" (Dei, 1996, p. 23). An inclusive curriculum would challenge the hegemonic Euro-centric norms that characterize Canadian schools, according to Dei, by including the diversity of human experiences, fostering respect and self-worth for all students. Dei states that issues of race and racism are central to the educational experiences of minority students but are only part of the answer why some students are engaged and why others are

disengaged. Other aspects of students' experiences in schools, working in tandem with

issues of racism, include gender, economic status, religion, and culture.

The claim to neutrality in knowledge is itself is a value-laden position according to Dei.

The anti-racist or multicultural position must move beyond a "narrow preoccupation

with prejudices and discriminatory action" to examine the ways a hegemonic view of

education and the world is entrenched in our systems and supported by structures (Dei,

1996, p. 27). Knowledge is a social construct and the power that comes with it can

negate and devalue the experiences of many who are not in power.

> By questioning institutionalized White power and its basis for dominance in
> schools, for example, the political and academic project of anti-racism is
> seeking to rupture how social power and knowledge is shared in
> contemporary Canadian society. It ought to be asked why the norms,
> values, ideas, perspectives and traditions of one social group should be
> adopted as standards by the institutions of society (Dei, 1996, p. 29).

The lack of power is what fundamentally makes all the difference in people's lives.

Dei feels it is not enough for students to learn about other cultures, as well as their own,

without analyzing the power structures that affect the generation of knowledge.

Multiple ways of knowing and interpreting the world would advance the course of

social knowledge, providing a larger, more complete, picture. Howard Gardner points

out that students experience the world in a variety of ways and approach learning from

many vantage points. One method of teaching therefore cannot meet the needs of

students from different cultures. Schools must constantly reflect on their methods to

ensure that the "wide body of community and off-school knowledge and expertise" that

students bring to the school is considered and utilized (Dei, 1996, p.30). This approach

would put the individual student at the center of education and would require a safe place for alternative and oppositional views. Dei believes that inclusive schooling means schools are required to be "working communities" where community and social responsibility are brought in from the margins into the centre of delivering education. Schools must seek assistance from community members, but this will require a change in how teachers define their position of authority by "redrawing boundaries of knowledge production" (Dei, 1996, p. 30). Schools would be required to teach the values necessary for a working community and would strive for peaceful co-existence among students, teaching staff, school administration, parent and local communities through instilling mutual respect, collective work and responsibility. Schools must unequivocally value the experience of every member of this more inclusive community. Diversity and differences means a wealth of knowledge is available for the benefit of all. Consequently, schools and the education process must proceed from the understanding that every individual in school and society has value, and those diverse viewpoints, experiences, and perspectives should be recognized.

Dei believes that blaming students' lack of school success on family and the home environment only serves to divert attention away from a critical analysis of the institution of education as well as definitions of "success" and "failure" (Dei, 1996, p. 35). He notes that, as many critics have pointed out, failures are consistently attributed to the students themselves, avoiding the examination of what happens in schools, how students experience schools and how this experience affects their learning. Schools should be promoting effective student-teacher-parent-community interactions rather

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than blaming victims for socio-historical and structural injustices. All parties must be actively involved in decision-making and ensuring that all viewpoints are present. The idea that there is only one reality worth knowing and validating is a dangerous delusion, according to Dei. The goal is to teach to difference, for difference is what defines us all. This understanding of difference is grounded in collective lived experiences, in ways of knowing and articulating social experiences. "Difference should be taught in a way that recognizes our individual and collective strengths" (Dei, 1996, p. 37). In this way we can benefit as a community from the strengths of all. Inclusive education means that success and excellence is available for all students, to understand and appreciate a wider understanding of our common humanity.

Dei believes that society is quick to blame youths when things do not move in a socially acceptable or positive way for them. Those who drop out of school are personally blamed and characterized as irresponsible. Dei reminds us that these individuals have their own personal dreams, as everyone does. Dei wonders if it is inherent in these individuals to "fail" or does the narrow definitions of success prescribed by the dominant value system of society need to be held accountable? A growing body of evidence points to the unequal opportunities and unequal outcomes experienced by students according to race, culture, gender and class. Dei refers to the "othering" of students when he points out how the system fails to tap into the richness of its student population (Dei, 1996, p. 77). When students demonstrate their unwillingness to participate in a system they feel is subordinating them even further, they are labeled "deviant", "problem children" and "at-risk youths". Disaffected

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students are left to try to realize their dreams and ambitions through their own devices. How students link their identity to schooling is important when considering the problem of student disengagement. Students do not arrive at school as generic youths with a clean slate for acquiring the lessons of the day. The identity of "student" constructed by schools ignores relevant racial factors and creates an "erasure of sexism, racism and classism" (Dei, 1996, p. 32). The margins become areas of resistance to political power, economic forces and cultural melting pots.

Dei reveals that Canadian schools have a history of not providing an understanding of what it means to live in a multicultural society. Dei believes that although Nova Scotia has a proud historic struggle for inclusive curriculum and educational equity through the work of community members, parents and students, many youths remain on the margins and do not identify with their schools. In 1995 the Nova Scotia government granted funding for the development of a new curriculum that would include Black history, culture and traditions. Dei states that while these types of decisions and policies are made with the best of intentions, their interpretation is often left to ill-equipped individual school boards and school administrators to administer with little or no resources or support. The deeper meaning of multicultural education has not penetrated the consciousness of schools. Teachers have not been brought to a full realization of the value in these ideas. Multicultural education becomes an afterthought, an add-on or special event. For students, this translates into little change in the regular everyday classroom learning experience.

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Consequently, many youths continue to exist on the margins of the school system despite the good intentions of many educators. Do we continue to turn a blind eye to the crisis in education and underachievement for certain groups in the school system? The "dropout" rate for Blacks and First Nations in Canada continues to be problematic. Toronto school board surveys identified 36 percent of Black students as "at-risk" of dropping out of school, and observed that 45 percent were enrolled in Basic and General level courses. Another study Toronto area survey revealed that 42 percent of Black students dropped out of school (Dei, 1996, p. 81). A similar pattern is evident with students in the United States. For instance, although educators may call attention to the fact that the curriculum in U.S. schools is becoming more multicultural, they neglect to note that the achievement gap between white students and "students of colour" is growing. Dei states that statistics prove falling grades, poor test scores, growing dropout rates, and enrolment in special education programs are evident in every type of school district and in all socio-economic groups. Given the alarming statistics, the claim that education is equally available to all is more fiction than ever. To address this problem Dei believes that students require a "multi-centric education" that uses the lived experiences of students as the starting point of education.

> Many racial minority youth have to contend with a dominance of
> "Whiteness" in the school that, historically, has left no room for alternative
> ideas to flourish. ...The hegemonic knowledge is presented as the only
> knowledge worth knowing. It is a structural process whereby minority
> youths' language and culture are devalued (Dei, 1996, p. 82).

Dei believes the current definition and practice of inclusion continues to leave students on the margins of the school system, even when they are supposedly included. The shift is from blatant exclusion to selective inclusion. One example is the creation of

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courses dealing with minority issues. Dei suggests that educators need to re-evaluate their definition of what it means to provide an education that is multicultural and equitable. For many schools its interpretation has resulted in the study of "exotic" cultures or multicultural events. Because issues and topics are taken out of context and isolated as pre-packaged programs, multicultural education and culturally responsive pedagogy can become "band-aid approaches to serious problems that require nothing short of major surgery" (Nieto, 2002-2003, p. 7). Dei presents multicultural education as an anti-racist education fundamental to student learning and permeating all areas of schooling. It is a hopeful way to confront the widespread and entrenched inequality in schools because its premise is that students of all backgrounds and circumstances can learn and achieve. Multicultural education needs to be about much more than ethnic tidbits and cultural sensitivity and instead must involve a deep commitment to social justice and equal access to resources. For students, educators and society at large multicultural education involves understanding the world from multiple perspectives.

Gender

Another student need that continues to be discussed with regard to individual potential and success is the different experiences of boys and girls in the classroom. Although many gender inequalities in the classroom have been addressed over the past 30 years, there remains considerable debate concerning the educational opportunities and obstacles for girls and boys. The discussions have pointed out positive and negative aspects of classroom dynamics and learning that affect the success of both sexes reaching their personal potential. Some research has pointed to the negative effects of

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the school process for girls in the classroom because of social stereotypes and biases (*AAUW Report*, 1995). Others believe the different learning styles are biological. Whether the differences are social or biological there seem to be many points of view in education with regard to how girls and boys fare.

Michael Gurian believes that there is growing knowledge that many girls and boys learn differently due to differences in brain development (Gurian, 2001). Though Gurian states that he is not interested in stereotyping or limiting males and females, he believes that many have been fearful of pointing out differences in brain development and gender because of the negative interpretations that have occurred historically for girls and women. Ongoing research in brain development is uncovering a number of sex differences in how the brain works, providing essential information to learning and therefore the education process. One example that Gurian cites is that girls generally tend to experience brain maturity earlier than boys resulting in girls acquiring complex verbal skills as much as a year earlier than boys. Because of this many preschool girls read faster and have a better vocabulary, as well as the ability to speak with better grammar, than their male peers (Gurian, 2001, p. 26). Another example of a major difference found in the brain of many males and females is the size of the corpus callosum, the bundle of nerves that connects the right and left hemispheres of the brain. In females it tends to be 20 percent larger than in males, resulting in better "cross-talk" between the right and left brain and allowing for increased development in decision-making and sensory processing. As a result many females tend to be better at controlling impulsive and high-risk behavior, relying on verbal communication to

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express emotions and desires. Many males, on the other hand, rely more on nonverbal communication, which has major ramifications in our present school system designed for little movement as well as verbal competencies (Gurian, 2001, p. 27). It has also been shown that boys tend to excel in areas of spatial abilities such as measuring, mechanical design and geography.

