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# Creating Schools & Classrooms for Antiracism and Ethnocultural Equity



## Questions & Answers

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# Guiding Principles and Beliefs



The York Region District School Board's Mission statement calls upon us to “unite in our purpose to inspire and prepare learners for life in our changing world community”.

One of our key values is that “we strive for equity, inclusiveness and diversity in all our programs, practices, facilities and people”.

In embracing antiracism and ethnocultural equity, we commit ourselves to positive and equitable outcomes in all education programs and services for all of our students. We are committed to preparing students for a society in which diversity is recognized, respected and valued. We will, therefore, assist students to define, detect and reject all forms of discrimination.

York Region's guiding principles on Antiracism and Ethnocultural Equity Policy include:

- Board policies, guidelines and practices that ensure equity
- leadership that promotes equity and eliminates systemic inequities
- school-community partnerships that address the perspectives, experiences and needs of diverse racial and ethnocultural groups
- an antiracist curriculum
- recognition of the value of maintaining a student's ancestral language while acquiring proficiency in one of Canada's official languages
- bias-free assessment and evaluation procedures, flexible placement decisions and parental involvement in the process
- guidance and counselling programs that are culturally sensitive, supportive and free of racial and ethnocultural bias
- strong condemnation of racial and ethnocultural harassment
- equitable employment and promotion practices
- ongoing staff development on antiracism and ethnocultural equity

## Acknowledgement

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# Rationale & Intent



## Purpose

This document was developed:

- to support the implementation of the Board's Antiracism and Ethnocultural Equity Policy; and
- to support administrators in facilitating discussions with staff and community members around issues of race, faith and culture.

***"The most useful piece of learning for the use of life is to unlearn what is untrue."***

Antisthenes (445-365 B.C.E.) - Greek Philosopher

## Intent

This document seeks to assist administrators and other staff by providing information on commonly raised issues, questions and concerns.

Our Antiracism and Ethnocultural Equity Policy strengthens our commitment to ensuring a learning and working environment which is inclusive and affirms the faith and the cultural and racial diversity of our schools and communities. Our policy challenges us to find ways to honour and reflect that diversity.

As an essential part of our task, we must seek an understanding of the historical and societal factors that have helped shape the focus of education today. We must expand our knowledge of antiracist education. In doing so, it is imperative that we have within our grasp useful information that challenges myths and contributes to correcting misinformation and misconceptions that may, or may not, be widely held.

This document also provides strategies for administrators and classroom teachers to assist all of our students to achieve success.

Our Director wrote in his introduction to the Antiracism and Ethnocultural Equity Policy that: "We are challenged by our responsibility to prepare our students for the world that awaits them... Ultimately, our aim is to educate our young people to emerge as confident, responsible, self-affirming adults, who are able to contribute their best to society and Canada".

That vision guided us in the preparation and review of this document.

The collection of questions and answers is a sample selection. It is neither comprehensive nor definitive. Our answers are intended to provide information. You may have additional information. The document is intended to be constantly "in progress". Your questions and input are most welcome.

# Government/ Immigration



## 1. Should business and government provide services in Canada's two official languages only?

To say that business and government should provide services only in the official languages ignores the demographic reality of Canadian society. According to the most recent data available, the 1996 Census, about one out of ten Canadians speaks a language other than English or French. As well, every year brings many new immigrants who may have a limited facility in the official languages. If we expect productive, contributing citizens, it is both an investment in ourselves and in them to communicate as effectively as possible.

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## 2. Don't antiracism programs and policies require tremendous financial and human resources?

Meeting the needs of aboriginal, ethnocultural and racial groups does not necessarily mean added costs. It may mean that existing resources be redeployed. It may also mean reprioritizing existing resources. More importantly, it may be an attitudinal shift, creating a new paradigm to continue to do what you are doing now but from new, more inclusive perspectives.

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## 3. Is it the responsibility of local government and the Board to be involved in race and ethnocultural relations?

Our schools reflect many races, cultures and faiths. If a community is to meet the needs of all of its members, then that should be reflected in the policies, practices and the very essence of both local government and the school. In addition, responding to the needs and concerns of aboriginal, ethnocultural and racial groups not only improves the services provided, but also creates economic, cultural, social and employment opportunities which are beneficial to the community as a whole.

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## 4. Is employment equity reverse discrimination?

There is no such thing as reverse discrimination. Studies have shown that certain groups are prevented from realizing their full potential because of their race or cultural background. Their disadvantaged situation may result from discriminatory employment practices that, intentionally or unintentionally, limit their opportunities. Employment equity is designed to eliminate discriminatory barriers by identifying and adjusting employment practices to provide equal access and opportunity.

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## 5. Don't antiracist policies lead to hiring on racial/ethnocultural basis rather than merit?