Though cultural factors have served to reinforce these tendencies, Gurian believes that evidence shows that these differences are innate. Although there are exceptions, Gurian feels that identifying aspects of the learning styles of boys and girls would have major implications for classroom teaching. Some classroom strategies that Gurian suggests include:

- Boys tend to be deductive in conceptualizing and reasoning allowing them to do better on average on fast multiple-choice tests, such as the Scholastic Aptitude Tests. Girls tend to excel in inductive thinking adding to their base of knowledge and ability to give examples at an earlier age.

- Girls do better with hands-on learning, such as with manipulatives in math. Boys do better, on the other hand, with math examples on the blackboard. Boys tend to enjoy abstract arguments and principles.

- Females produce and use more words than males. Girls tend to prefer concrete everyday language where boys find jargon and coded language more interesting.

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- Girls are generally better listeners and are more receptive to what is said. Boys tend to hear less and want clear evidence to support claims.

- Boys require more of a variety of stimulation to combat boredom in the classroom. Girls seem to self-manage boredom in all aspects of instruction. Gurian notes that once a student has become bored they will give up on learning and often act out and disrupt the class.

- Boys tend to use more space when they learn, especially at younger ages, spreading out their books and work. This is often considered to be impolite, rude or out of control by many classroom standards, but it reflects a spatial learning brain.

- Movement seems to help boys in the learning process as well as managing impulsive and fidgety behavior due to lower serotonin and higher metabolism. Girls do not generally need to move around as much while learning.

- Girls do better in group activities because they tend to follow the code of social interaction while boys tend to focus on completion of the task without much consideration of the needs of other in the group. Pecking orders seem more important to boys, with those at the low end of the social scale becoming more academically fragile and more likely to be consumed with being humiliated and disliked than with intellectual learning.

- Boys prefer symbolic texts, diagrams and graphs; girls prefer written text.

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Others, on the other hand, concerned with gender differences in the classroom believe that the focus on the differences between males and females is limiting to the education process. Blye Frank and Kevin Davison argue that individuals exist in "overlapping and ambiguous" categories, far too diverse to be reduced to two simple gender definitions (Frank and Davison, 2000, p. 65). The oversimplification of what typical boys do, for example, provides an "acceptable" form of masculinity that all must live up to. Frank and Davison believe that the current "panic" concerning the widening gap between girls and boys in school is based on "an irrational fear of girls out-performing boys" (Frank and Davison, 2000, p. 66). There is a growing notion that girls are succeeding at the expense of boys. There is a long history of gendering educational potential "illustrating the various arguments to explain boy's underachievement all the while upholding boy's superior intellectual capability over girls" (Frank and Davidson, 2000, p. 66).

Frank and Davison point out that the social construction and perpetuation of gender roles is rarely addressed by those concerned with the education process. Achieving good grades is contrary to how many boys construct their masculinity. Because girls are viewed as being more committed to their schoolwork, boys see schoolwork as a challenge to their masculinity. Labels such as "nerd" or "girlish", used to describe male students who do well in school, are used to socially ostracize boys (Frank and Davison, 2000, p. 67). Frank and Davison believe that popular remedies for boys' declining achievements in school have ignored the more than ten years of research that has outlined the complex role of masculinity in the lives of boys. Also ignored is the

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identification of which boys are doing poorly in school and the fact that underachievement is less about a boy-centered pedagogy and more about the growing poverty rate in Canada. Instead of investigating issues of systemic educational and social inequality, it is much easier to blame individual students (Frank and Davison, 2000, p.67).

"Beyond the Gender Wars", a forum held by the American Association of University Women Educational Foundation in September 2000, assembled a panel that agreed that both boys and girls faced significant hurdles in schools often stemming from social constructs of masculinity and femininity (Jobe, 2002-2003, p. 65). Schools must provide learning environments where boys and girls are not confined by stereotypes and limitations. "Generalizations about boys and girls do not take into account the within-group differences, such as race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and other characteristics. We need to move beyond the notion of girls and boys as two generic groups" (Jobe, 2002-2003, p. 65). Studies show that the use of teamwork and collaboration in the classroom, techniques initially used to reach girls, benefit many boys. Although some students excel in a competitive environment, many others gain personal confidence from the relationship building and negotiation that takes place in a cooperative classroom. The challenge is for educators to meet the needs of all students.

Whether the differences between boys and girls are biological or social, there remain unquestionable statistics concerning the state of affairs for both sexes in classrooms. By age four the idea that the sexes are "opposite" has taken hold and by six or seven

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children strive for conformity with their gender roles (The AAUW Report, 1995).

These well-ingrained gender roles are apparent in the behavior of many boys in the classroom as well as the choices many girls make with regard to post-secondary education and careers. Girls are showing marked improvements in all subject areas and are now making up 60 percent of university and college enrolment. Girls, however, continue to experience many gender disadvantages such as culture gender bias and sexual abuse. Though girls' participation in math and science has increased in the past decade, they are underrepresented in science and engineering bachelor's degrees as well as high-tech activities, the fastest-growing job sector according to the U.S Department of Labor Statistics (Jobe, 2002-2003, p. 64). Trends are also troubling for boys as statistics reveal that boys are underachieving at a higher rate than girls in reading and writing (Taylor and Lorimer, 2002-2003, p. 69). Teachers identify many more problematic issues in teaching boys than girls, such as failures, low academic achievement as well as mental and emotional problems (Gurian, 2002, p. 126). The field of special education, learning disabilities and behavioral disabilities is one of growing concern for boys in education. Many studies have shown an over referral and over certification of males for special needs education and more than two thirds of boys make up the population of special needs classrooms (Gurian, 2002, p. 187). Boys are ten times more likely than girls to be diagnosed with Attention Deficit Disorder and of the 1 million children taking Ritalin, three-fourths are boys (Taylor and Lorimer, 2002-2003, p. 69). Boys make up 90 percent of discipline problem in schools and account for 80 percent of dropouts (Gurian, 2002, p. 56).

The development of an approach to education that focuses on each individual to develop to his or her potential continues to stand strong. Students fall into many leaning styles, exhibiting strengths and weaknesses that need to be addressed in order to address individual potential and achievement. This involves moving from old models of education to ones that start from each individual student to eliminate barriers and address unique learning needs.

Special Needs

Arthur Shapiro outlines the deep-seated discriminations held against individuals with physical or mental differences in *Everybody Belongs* (1999). At a very early age young people are bombarded with negative images of those with disabilities in literature, the media, language and often at school. From wicked witches to deformed little people to others with speech impediments, "images impress on young minds that people with physical or mental differences are to be feared, pitied, trivialized, or ridiculed" (Shapiro, 1999, p. 3). Shapiro believes that the literature that youths are exposed to regularly throughout their education reinforces negative stereotypes. It teaches children that physical "wholeness", good looks, superior intelligence and clear speech are what is most valued while lesser qualities are stigmatized and ridiculed. Youths quickly learn that people with special needs are not like them and schools reinforce these lessons, consciously or unconsciously.

Shapiro believes education's approach to differences in learning needs or physical challenges must be re-examined and addressed directly in school. Although the benefit

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of integrating all students into the classroom for the promotion of an interactive community of learners is a concept that is accepted in theory, its implementation has been questionable. Successful integration of all students into the classroom requires educators to assess attitudes and curriculum that impact on those individuals who do not meet the present "high standard" of a successful student. The present system, according to Shapiro, denies many students the opportunity to build a positive self-image and does very little, if anything, to break down social barriers and discrimination of individuals with differences. Although teachers have been trained in addressing the cognitive needs of students, there continues to be a void in areas of role models, social interaction and friendship building that would address many of the emotional needs not being met in the classroom. For schools to meet diverse student needs, all parties must stop thinking in isolating ways. Educators must "relinquish traditional roles, drop distinct professional labels, and redistribute their job functions across the system" (Villa and Thousand, 2003, p. 21). Empowering children with differences requires more than simply having them in the classroom. Contact itself may not reduce ignorance and fear on the part of all students. Educators must facilitate children learning and sharing with each other. Students must see themselves reflected in the world around them, in pictures, in toys, in stories, in friendships and in role models to establish the feelings of belonging and trust required in a positive leaning environment. Shapiro's research finds that the most effective methods of changing negative attitudes towards those with disabilities include active participation of all students in experiential learning. Role-playing, simulation activities, cooperative learning and guest speakers involving

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interaction with persons with disabilities promotes positive perceptions and allows for real learning experiences.

Unfortunately, according to Shapiro, schools provide and enforce negative attitudes through labeling and segregation. Students who are considered less worthy than others in the world of academia, or athletics, are denied access to many school experiences and are left with the guilt, pain and the shame of not fitting into society. Students with special needs are excluded from systematic and standard testing, which speaks volumes about the perceived worth of these individuals. There is however sufficient data to conclude that students involved in a separate education system experience high dropout rates, low graduation rates, lower levels of postsecondary education or training, and low levels of employment. Damage to an individual's self-confidence and self-concept greatly restrict one's ability to fully develop. Many students are subjected to teasing and harassment for any deviance from the "norm", whether it is physical or mental. The perception that one is not valued or does not belong plays a critical role in the development of personality. Shapiro believes that self-concept is the lens through which individuals perceive themselves and is shaped though one's achievements and social acceptance as well as positive or negative evaluations placed on them (Shapiro, 1999, p. 11). This self-concept colours all learning experiences and is developed and solidified through many long years and interactions with others, or lack thereof, in schools. Shapiro wonders how a child could possibly develop a positive self-concept when the message she or he receives is that of not fitting in, not measuring up, of being abnormal or valueless. The continued social segregation of students with learning

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challenges sends a strong message to everyone that these individuals do not belong; they do not fit in.

The experience that schools provide is at the heart of success for disabled children. Positive attitudes established through regular classroom activities would promote the values crucial to a pluralistic society by addressing discrimination and its barriers to democracy. Shapiro believes that each individual child is the responsibility of the education system and this responsibility includes the right to attend school without being made to feel inferior. Research shows, however, that considerable prejudice exists among school-aged children, a tendency that becomes increasingly rigid throughout the school experience. Disability awareness, therefore, needs to be a part of the curriculum. Inclusion in itself does not change attitudes.

> Educators need special skills to recognize and counter stereotypical
> negative images and their sources. Their role is critical for the success of
> full inclusion and acceptance of disabled individuals into our schools and
> society, which is now a matter of rights as well as a matter of right
> (Shapiro, 1999, p. 19).

Placing students in classrooms without adequate support can be as ineffective as keeping them out of classrooms. But years of stereotypes and misconceptions have left most students and adults unable to comfortably or adequately handle inclusiveness in the classroom, or the community at large. Shapiro believes that attitudes can be changed but the process requires more than another educational slogan or add-on that leaves many pondering its effectiveness. Positive attitudes must be modeled and taught. Shapiro states that researchers have noted that most mainstreamed disabled children begin their classes with little if any planned social interaction with their non-disabled

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peers. Unfortunately, as educators count the minutes of instructional time for accountability, setting aside time for the promotion of relationships between disabled and non-disabled students is not central to instruction (Shapiro, 1999, p. 30).

What is required is a school-wide approach that supports teaching strategies to build positive relationships, and the mandate to address differences in the classroom. True integration is necessary for all students to see themselves as valued and belonging, as much as those who are considered "gifted" or "normal". All students would benefit from cooperative learning environments that allows for learning and teaching to take place between peers. This would promote community development and equality for all stakeholders. Shapiro suggests that educators should be asking questions and seeking new approaches with regards to school and the learning experiences of disabled children. Educators must find ways to change negative attitudes concerning students with differences. Schools must make the development of students' potential a priority. Gurian asks how can we encourage true integration for all students so everyone can benefit from the learning opportunities in a diverse and pluralistic community? In order to achieve true integration of people with disabilities, and in turn any other individual who lands outside the dominant population, Shapiro states that educators must evaluate the factors that contribute to negative attitudes, including history, language, culture, media and education. Students must be aware of oppression in all of its forms including disablism. Teachers and students must begin to break down the invisible barriers of fear and curiosity to see beyond differences. Encouraging development of all potentials will provide students with the means to be successful in life outside of

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school. Participation in a smaller community where all are valued creates a positive learning experience with peers. Eventual integration into the larger society will have a positive effect by encouraging social and academic growth through exposure to a variety of experiences. All students will benefit from these relationships by breaking down barriers of working with those who are different and breaking down misconceptions about persons with disabilities.

For educators this requires more than a one-time discussion or lesson on disabilities. Like one time multicultural events, the dominant student body may interpret the effort of superficial exercises as emphasizing differences rather than encouraging a genuine appreciation of all people. Again the argument arises concerning the addition of special events on an otherwise traditionally narrow and segregated organizational structure. It has long been documented that individuals begin to internalize negative and distorted views of themselves when they are continuously bombarded with perceived unfavorable information. The effect is mis-education, the discontinuation of learning and intellectual growth. As discussed in this chapter, many concerned with education believe that unfavorable and damaging pedagogy is perpetuated in schools, leaving many students without the skills or desire to live a happy present life let alone forge a successful future. Instead of ignoring differences and pretending that all students come to school with a blank slate for learning, educators should be ensuring that the priority is for everyone to receive an education that maximizes his or her own intellectual potential. This approach to education can be applied to issues of multiple intelligence, cultural differences, gender issues and special needs in students. The entrenched

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factory model of education, in which students are all served the same curriculum in the same assembly-line fashion, supplemented with add-ons for those who do not fit, remains an antiquated system providing a disservice to many students and teachers.

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Chapter III

Process not Product

Although the Nova Scotia Public School Program has identified the development of individual student potential as essential for personal and societal success, the education system has not been successful in the execution of this priority. As leaders continue to focus on test scores in Math and Literacy as the only indicators of academic achievement, I wonder how we are measuring the success of achieving the fundamental goal of providing a "stimulating and supportive environment to assist individuals in reaching their full potential" (*Public School Program*, 1999-2000). How are we measuring the development of self-esteem and personal dignity, identified as being essential for future success and a primary goal of our educational system, through a sensitive, anti-racist, democratic and balanced system? The answer is we are not measuring these goals and therefore they are not a priority in our schools. Are these goals supposed to be happening as a by-product of an education process that has not fundamentally changed in over one hundred years? Though we have witnessed major changes in every aspect of society through technology and innovation, schools remain virtually the same. Many educators and theorists have concluded that education needs to be revisited and re-evaluated, but attempts to consider a better way have been blinded by our traditional thinking. The entire system, which can be broken down into areas such as curriculum, teaching methods, school organization, grouping and testing, are parts of a system that many considered to be set in stone.

Considering changes to the education system means changing how society and community members interact. When critics discuss the need for individuality and diversity in the education system they are referring to a fundamental aspect of democracy: social justice. In a global community, the future of a fair and just society demands cross-cultural interdependence and a reshaping of traditional values and beliefs. The assumption that youths arrive at school ready to assimilate into the learning environment and willing to be a cog in the educational wheel raises questions about our understanding of individual potential and the learning process. If society is serious about closing the achievement gap of student success, not just throwing around slogans, then the primary building block of individual potential in the education process must be addressed, valued and nurtured. A typical school will house an abundance of potentials and challenges. Besides a multiplicity of interests and intelligences, there is also a wide array of family support and community needs. As teachers struggle to meet curriculum requirements, there is a growing number of students not connecting with, or benefiting from, their classroom experiences. These are students with racial, gender or ability issues, as well as students living in poverty. Others youths simply believe that schools are outdated and unable to connect with what they are experiencing in their real lives, or what they are exposed to through the media and Internet. The education system must recognize and address these changing needs and diverse perspectives to ensure youths are fully equipped to face a very different future.

This chapter outlines just a few of the possible changes that, if genuine and sustained, would shift our thinking from product, namely test results, to process, or the seeking of

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the development of individual potential as a springboard for the future. These changes

include a new vision for politically motivated decisions, teaching, community

involvement and the entire school experience. In doing so, I reflect on some of my

personal observations and conversations in and about schools that serve to motivate my

desire to work to find a way to include all youths in a positive and successful education

process.

P is for Political

> From a political standpoint, making schools responsible for every societal
> problem is clearly expedient. Better that schools take the blame than
> politicians and their friends. And it is so much easier to scapegoat
> education than to examine economic and political realities (Robertson,
> 1998, p. 9).

Education is political. The provincial government is charged with this responsibility

and has responded by developing educational goals that are inclusive and promote the

development of individual potentials for the good of the nation. Canada is a democratic

nation, therefore the education system must uphold democratic values by ensuring that

schools foster social cohesion as well as individual success. Yet, more and more, our

governments reflect capitalist values by supporting private industry and cutting funding

to vital social support systems. The "every consumer for themselves" philosophy is

seeping into the education process as more parents are seeking private alternatives to

educate their children. With less time and money to adequately address the growing

needs in schools, many parents with resources or ability are choosing to remove their

children rather than working for change. This only serves to reduce Canada to a

fragmented nation by dividing education in terms of economics, religion or intellectual

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ability. Although private schools still play a minor role in Nova Scotia, students are leaving the public system in growing numbers, pulled out by parents who feel the school is not offering their child enough opportunity for success. This trend has shifted the responsibility from governments to provide quality education to individual consumers. In British Columbia, for example, the proliferation of private schools has caused concern for many who feel that economic and cultural segregation does not reflect the diversity of our Canadian culture.

"I am taking my child out of this school."

(Parent, 2004)

When the social grumbling about our sagging education system gets to be loud enough for politicians to care, the call for new initiatives in the regular top-down approach of school improvement is implemented. This process always involves too few resources to make any real, substantial change and does not involve a sustainable plan that would carry it through the next change in leadership. Predictably, changes are not initiated with the individual student in mind but with the primary goal of keeping politicians in positions of power. Politicians' focus will be where the votes lie, and this may or may not be in education. Many in leadership positions are quick to make promises of increased educational standards and equity for all, but offer little in the way of how these conflicting goals will be met. Overdue educational changes will take long-term commitment, and many politicians are not willing, or they are unable, to make this kind of investment. Changing governments means new agendas, new approaches and often

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the undoing of what previous parties put into place, leaving the education system shell-shocked and teachers numb. Many educators survive by sticking with what works in their schools and classrooms because they know changes will not last the changing of the guard.

Theorists have long identified the challenges of trying to educate students who do not have their basic physiological and psychological needs met. As of May 1999, Nova Scotia had a 23.5 percent rate of poverty, the second highest in Canada. Almost one in four children in Nova Scotia are living in poverty. The poverty rate is almost double that among visible minorities at forty-nine percent (*Nova Scotia Child Poverty Report Card*, 2000). When dealing with the emotional, intellectual and moral development of youths, schools need to be supported by all segments of society. If government is serious about education and getting to the bottom of unemployment and poverty, then school is the place to start. Schools must be able to provide the services necessary to help youths and their families succeed. This requires adequate support from social workers, health care workers, day cares, and nutritional and counselling services, instead of expecting teachers and schools to fulfill these roles. Support and services must be provided within communities. If poverty is the most influential factor in determining student success, politicians must honestly and openly address this issue as it exists, instead of passing the buck and blaming schools and teachers for poor test scores or dropouts. Sustainable, long term solutions must seek a new vision for educating our youths by meeting all of their diverse needs within a community. Society

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must make a commitment to our youth by making long-term investments in their healthy development.