Highly qualified people are found in all groups; however, there are hidden barriers to employment for people based on racial/ethnocultural and other factors. Antiracist policies and other forms of employment equity attempt to eliminate those "barriers to opportunity" by encouraging employers to seek out and welcome qualified candidates from groups that are inadequately represented in many areas of the work force. Employment equity measures require that candidates possess proper qualifications for a job.

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## 6. Don't immigrants "steal" jobs and create a "drain" on the welfare system?

Many immigrants come with money and create jobs. Others bring new skills, and help provide necessary services. Immigrants arrive with energy and a determination to succeed and are usually able to quickly become self-supporting, and contributing members of the community.

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**7. Is it true that minorities are not well represented in the work force because they are not qualified and because they have not been here long enough?**

The fact is that minorities, like the rest of the Canadian population, are diverse in their skills, education and length of time in Canada. Some minorities are recent immigrants, while some have been in Canada for generations. Some are highly skilled and educated while others are not. Studies have shown that compared to the rest of the population, minority groups earn less, have higher rates of unemployment, and are less likely to find work for which they are qualified and experienced. The degree to which minorities suffer employment and economic disadvantages varies significantly by group and by region.

Studies also show that immigrants are twice as likely to be university educated than people born in Canada. Racial minorities, compared to other Canadians of the same education and age, earn less. Taking all factors into consideration, the evidence suggests that discrimination is part of the problem.

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**8. Does Canada need immigrants?**

Compared to most industrial nations, Canada has a very narrow population base. Canada has always relied on immigration to maintain its population and development. Without newcomers, our population growth would shrivel.

Some reasons:

- Canada's birth rate is far too low.
  - Close to 100,000 people leave Canada each year, many going to the United States
  - Today, the number of children per family is about 1.7 compared to 4, thirty years ago
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**9. Isn't Canada too willing to take refugees?**

An estimated 230,000 newcomers arrive in Canada each year. About 20,000 to 25,000 of these are refugees, of whom about 10,000 are resettled from overseas and are sponsored by faith organizations and/or the federal government, etc. Canada's refugee program is generally regarded by the United Nations to be among the most generous of the industrialized nations. However, the acceptance rate for refugee claims heard by the Immigration and Refugee Board currently stands at about 44%, compared with 60% in 1994 and 77% in 1990.

Canada provided a new home to about 24,000 refugees last year and expects to do the same this year, given the ongoing wars around the world. The U.N. estimates that there are about 22 million refugees and displaced people in the world, but Canada's annual intake of refugees has actually declined.

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**10. Should all refugees have to "line up" like other immigrants?**

Refugees need to come to Canada more quickly than ordinary immigrants. Their lives may be in danger or their safety at risk.

Many refugees have to come directly to Canada's borders because it is extremely difficult to apply from overseas. For example: There are few immigration offices on the entire African continent.

In some countries, Canadian immigration offices are watched by secret police and applicants have been known to disappear.

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**11. Aren't there a lot of phoney refugees coming to Canada?**

Refugee claimants desperately need our help. Many of those now arriving at our borders are from countries where they have been terrorized by government-sponsored violence. Many people are desperate to leave their homelands; however, they can never come to Canada under "cream of the crop" immigration policies. There are, however, some who are lured into claiming refugee status by dishonest travel agents or unscrupulous immigration 'consultants'. While they may present themselves as refugees, most false claimants are discovered and are not allowed to remain in Canada. In fact, Canada routinely deports hundreds of failed refugee claimants every year.

Other refugees must lie or use false documents to flee their countries and get to a safe place like Canada. International refugee laws allow this and recognize that for some people this is their only way to safety.

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**12. Don't Canadians have enough people to look after already?**

This question presumes that the average Canadian has to "look after" someone. Indeed, most immigrants and refugees are self-supporting, contributing members of our society.

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### **13. Do refugees and immigrants bring crime, disease and other troubles to Canada?**

All refugees and immigrants must pass criminal and medical screening before they are allowed to stay in Canada. While refugee claimants coming directly to our borders enter Canada temporarily, before receiving medical checks, so do hundreds of thousands of visitors each year.

A 1996 Statistics Canada study showed that 50% of those who are foreign-born and age 18 or over reported a chronic health problem compared with 57% of Canadian-born adults. And while 18 per cent of immigrants reported a long-term disability, 22% of Canadian-born adults reported such a disability.

Ninety percent of refugees get jobs as soon as their first hearing is finished. The problem is, they have to wait 5-6 months to get their first hearing (under the new system).

Many refugees come from countries where injustice is rampant. They may have had to flee because of their efforts to change things there. Once in Canada, they often want to keep working for social justice in their homelands.

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### **14. Don't immigrants commit more crimes?**

The crime rate for newcomers is about half the rate for Canadians. All immigrants must pass criminal screening before they are allowed to enter Canada and fewer are likely to go to prison. A 1993 immigration department study (by Derrick Thomas) based on 1991 federal prison statistics showed that the rate of federal imprisonment for foreign-born Canadians was 5.5 per 10,000 people compared with 10.6 per 10,000 for those who are Canadian-born.