Provincial standardized testing is a relatively cheap and easy solution to pacify the masses and blame individual schools, teachers or parents for low achievement scores. Individual learning needs and cultural factors are pivotal in the language and social development of children, yet differences are ignored or dismissed in the testing process. The government has covered their collective consciences by producing inclusive and altruistic goals for the education system, but they continue to fail youths when expecting individual schools to carry these goals through without adequate resources. Today's youth are tomorrow's parents, workers and leaders. They will require confidence, initiative and creativity to successfully manoeuver through new and multidimensional issues. To dismiss any part of our population because of an education system that does not carry through with its responsibility to recognize the diversity and potential of our youths is to fail as a society by putting limitations on the full potential of our future.

Curriculum and Learning

> There is a problem that is receiving little attention today, the demise of the balanced curriculum. Amidst the demands for a return to the educational virtues of the past, curricular balance seems to be an abandoned idea, a romantic notion, appropriate perhaps during an era of greater educational latitude, but not particularly appropriate for today's educational world (Elliot Eisner, 1994, p. 121).

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The "Time to Learn" strategy, put forward not only by the Halifax Regional School Board but also school boards nation-wide, is designed to maximize learning time by emphasizing the production of measurable competencies. To be the "most improved school board in Canada", according to the current leadership of the Halifax Regional School Board, time must be redirected from non-core subjects to those that will be tested and utilized to demonstrate success. The core subjects that will be of primary focus are, of course, Math and English, or Language Arts. It is argued by many that this unbalanced curriculum will, in the long run, weaken the quality of a student's education. The content of tests will identify what teachers will focus on in their daily lessons as well as define for students what is valued by school and society. The desire to spend more hours in Math and English classes has resulted in the cutting of hours in other areas such as Art, Music, Social Studies and Personal Development and Relationships, as well as field trips outside of the school walls. These ill-conceived decisions prevent youths from experiencing a well-rounded education that is necessary for the growth of self-concept and individual potential.

Alan King, an education policy researcher at Queen's University, points out that provinces that implement a rigorous curriculum and place greater emphasis on national and international standardized tests, in a push to improve standards in schools, are "paying the price" with the unintended consequence of higher drop-out rates (Sarah Schmidt, *National Post*, VOL.7 No.85, p. A-1). The new and improved Math regime is considered by many to be bloated and fragmented, as well as short on ideas and consideration of the needs of students. With the current focus on data based decision-

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making, it seems as though trivia is mistaken for education. The question is whether the process of living up to the pressure of provincial and international standards is worth the price of losing some students. I do not believe that a system that professes to meet the educational needs of all students should be operating under the assumption that we will win the war on reaching higher standards even though we will lose a few students in the process. The Nova Scotian *Public School Programs* does not say schools will meet the needs of some students, or those that fit into our hegemonic system, but that we will meet the needs of all students. As it exists, education is a barrier for many students by not providing opportunities to work toward a meaningful and successful future. The curriculum does not require students to make connections between what they "learn" and the world they live in, their personal needs and goals, or to question what they learn.

Schools continue to operate as if all students can be treated as a homogeneous group by enforcing core curriculum standards that all will master at specific grade levels. Perhaps the real inhibitor of change is that school is viewed as a step to something more important (namely university) rather then being of value for its own sake. Although the world is not divided into disciplines, schools model themselves on universities. The courses that prepare students for university are at the top of the educational food chain, including Advanced Math and Physics.

> High school teachers have traditionally derived much of their status from their disciplinary focus. There is prestige in the part that the high school plays in preparing (selecting) those who will go on to further study. There is also a discernable status hierarchy among high school disciplines. When I attended school, Latin was the most prestigious course. It distinguished those worthy of going to university from those who were not. Advanced

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mathematics has the most prestige. At the bottom of the high school hierarchy are the courses that have no apparent connection with an identifiable discipline, such as Career and Personal Planning, Media Studies, Consumer Education (Ungerleider, 2003, p. 272).

Instead of questioning a system that does not consider the potentials of students and how to address their individual needs, schools blame the students for not being successful within narrow parameters. The students who are not slotted for university quickly learn the lesson that they are considered to be second-class citizens. Through the "hidden curriculum", or that which is not the official curriculum but that students learn through the school system, we let students know that university is at the top of the success hierarchy, and that only some students will be able to achieve this goal. Every student must have an equal opportunity to achieve success by pursuing the type of curriculum and learning experience that allows for personal growth and a wider definition of success. Schools cannot continue to ignore the barriers that prevent student from achieving success, such as narrow definitions of intelligence that does not take differences into account.

Students should be making meaningful connections and be challenged by the curriculum to reach beyond their own boundaries as well as the boundaries of knowledge. Instead, students are struggling to stay focused, or awake, in the learning environment. Schools continue to be dull, meaningless and routine for many students, and regarded as something that must be endured. Students should be stimulated to want to learn more and to want to follow their curiosity. A strong foundation in reading, writing and numeracy is fundamental, but the accumulation of facts for use in an unforeseen future relies on rote memorization and extrinsic motivation. Youth today

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are exposed to such a barrage of information and new technologies that critical thinking skills are more important than ever. Educators at every level speak about, and perhaps even believe in, the importance of critical thinking, yet little room is provided for critical investigation of issues when teachers are forced to cover a diverse and fragmented curriculum. Students need to consider the purposes of math and sciences and the social and political implications of the advances of these fields in order to understand why this knowledge is of importance to them and their world. Students are not allotted the time to contemplate and analyze the changes around them to recognize how their daily choices have implications for the world. As data based decision-making increasingly defines what will be the focus for lesson plans, analysis and creativity that does not lend itself to traditional testing falls by the wayside. Though the Essential Graduation Learnings, outlined by the Nova Scotian *Provincial School Programs*, promote the importance of aesthetic expression, citizenship, communication and personal development, schools are not required to provide proof that they are being fostered. We blame apathetic and disconnected youths for society's ills, yet populations of non-voters and non-thinkers are reproduced within a system that does not deliver on its primary mandate to "develop their potential and acquire the knowledge, skills, and attitudes needed to contribute to a healthy society" *(Public Schools Programs*, 1999-2000, p. A-3).

"Old people are mean. They hate us."

(Junior high student, 2004)

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The ability to work cooperatively with others and respect and value the human experience is a democratic value that is not fostered in a system that thrives on individual achievement and the ranking of students by tests scores. Youths need to make meaningful connections to community to break down the barriers that are perpetuated through the media and stereotypes. I have had much experience in bringing guest speakers into the classroom only to have adults express amazement with how intelligent and well-behaved youths are. Stereotypes only serve to keep real connections from happening. Students' commitment to community and society does not have any opportunity to develop if they are confined to classroom work. The learning process must look beyond testable curriculum to making valuable connections with community essential in the healthy development and growth of youths. Adults complain about how youths do not care about their surroundings, yet youths are prevented from making meaningful connections. Keeping students locked away in classrooms that ranks their individual performance on the accumulation of facts, with little or no interaction with the outside world, hardly fosters cooperation and empathy. The curriculum, as well as the assessment process, should encourage students to treat others with respect and to work cooperatively. It should tap into an individual's passions to develop a love of learning through meaningful experiences and relationships.

In an age of instant information and global communication, education must provide students with the tools for critical analysis to empower them in decision-making and innovation in a changing world. The current system does the opposite, however, by

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force-feeding more information and facts to students without the time for deconstruction. Real learning requires students to be self-motivated and take ownership for their part in learning. Under the present system there is no impetus for students to do so. It is well known that learning happens while students are actively engaged; teachers do not need an empirical study to convince them of this. Learning is something that happens in the individual while engaged in the learning experience. Intellectual construction requires real experiences (Myers and Simpson, 1998, p. 48). If we were to evaluate our present system in terms of how well it provides the experience of learning, we would have to admit that our schools are failing miserably. The use of smoke and mirrors, also called tests or measurements of learning, can give the illusion that most students are achieving. But achieving what?

If the goal of public education schooling is to cultivate socially responsible citizens for a democratic society by developing individual student potential, then the present preoccupation with curriculum outcomes has led us far from our course. Subjects that would foster conversations and creation, collaboration and critical analysis of global issues, are not valued on the education agenda because they are not easily tested or a prerequisite of institutes of higher learning. Youths are pushed to greater intellectual feats than previous generations, supported by rising standards of achievement. But tests do not examine students' critical examination of current issues in individually meaningful ways. It is time for educators to re-examine educational values by asking: Where are the tests for inquiring minds and for valuing diversity in community? How are we preparing students for their future, both individually and collectively? How is

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this education process opening individual minds to their developing potential? If students were encouraged to pursue learning motivated by personal experience and individual potentials, instead of for marks on a report card, we would see learning as an ongoing process that lasted long after graduation.

Quality Control

In the self- proclaimed race to become the most improved school board in Canada in terms of measurable standards of achievement, tests are the bottom line for the Halifax Regional School Board. Yet the testing process is in direct conflict with the primary mandate of public education: the development of individual potential, as well as promoting the appreciation of aesthetics, critical thinking and commitment to community. Tests are one type of assessment tool that, when used correctly, can help students recognize their strengths and weaknesses. They should not be the sole device used to determine success or failure. Tests readily serve those with short-term political agendas and teachers with little time or understanding of student learning. "Although they tend to be the most hazardous and inaccurate, large-scale assessments of students are popular because of the high cost of attempting better ways of assessing what children know and how they perform" (Robertson, 1998, p. 67). Parents want to know in simple and easy to understand terms where their child stands with regard to other students. Tests are the most cost efficient, easy ranking system that sort students into achievement categories. Though critics continue to point out how tests are biased instruments that work to the advantage of some students, they are used as objective

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indicators of students' learning. The education system continues to treat children as a homogeneous group when, besides the multiplicity of intelligences, there are also class and cultural experiences that contribute to school success.

To evaluate the success of schools or how "smart" students are, schools continue to resort to the traditional methods. The belief is that tabulating, ranking and reporting students' test results will point to deficits in not only students but in teacher proficiency. Focusing in on the importance of these tests will then force teaching and learning to strive for better test results. Test results are, therefore, viewed as an end to the learning process instead of one tool used in shaping future learning. If educators were truly concerned with student achievement, testing would be a means for determining how to best meet the learning needs of individual students. Decisions to test students and publish results, as a means of demonstrating commitment to educating youths, continues to fall back on an outdated practice that assesses a narrow range of student ability. "Students and schools may still be ranked and rated according to IQ and analytical and verbal prowess, but no one can claim (with validity) that these scores reflect any more than a fragment of actual capabilities or potentials." (Senge et al., 2000, p. 117)

Recent Halifax Regional School Board (HRSB) tests in elementary literacy have identified schools that are not meeting standards for success. Not surprising, the schools that performed most poorly were in areas of greatest poverty. Yet, because the same education is theoretically available to all Nova Scotians, the system is not held

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accountable and the marginalized are held responsible for their own marginalization. Ignoring the fundamental issue of individual student differences and needs only exacerbates societal and classroom tension. And what is the remedy to failing test scores, implemented by the HRSB? Teach more of what will be tested and reduce, or eliminate if necessary, all other "extras" that are in the way of high Math and Literacy test scores. Focusing on testing diverts attention away from inequalities to a "value-free" testing system that treats all students the same. Too many educators still buy into the notion that "paper and pencil" test results do not lie. The assumption is that more testing will result in more focus on curriculum for students and teachers. Instead, students are disengaged and teachers are discouraged by a process that is long on details and short on challenges.

"Students just don't care if they fail this math test. The system is breaking down."

(Teacher, 2005)

Parents continue to demand a guarantee that their child will be successful in an increasingly complicated and unpredictable future. They want this guarantee to be in a very simple form, preferably a letter or a percentage. Does it matter what the student is receiving the mark for? Or does it only matter how the student is faring compared to other students? For a genuine reflection of the progress of individual students, schools must use an assortment of assessment tools that would provide the feedback necessary to make informed decisions concerning their current and possible future successes. Schools cannot ignore students who continue to disengage, fail or drop out of a system

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that does not address their needs. If we celebrated differences and individual achievement, schools would stop making youths feel inadequate for not living up to testable standards. Assessing the progress of students must be ongoing and appropriate for an individual's learning style. A system that uses punishment, or fear of failure, as a means of motivation, does not tap into the endless internal reasons for learning. The present testing and reporting regime judges and penalizes students for making mistakes, an essential part of the learning process. It would be expedient, therefore, to allow students to make as many mistakes as it takes to propel learning into new and exciting directions. If students are continually negatively judged on how they do not live up to externally established standards, they do not internalize the value of learning.

> Focusing on comparative achievement overemphasizes competition, self-interest, and human selfishness and undervalues personal inquisitiveness, self-satisfaction, and the intrinsic motivation and excitement of learning. It substitutes in learners' minds a desire to get ahead of someone else for the desire to learn more. Schools become so caught up in the competition for the external rewards and getting ahead of others that they lose sight of the rewards of learning itself (Myers and Simpson, 1998, p. 55).

Teachers/Leaders

Few understand the demands placed on teachers in today's classrooms, on the front lines of the education battle between policy makers, parents and students. In the media and throughout society, teachers are often regarded as being overpaid and undervalued. Yet, not only do they spend every day interacting with students ready to respond to any interruption or crisis in their teaching activities, teachers must also spend their before school, lunch and after school hours preparing as well as meeting with others involved

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in the teaching process. Teachers meet for school improvement planning, to discuss the progress of students, to learn more about students from specialists and parents, to connect with community, and to align teaching with other teachers. Beside these activities teachers coordinate and manage sports teams, clubs, extra help, breakfast programs, special events, as well as being a shoulder to cry on. Preparing Individual Progress Plans as well as writing report cards (that seem to change format on a yearly basis) continues to demand more and more time though less and less time is allotted. Any new initiatives implemented are downloaded on teachers with little or no professional development. Teachers are expected to have the enthusiasm and energy everyday to face a classroom of often more than 30 students who arrive everyday with their own entourage of pressing issues. Many students do not show up at school eager and ready to learn. Too many come from disruptive homes and arrive with hungry stomachs. Administrators expect teachers to be innovative and current when delivering the new and expanded curriculum to an increasingly diverse population through a system that has changed very little in the past one hundred years. Teachers' working conditions are often poor. There are no scheduled bathroom breaks; teachers are expected to be on duty between classes or during recess. Preparation time is increasingly consumed by filling in for other teachers who are out so that the school can save money or because suitable substitutes are unavailable. Lunch breaks are often used for essential meetings. In many schools, teachers work in old and dingy rooms that have not seen a coat of paint for 40 years and with room temperatures that are often uncomfortably hot or cold. Textbooks are often outdated and photocopier and paper use is restricted because of lack of money, and though technology is plentiful in new

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schools, many schools are woefully lacking. Although teachers are involved and consulted on many issues affecting school policy and students, it seems as though their concerns are not heard. Many teachers are exhausted from the ever-increasing demands of meeting the growing needs in the classroom and the proliferation of orders from above. The system has not made allowances for the increased demands. From this perspective perhaps it is unfair to blame teachers for their frustrations being played out in classrooms and on to those students who require the most help.

"You know nothing! I know everything"

"What is wrong with you? Don't you listen?"

"I have already taught this lesson to the class, why should I teach it again to you?"

(Teachers, 2004)

That being said, from discussion and observations, it seems clear that there are too many incidences of unacceptable statements said to, or directed toward, students by teachers. Too often, differences in personality and culture are frowned upon and judged. Students' experiences are not valued and this does not go unnoticed by students. Educators, parents and others discuss the proliferation of disrespect and bullying in schools, yet the remedies do not consider the adult role models who disrespect and bully students on a regular basis. Positive and negative attitudes of teachers towards students colour teacher-student and student-student interaction, as well as student school success. This significant influence, however, is not given much consideration when preparing individuals for positions of interaction with

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impressionable youths. Perhaps it is time to screen applicants for teacher and leadership training on more than academic standing, but on their community involvement, attention to diversity and empathy with youth. It is difficult to promote respect for difference in schools when teachers and leaders continue to believe that it's "their way or the highway".

Is it the traditional classroom's management style and unrealistic demands that perpetuate narrow views of acceptable students behaviour and what learning must look like? Too many teachers, and administrators, continue to believe that students must look, act and learn a specific way. Despite the attempts, be they limited, to make teachers aware of the many needs and learning styles of students, too many classrooms continue to operate with lessons that leave students unchallenged and tuning out. When teachers are confronted with large classes, increased expectations and diminishing preparation time, the "cookbook" of classroom lessons is always close at hand. Under current circumstances, a teacher's opportunity and enthusiasm for tailoring a curriculum to individual student needs is too often fictional. It is difficult for some teachers to get behind another initiative imposed from above, or another individual lesson plan when there is no more paper for photocopying and preparation time has been expropriated to fill in for an ill co-worker.

Our schools are bound by tradition and the inability to see education as a dynamic, engaging process that begs us to explore more. A new approach to education would not require that teachers and administrators be omnipotent experts but instead lifelong

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learners who are willing to take the risks necessary to move the learning community in new and empowering directions. This requires letting go of some of the power, being vulnerable and open to change. Teachers learn from students, just as students learn from teachers. Learning in this way takes place for all participants through learning experiences that motivate everyone to ask questions, explore and discover new ways to approach the world together.

Curriculum interpreted as "meaningless" or "pointless" and relentless routine do little to address the changing needs of students and increasing discipline and disruption issues. Schools continue to address the symptoms of a failing system instead of having the vision to make healthy, long-term changes in education. Leaders must break away from the prescriptive approach to managing our "out of control" youths. What is required is a new approach to working with students' diverse potential to create a learning atmosphere that challenges all. Students realize fairly quickly in their school careers what teachers' value and what is required for school success. Some students are motivated to achieve at schools by fear of failure, or other repercussions. Others decide not to partake in a process that does not recognize their individuality, or their culture, and simply tune-out, or dropout. If educators are honest about wanting students to learn and succeed it is time to stop talking in terms of who is failing and who is not meeting expectations, and start finding ways to challenge students to learn. Teachers cannot do this on their own within the system as it presently exists, so many continue to teach with the expectations of the past. Administration is not sheltered from this analysis. They, too, are often most happy with a school that appears on the

surface to be running smoothly. This means that walking by a classroom where students are silent, sitting in rows, with the teacher at the front lecturing, is ideal. They, too, continue to think of education in terms of antiquated ideals, where students are passive recipients of information. In a system that does not provide the flexibility, resources or time required to help all students reach their potential, teachers and other leaders continue to meet the needs of those who fit the system.

Learning Community

> No single comparison metaphor, or argument can work for the phenomenon as complex as the school. That said, I believe the most appropriate model for talking about school change is the idea of building a new community. Many educators today are adopting the metaphor of community to distinguish schools from older organizational models-for example, those based on factories and industrial organizations-in which administrators imposed the agenda from the top down. They point out that in a community, everyone has a voice (Gardner, 1993, p. 84).

A learning community is a new approach to the education process that, if genuinely supported, would open communication between all members required for a successful learning process: parents, students, teachers, administration, and community members. In a learning community, all members must recognize and celebrate differences and search for common goals and vision. Far from representing the slogans and sentimental rhetoric witnessed in most schools today, real commitment to community would reflect the interconnectedness necessary for changing how we approach learning and schools. The opportunities for learning through relationships and experiences that could be fostered between senior citizens, pre-school children, businesses, and other institutions are endless. Through these connections, stereotypes are deconstructed and new positive understandings are formed. Community members would become connected, resulting

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in a more supportive and cooperative society, one that cares about all members. Many administrators and teachers, however, are reluctant to open up their doors to parents and community. Until leaders become committed to the idea of real change in the school system, symbolic gestures of involving parents and community will continue to take the place of real change and progress. To allow true partnerships to develop, educators must be part of a give and take process that provides all participants the opportunity to achieve in a process that promotes and supports life-long learning.

Parents play a crucial role in their child's educational success. Schools must capitalize on this fact and include all parents in a learning community. Schools must make schools inviting far beyond the required twice a year parent-teacher interview. Policies that have regulated the involvement of parents in consultation committees are met with reluctance by both parents and schools. Many parents prefer to leave education to the teachers, partially due to long-held notions of the process. Schools must provide a more flexible program that promotes and encourages opportunities for interaction. Many parents and adults are unsure about how to support youths today and require coaching and encouragement. Current time constraints and workloads discourage more that the five minutes allotted to parents on designated days. Alternatives to this arrangement must be considered. Time must be allotted for teacher-parent-student conferences to find optimal ways to approach youth development and parental support. Reaching out to families and communities requires more than a symbolic effort, but a commitment and a plan. An education program for parents and other adults is an

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example of providing extra support for parents, one that encourage the lifelong learning process for the whole community.

Health Departments, businesses and post-secondary institutions must also be at the table as community members in school reform process. Students need to experience the world outside of the school walls to make meaning of their academic studies and to try on budding potentials. Universities and vocational schools, as well as a host of other training facilities, must make connections with schools to provide much needed "real world" experiences. Through experiential learning, students will to be able to develop the knowledge, skills and attitudes that enable them to discover their strengths and interests, as well as building self-awareness and citizenship. The critical thinking and problem-solving skills involved when actively participating in society will take learning to a new level. Other community members such as government services, including family resource centers and youth health centers, must be part of building healthy relationships for a productive education process. When we speak of educating youths in a learning community, we must consider all aspects that might be preventing success, such as poverty and physical or mental abuse. Presently, schools are far from able to deal with the many issues facing children today. In a learning community, the education process is one that relies on all of its members to come together to provide a rich and diverse community that meets the needs of all its members.

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Racism

"Look at them running though the halls with their asses in the air like baboons."

" If they would only talk properly."

(Teachers)

We all have a responsibility to address the racism that exists in our society and schools. This is no small task and requires deconstructing racism in our everyday lives as well as empowering students to critically analyze the world around them. The process would provide room for students and teachers to engage in dialogue in safe and supportive environments. There are many teachers who are not comfortable discussing racism with students or other staff members and who require intensive professional development to overcome these barriers. In a recent survey by the Halifax Regional School Board, students indicated that they felt that teachers did not have enough training in African Nova Scotia Culture and did not understand what African Nova Scotians had to face when trying to succeed in the education system *(Improving the Success of African Nova Scotian Students*, 2003). Many parents noted in this survey that students continued to experience racial discrimination in school, as well as stereotyping and lack of understanding. This report also sites the *BLAC Report on Education*, published in 1993, as identifying many issues that continue to be problematic for Nova Scotian students. These include: alienation of Black students in the school environment, a lack of representation of Blacks in the curriculum, the low expectation of Black students, higher drop-out rates of Black students, and the higher

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number of students in resource programs. Although there are students who choose to live on the margins of societal success by turning their back on a system and society that does not respect or reflect their values and goals, educators and community members must continue to reach out to all students. Educators, leaders and those concerned with a democratic system must explore new and innovative ways to make connections and open dialogue for a better future.

School curriculum must reflect the multicultural nature of Canada and the power structures that prevail in the world at large. The contributions of our First Nations people, as well as the integral role of many early immigrants in the formation of our nation are relatively absent from the curriculum. Students who do not see themselves reflected in the official school curriculum, except as add-ons for special months or celebrations, do not feel valued by schools and society for their everyday contributions. Parents who may have had negative experiences in school continue to feel disconnected and intimidated by the education process, sentiments that are inadvertently, or purposefully, passed on to their children. A learning community requires the wider perspective, the voices of all members to shed light on enduring issues. It also requires the undoing of past wrongs through meaningful conversations. Deprived of all participants, schools remain a closed system, fearful and intolerant of the unknown. One day of professional development to educate two teachers per school on the new Racial Equity Policy recently tabled by the Province of Nova Scotia is far from addressing an issue as fundamental and democratic as equality for all. Viewed as another top-down attempt to force overworked teachers to address social problems, this

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initiative is provided with no meaningful learning opportunities for teachers and community members dialogue for real change.

Education could, with the proper support, make a major difference in addressing and reducing racism. The role of the school should be to give all youths the opportunity to question social inequities and to work towards a vision of a better future, one that promotes the freedom to imagine, build and try on a better way. In education's systematic approach to learning, many of the cultural differences are ignored or misinterpreted, usually as unacceptable. At a pivotal time, many developing youths' first school experience is that of miseducation and alienation as cultural or linguistic codes are disregarded or deemed unacceptable. In effect, schools are telling children that what they live and experience everyday is wrong and must be abandoned. For students to succeed in school they must sever themselves from their own systems of understanding and acquire the language, rules, and expectation of the dominant class. Education fails to make any real connections with the lives of many culturally diverse students. Although the advantages of acquiring the fundamentals of Literacy and Math will only serve all students for future success, the denial of lived experiences only serves to create barriers to learning. "The rejection of school norms and values and self-exclusion, through apathy, indiscipline, vandalism and truancy takes place in the context, and as a result of, their compulsory incorporation into middle-class oriented system of education that does not work for them" (Plumber, 2000, p. 30).

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In the name of social justice for all communities and cultures, education must put diversity on the curriculum. To build a strong democracy, and a healthy society as a whole, students need to experience accepting and cooperative relationships with peers, teachers and community members. Educators, administrators, students, parents and communities need to work more collaboratively, and in genuine power-sharing partnerships, or learning communities, to make schools fair for everyone, as well as responsive to social needs and concerns. Schools cannot continue to try and force students to accept a one-dimensional school culture that does not reflect the variety of differences that make up our Canadian democracy. The hegemonic, industrial age school system, as it presently exists, is guaranteed to restrict and inhibit many students from achieving their potential for personal success in all its possibilities. School must be a vehicle for success for all, not just those who fit the narrow criteria of acceptable intelligences, behaviours or ambitions. Through the study of history, art, music, languages and geography, the stereotypes and barriers to diversity can be questioned and dismantled. Education plays a fundamental role in opening doors to how individuals see themselves and the world around them. Schools shape the values of our future citizens through successes and failures, from lessons taught in classrooms or those that are omitted. This is not a responsibility that we should take lightly, nor should it be ignored in a system that fears the unknown. The cultivation of democratic and cooperative abilities is a much higher standard for our youth, society and education system to be striving toward.

The School Factory

"School is ok but why do they make us sit all day?"

(Grade one student)

Time is the main organizing element in operating schools and identifying priorities in education. One only needs to look at a typical school timetable to understand what simplicity and clarity is granted by this approach to disseminating knowledge, as well as understanding what is valued in schools. With more time now spent on Math and Literacy in schools in the Halifax Regional School Board, all other subjects must be scaled back or eliminated. The traditional relationship between time and academic achievement continues to be the driving force behind any initiatives or strategies for student success. Despite the theories that have been developed with regard to how children learn, the variety of intelligences found in classrooms and the technological advances that have opened possibilities to how we work, school continues to embody the educational principles and methods of the industrialized model of the nineteenth century. It has been well established that learning requires doing, active participation in learning experiences. There has been no evidence that the process of passively absorbing information from teachers or books without active analysis and synthesis involves any real or lasting learning. And though some test scores have increased, critics argue that this is a short-term solution to which there has been no evidence of individual growth with regard to the development of individual potential and personal meaning. Teaching continues to be about the accumulation of facts that students are expected to regurgitate, or recreate to a teacher's specification, on tests at a later date.

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To ensure that our students are learning, the testing machine has been turned to maximum output. Across the system assessment will reassure restless parents and hungry media that schools are continuing to measure up. Unfortunately, focusing on testing means fewer activities that meet the needs of the whole student, mind and body. Teachers continue to find themselves struggling to keep students focused at their desks, as patience levels run out for both teachers and students.

Learning should be the constant, in its many forms, and time the variable. Because students learn at different rates and by different means, teachers need more flexibility to meet the needs of individual learners. Educators must envision ways to meet the learning needs of all students. This would require more than the occasional lesson that allows students to present a project through drawing posters. Learning activities must be ongoing and as valued as preparing for the next test. Experiential learning will not only address numeracy and literacy intelligences, but also bodily kinaesthetic, music and spatial skills. Though educators speak of child-centred learning, the "back to basics" movement endorses more hours spent in Math and Literacy classes with the traditional approach of teacher lectures and control. The decision to use test scores as indicators of success has indicated that the education process is stuck in the past and continues to turn its back on individual student differences.

When students are not meeting the school's expectation, be it behaviourally or academically, they are labelled a poor student or tested to identify learning challenges and exempted from the regular testing and ranking regime. Educators continue to use

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labels to eliminate, or quarantine, differences as fast as they are found. This is essential in keeping measurable achievement scores on the rise. Dealing with "problematic" students is time-consuming, expensive and often results in students being removed from classrooms to "time-out" rooms, or resource rooms. Ritalin and related drugs are increasingly prescribed to students who cannot settle down and focus. Though the benefits for a small number of children are documented, many question if society is condoning sedating children rather than addressing the fundamental problems of the education system. Is this a cheap and easy remedy for children who may be misbehaving because of boredom, poor diet or emotional turmoil?

Through the use of IPPs, or Individual Program Plans, for more "challenging" situations, to less invasive program modifications, students are assessed for insights into how to best approach their education. This process would be beneficial for all students, not only those who have learning challenges, but those who need a more challenging learning process. Boredom and disengagement is not limited to those who are not able to excel at the sanctioned learning material. It would benefit all students to be assessed for individual strengths and challenges to develop a learning profile that would assist learning throughout their school career. Technology has also opened up new possibilities for enabling individualization of learning. Schools must begin to approach curriculum and evaluation by tailoring it to the learning styles, pace and needs of students in the development of individual potential for future success.

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It may be argued that, in the case of multiple intelligences, there is a risk of stereotyping or "premature billeting" as Howard Gardner referred to it (Gardner, 1993). There have been instances where students have shown particular talent only to be directed to a specific career to the exclusion of anything else. In the worst case scenario, students may be deprived of encouragement and opportunities from developing the seeds of future possible strengths. Instead, early identification of strengths can benefit a child by finding new approaches to learning, as well as allowing for various alternatives for overcoming weaknesses. The education system now has the ability to truly implement student-centered schools; all that is required is the vision. An individually developed portfolio would be well-rounded and demonstrate the growth of students. An education that cares about all students needs to recognize and value learning in more ways than tests scores. With the current demand for individual services and resources presently outweighing the supply, the task may seem insurmountable for schools. Many teachers are feeling as though the inclusion of special needs students into the classroom has left them trying to do the impossible with little or no support. Schools continue to reflect the society at large, as Dewey hypothesized. What we see inside and outside of schools is a continued intolerance for difference. As the student population becomes more diverse, teachers and administration find themselves increasingly battling with those who refuse to play by outdated rules.

"School is such a waste of time. We might get one hour of work all day."

(Student, 2005)

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A school day should consist of mastering the fundamentals of core knowledge including math, literacy, science and social studies and exploring the possibilities that this knowledge reveals for all of society. The acquisition of information is meaningless unless it is applied to the world that students find themselves in. A school day must therefore involve focusing on the development of potentials with experiential learning in areas that stretch the contemporary, as well as the fundamental, mind. This would include music, art, design, construction, business, languages, performance and technology as well as others areas. Students would be encouraged to develop talents and explore careers to guide them in their later years of school as well their lives outside of the public education process. Our youths deserve an experience that challenges and engages them, not one that causes them to tune out and care less.

Changes such as increased learning experiences would require schools to look at how they organize learning and group students. It is well documented that students begin school at various stages of cognitive ability. Grouping students by age does little in the way of supporting various rates of learning. All 5 year olds should not be required to complete the same tasks at the same pace. Schools should not set students up for failure and disengagement, or other discipline issues, from the start with a predetermined learning pace. Grouping by age is an artificial construct that does not serve real learning. Students should be able to progress at a rate that continues to challenge their abilities through cooperative exercises as well as individual activities. Multigenerational classrooms provide stimulation from teachers and peers who can

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provide challenges, wisdom, direction and intellectual forces. Parents and teachers tend to dislike class organization that combines students from more than one age level as the process veers from the traditional classrooms, and many fear any changes to the sacred system. For teachers, the additional work is daunting. Supporting multi-grade classrooms would require the resources and support to ensure lesson planning and individualized learning is not another download on over-burdened teachers.

Isolated subjects and bells to indicate the ending of one lesson and the beginning of another suits school management but is not in the best interests of student success. The education system continues to be routine, mind numbing and risk-free as it alienates students by not addressing needs and changes in their world. Schools do not take into account the reality of students' lives in this century. Media and technology have provided youths with information and controversy that were inconceivable a generation ago. There was a time when teachers really did know more than those they taught. Today, at an increasing pace, youths are bombarded with information through the innovations, satire, music and entertainment of popular culture. Yet we insult their intelligences by treating them as though they have nothing to offer, to remain passive recipients of "bland and inoffensive" information somehow deemed essential (Ungerleider, 2003, p. 121). Students need to express themselves, to assess the interconnectedness of information that they are exposed to, and to feel secure enough to use what they are learning in an unpredictable and growing community. Learning through real understanding and making connections to the community and world would require a schedule that moves outside of sixty minute periods of Math and English.

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Year-round school is another option that would maximize learning potential. The school year was designed to give the many children in rural areas the summers off to help out with farm work. This schedule is seldom disputed today, though its efficiency is questionable. Every year the starting up and shutting down of schools is a process that results in the loss of at least two months of productive activity, September being the "getting started again" month and June being the "it's almost over" coasting month. The two months off in the summer disconnects the continuity in learning. Many teachers say that students have forgotten much of what they learned (read: memorized) over the summer and they must begin again with a review of the previous year's material. Besides being a strong statement about exactly what students are learning, there is also the impression that learning is not a part of our real lives. Splitting up the summer vacation into shorter breaks throughout the year would allow for continuity of learning, as well as allowing the inclusion of activities that would take advantage of warmer weather. The current schedule is, however, well ingrained and would be difficult to change, though many students presently attend summer school for upgrading or extra-curricular activities.

A school day that ends between 2:30pm to 3:30pm leaves many younger children finding their way home to an empty house. As a society, we should care about all of our youths. In a learning community schools would care. A new education facility would include options such as the long overdue national day care program as well as nutritious food services (I won't even begin to comment on the sale of pop and chocolate bars in schools) and family health centres. The effective use of school buildings to

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accommodate an assortment of learning programs and alternative teaching methods may require educators and politicians to reconsider closing down buildings for the summer to meet a diversity of needs. A new vision of schooling, one that embraces the needs of families and learning for all community members, would require a new kind of school facility.

Traditionally, schools were designed as fortresses to keep children in and the surrounding community out. Symbolically and figuratively, these walls have prevented students from connecting the learning process to their communities, as well as discouraging any interaction from not only community, but parents as well. This may have been the desired outcome in days gone by, but a new vision of learning communities requires a review of how we see the education process and school facilities. Though the Internet has been successful in bringing the outside world into the classroom and allowing students to explore the world around them, schools need to be more interactive with the community to make the learning process relevant. Both in and out of the school building, students should be given opportunities to develop their individual potential with regards to a variety of real life experiences, as well as developing the social responsibility required of a democratic community. The old ways of thinking about education and administrative efficacy must make way for innovative means of accommodating a diverse learning community.

Every year millions of dollars are spent on programs and curriculum and ways to make schools an inclusive and inviting learning environment. But for many students the day-

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to-day reality of school is one of boredom and indifference. Many do not enjoy or respect the educational experience and endure it as a necessary hoop to meet future goals of jobs and postsecondary education. Others drop out and opt for alternative routes. Many students express dismay at teachers who are less than patient with those who are struggling. Many feel that teachers are quick to judge and label students successes or failures, a label that is difficult to shake during their public school careers. Schools, especially high schools, operate under the assumption that all students are striving to go on to university with their hierarchy of university preparation courses. Schools do little in the way of preparing students for alternative work that may include other kinds of post-secondary education. Courses that were once preparation for vocational work, such as electronics and mechanics, are giving way to more academic subjects, though the individual desires and social needs continue. How are schools helping students to find occupations that would best serve their talents? Why are university entrance requirements, such as advanced math, limiting the experience of our young minds? We must speak out against a system that values such a narrow standard of success, one that privileges those who perform well in math and literacy on standardized tests. Compulsory work experience would be beneficial to all students, not only at the high school level. Experiences outside of the school would make school subjects relevant where students can see first hand the environmental, historical, multicultural, mathematical, and global events play out in our communities. Making meaningful connections would change how students see the learning process. To meet the diverse needs of individual students, leaders and educators must envision new ways of scheduling, grouping, teaching and supporting students,

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Conclusion

> The trouble with kids is that we can't melt them down and reconstitute them into any kind of standard. Shipments of impure gold can be returned to the manufacturer. Hubcaps accidentally mangled on the production line can be recalled. The assembly line, which created the metaphor for standards, offers only obscenely inappropriate language to apply to human beings – one that obliges us to refer to students who don't succeed as "substandard".
> (Robertson, 1998, p. 33)

Education cannot continue to be delivered as though all students have the same needs and goals. In our culturally, economically and intellectually diverse society, schools need to find ways to make meaningful connections with all students. The Department of Education of Nova Scotia had identified that education is about realizing individual potential, as well as seeking a vision for society. Based on critical reviews and personal experience, education is failing on both accounts. Individual student needs are not being addressed and the vision of society as being inclusive and socially democratic continues to exclude many voices. John Dewey recognized the need for educational reform over one hundred years ago when he identified essential aspects of the learning process including self-discovery and personal development. Dewey, as well as many others to follow, believed a truly democratic society requires the development of individuality yet this essential element of education continues to be the antithesis of schools.

Throughout many places in Canada and the United States, parents and students are demanding choices in the education process. Some private and public programs have adapted to meet these demands. Many parents are seeking alternative scheduling, multiple language, fine arts and performance programs, while others strive for

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traditional values and homogeneous communities. As education is increasingly regarded as a consumer good, parents believe that they should be able to have a choice as to where and how their child is to be educated. The pressure on schools to publish assessment results to bolster their public image and the decision to allow parents to choose what school their child will attend, benefits the individual consumer, omitting the need to focus on social good. Some believe that the proliferation of private schools will only push public schools to raise their standards to compete with "innovative" and "responsive" private schools (Ungerleider, 2003, p. 193). Yet, there are many who believe that more choice in schooling, without social vision, will result in increased segregation and the erosion of democratic ideals. Is consumerism the value that keeps our country together?

It is time for the education process to reflect Canada's vision of an inclusive and democratic society. Making changes to the present system is not enough; we require a new vision. Education policy has recognized the importance of developing individual potential as essential to the learning process. Now we need to have a vision of how we plan to carry this policy through. Instead of truly embracing the learning community, leaders and educators pay it lip service by trying to engage in superficial relationships with unwelcome parties. It is time for educators to share the power and become part of a community where all participants are learning and supporting the well being of everyone. Educators must consider changes to the big picture, a new approach that allows us to rethink education with a forward-looking vision. What would schools look like if we could meet the needs and potential of all students? Teachers and

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administrators must examine how they feel about each and every child, addressing their personal goals and frustrations. Experiencing growth and satisfaction within their role as educator would play a role in changing the school climate for all participants.

All children start school full of enthusiasm and a joy of learning. Somewhere along the way we begin to lose them to miseducation. It may be that a student feels excluded because she is not reflected in the books or lessons being taught. It may be that a student is made to feel they are "stupid" because he is struggling with math. When we continue to fail those who do not fit the mold of an ideal student, we fail all of society. The cost of poverty, criminal activity, mental and physical health, and other social services are just some of the spin-offs of school failure. There are students who will go on to university but there are many others who will do something else, though the education system really does not give "something else" much consideration.

Society cannot afford to turn its back on its greatest resource, its citizens. Schools need to help students feel optimistic about their future by opening up the many and varied avenues for success. It could be argued that it is impossible to develop a school system that can provide an education that meets the needs of all individuals and that the present system is serving many in an adequate manner. Demands placed on today's teachers have grown exponentially and schools are unable to meet the present needs of students. Teachers are powerless, though many good teachers are creative and try their best to keep all students engaged. It is unrealistic and impossible to expect teachers and schools to reach all students without support. For this reason the primary mandate of

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the Public School Program is not being achieved. Many youths are suffering at the hands of a system that disregards their individuality and experiences. Schools cannot continue to ignore the issues that dominate many students' lives such as over exposure to information on the Internet, mental and physical abuse, drugs, sex, teen pregnancy, and poverty. These issues do not disappear when students step into the classroom, when educators try to convince them that the curriculum is all that matters. By ignoring the concerns and needs of youths we send the message that their lives are not important. The results are increased classroom tension, disengagement and frustration. These issues must be addressed in our schools and this responsibility must be acknowledged with ample resources and professional support. Teachers are not able to be social workers, psychiatrists, jail wardens, fill-in-parents, and health care workers, as well as teachers. All children require a learning environment that will meet their needs and challenge them to new levels of understanding.

It is time to throw away the old methods and ideologies of education for a new and innovative future. The factory model of standardized education and testing that we have clung to so desperately is simply not meeting the needs of many who are interested in innovation and vision in a changing world. Because some students and teachers succeed in spite of the narrow approach to education is no reason to continue to fool ourselves about the ineffectiveness of the system. Many leaders, educators, parents and community members are imprisoned by a way of thinking that considers the production line approach to education as the only option for schools. As the education process continues to leave many students on the margins of success,

educators continue to ask the wrong questions when envisioning changes. Schools

should be more than buildings where developing minds are fed bland diets of processed

facts and skills that do not promote individual growth. The malnourished intellect does

not make for the innovative mind necessary to meet the challenges of an unforeseen

future. Schools should be places where youths are provided with experiences that

challenge them to stretch and develop for their own success and for the benefit of the

wider community. To move in this direction, educators must be open to a new vision

of schools, one that embraces difference and includes the larger learning community in

more than symbolic ways.

A new vision of learning must take place in an environment that values relationships

with all of its members more than standards, regulations and cost cutting measures. The

learning process requires the guidance of caring and motivated professionals, as well as

the broader perspectives of family and community members. Schools exist to do "good

and important" work and therefore with a moral purpose "unmatched by other

institutions in our society" (Myers and Simpson, 1998, p. 29). Educating youths is

society's greatest responsibility. Collectively, we need a vision of what schools should

look like and move in that direction. It is this moral mission that pushes those who are

genuinely concerned with the individual potential of all students to develop an

equitable and inspiring education. Learning is a whole school, whole community

responsibility. An intellectually democratic and diverse society requires a commitment

to the communication and collaboration required to meet future changes and

challenges.

Implementing a new vision of education cannot be a short-term plan with more superficial changes, as witnessed throughout the years. The potential for intellectual and value struggles should not deter educators from forging a better future for schools and society.

It is not as though classrooms have not seen any innovation over the years. There are computers, more challenging curriculum, and the growing identification of a variety of learning challenges. Yet these changes have not affected the fundamental approach to learning. Someone from the 1900s would feel very much at home with the classroom management style of lecturing and compartmentalized, decontextualized learning. By contrast, outside of the classroom, a child of today is now experiencing multimedia, instant communication and global economies as never imagined before. Computers and technology are changing the pace of information access and how we interact with the world. With the job market ever evolving and unpredictable, employers are seeking flexibility and problem solving as key skills. Adults are now living full and productive lives into their 70s and 80s in many parts of the world and the reality of "lifelong learning" is much more then another educational slogan but is necessary for survival. Youths must therefore be prepared for a life of learning, to enjoy learning and pursue a wide range of interests to "nourish their minds for the rest of their lives" (Gardner, 1999, p. 52). School facilities must explore meeting the demands of a learning community.

The necessary changes required for schools to meet the needs of students are complex. Time and resources, for professional development of teachers and leaders, is essential. Change is not a well-supported concept in schools. Teachers would rather stick with what they know than embark on a new, seemingly risky, path. The time has come for educators to support the need for a fresh approach to learning and meeting the needs of our youth. Change must be guided by a new vision of education, not short-term manageable changes. We cannot forget our vision when we become bogged down in the day-to-day crises that beg for immediate, short-term solutions. In a recent conversation I had with a university student studying to become a teacher, he spoke of schools without traditional classrooms that grouped students of various ages for experiential learning, as well as the hypocrisy of traditional testing and how schools must encourage individuality in all students. I thought back to when I first began teaching and how the veteran teachers laughed when I spoke of potential and individual needs. I told the Bachelor of Education student how I witness, year after year, experienced teachers rolling their eyes when the "newbies" speak of their educational plans saying, "Wait until she's been here for awhile". It is only a matter of time until the day-to-day survival of the classroom breaks teachers of their dreams of helping all children succeed.

> We who are teachers would have to accommodate ourselves to lives as
> clerks or functionaries if we did not have in mind a quest for a better state
> of things for those we teach and for the world we all share. It is simply not
> enough for us to reproduce the way things are now (Maxine Greene, 1995
> p. 1).

In the restriction of individual expressions, schools have condemned students to lives of partial fulfillment, an affliction that not only inhibits individual development, but the

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progress of society. With a new vision, we can begin to take the steps towards new beginnings and the termination of outdated methods and values. We need to see education as a process where students construct meaning through experiences and where teachers, parents and community work to support this learning in new and innovative ways. Schools reward students who are able to sit for long periods of time with minimal physical movement, who are passive and unquestioning recipients of information. If we as educators are sincere about our desire to work with students to develop and learn to their fullest potential, then we must be prepared to start doing school in a new way. Changes in schooling must be deep and tranformative to foster the intrinsic desire to participate. Educators, parents, community members and other professionals will also grow and learn as they fulfill their vision of guiding youths to a successful future.

Some students manage to successfully negotiate the system. Educators can point to these successes as indicators of system success. It is much easier to maintain that it is the fault of the individual student if they do not succeed. But at what cost do we continue to blame students? With the wealth of information and research available today about how students learn and the factors involved in attaining success, it is inconceivable that educators continue to deflect the blame. Not all students are headed for university, but that does not mean they are not worthy of enjoying a successful and productive life. The hierarchical nature of education and core subjects, reinforced by standardized testing and data based decision-making, must be replaced with a system that promotes success for a variety of intelligences and potential futures. Students

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should have the right to use their own creativity and talents to respond to their own lived experiences and the world around them. Assessment can no longer drive instruction. We must devise procedures and instruments that are intelligence, culture, gender and ability empowering.

Achieving lasting change in education is a question of will, including the will to withstand the current pressure for uniformity, one dimensional assessment and guarantees. There is growing demand, exaggerated in the media, to compare students, schools, teachers and countries through a narrow lens. It is of utmost importance that we look beyond superficial ratings and recognize and nurture all of the intelligences and potentials found in our youths. In doing so we may have a better chance of dealing with the many problems and challenges facing society. Youths need to feel good about their differences and in touch with their potential intelligences to become more engaged for future success. The newest mantra of the Halifax Regional School Board that "every child can learn and every school can improve" must mean more than the results of Math and Literacy tests. The current push for standardized testing and the rating of schools and students is putting unnecessary pressure on students and teachers. Data based decision-making is doing little to address the real problem in the education process: The inability of the system to handle individual differences. The idea that all students are developing at individual rates would discourage grade level testing and notions of passing and failing. Instead of being a teaching tool, a means for further clarification and learning, tests are the end, a set of numerical indicators and the currency in education policy. If educators truly value the potential of each student as

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stated in the Public School Program then we have a duty to create a challenging and meaningful curriculum by being explicit about reaching this mandate.

We claim to want our youths to be able to think critically, to think for themselves and develop to their potential, yet they get little experience through an education system where spontaneity is punished and conformity is rewarded. The outdated vision of school-as-factory, that strives for standards and "confuses assessment and achievement with learning" requires tests to ensure that students and teachers are doing a well as expected (Myers and Simpson, 1998, p. 50). If learning is an experience, then assessment takes on new meaning. It moves from a process that ranks students on a universal scale to one that decides how to best meet the needs of individual learners in a community that supports diversity. We cannot continue to waste precious funding on exercises that create the appearance of reform. Schools have a greater responsibility than ever before to be the glue that that keeps this diverse country united through the sharing of history, values and vision. Making our education system work for all Canadians is something worth working for.

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