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### **15. How will we maintain our "Canadian way of life" with all those "different" people coming?**

With the exception of aboriginal peoples, everyone living in Canada is an immigrant or descendant of immigrants.

Many of our ancestors were "different" too.

Our Canadian way of life has been changing and evolving for the past five hundred years. It continues to do so through the contributions and experiences of all Canadians, old or new. We bring together the richness from each other's backgrounds.

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### **16. Shouldn't newcomers be grateful for "our" generosity? If "they" don't like the way "we" do things, "they" should go back "home".**

As Ontarians, we should all be grateful for the contributions made to our society by all its members. We should not confuse "generosity" with affording newcomers the same opportunities that our ancestors once expected and enjoyed. We need to ask ourselves if what is being asked for is any different than what has been asked for within our own racial, ethnocultural or faith community.

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### **17. Why don't people new to Canada learn Canadian traditions?**

It is important for people new to Canada to learn Canadian history, geography, and Canadian literature and view Canadian films. It is also important to realize that Canadian traditions are traditions Canadians practise. As Canadians come from many backgrounds, so do our traditions. This also means that our traditions are being constantly shaped and reshaped.

Curriculum should allow students of various backgrounds to learn how their lives connect to the broader society. The classroom life should seek to make every student feel significant.

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### **If you want more information about refugees contact:**

Canadian Council for Refugees, 6839 Drolet #302, Montreal (Quebec) H2S 2T1  
(514) 277-7223, Fax: (514) 277-1147, E-mail: [ccr@web.net](mailto:ccr@web.net), Web site: [www.web.net/~ccr](http://www.web.net/~ccr)

### **If you want more information about Canadian immigration contact:**

Immigration & Citizenship Canada, 1-888-242-2100, [www.cic.gc.ca](http://www.cic.gc.ca)

# Identity/ Multiculturalism



**1. Does multiculturalism undermine the development of a “Canadian identity” while encouraging the ‘ghettoization’ of racial and ethnic minorities?**

Multiculturalism is intended to break down discriminatory attitudes and misunderstanding by promoting respect for the cultural rights and freedoms of all Canadians. Cultural diversity is a source of conflict only if minority linguistic, cultural and religious rights are not recognized and respected. Canada is a country of aboriginal peoples, immigrants and the descendants of immigrants. Ethnocultural and racial minorities have made invaluable contributions to the growth and development of Canada. Many minorities have been here for generations and some since before Confederation. Multiculturalism, therefore, is a fundamental part of the Canadian identity and should be viewed as a source of strength and enrichment.

**2. Does race and/or historical ties determine whether one is “truly” Canadian or not?**

No. In defining nationality, how individuals or groups perceive themselves is as important as their historical ties or race. For example, commitment to Canada and pride in being Canadian are as important as length of residence, race, or cultural background.

**3. Doesn’t a policy of multiculturalism erode pride in Canada?**

No. Ontario and Canada have been multicultural and multiracial for many generations. A monocultural society is not required for patriotism to exist. In fact, the choice of Canada as a homeland by diverse groups should be a special source of pride.

**4. Isn’t a policy of multiculturalism promoted by pressure groups seeking economic and political advancement?**

Those who promote multiculturalism are seeking equality of power and opportunity for all Canadians, not special treatment for some at the expense of others.

**5. Why shouldn’t we pick any member of any group to represent the ‘characteristics’ of that group?**

Individuals are unique. To judge all the members of a group by one example is to prejudice them (to be prejudiced).

**6. “Ethnic” or racial humour - humour at the expense of a particular group - is okay. Isn’t it only a joke?**

Such “jokes” are a form of intimidation and are racist. We do not need ethnic jokes to enjoy a good laugh.

**7. Aren’t “self-put-downs” just harmless?**

The act of “mocking one’s own ethnic or racial group” may produce low self-esteem in its members and lead to acceptance of negative views. Self put-downs are a sign of alienation from oneself and one’s own group. They reinforce false views and hurt the individual, the group and society as a whole.

**8. Acknowledging people’s differences is divisive. Wouldn’t a more constructive approach be, “Everybody’s the same, really. Differences are not important.”?**

“Colour blindness” and blindness to other differences deprives us of the benefits of diversity: the different abilities people have and the contributions they can make.

It often allows us to ignore the barriers to opportunity that prevent full participation for some Canadians. Refusal to see differences is also a way of ignoring important aspects of people’s identity.



# Community



**1. Are most minorities offended by what some may perceive as “preferential treatment”?**

All minorities want equitable treatment not preferential treatment. Equitable treatment goes beyond treating people the same regardless of their racial or cultural background. It also means treating people as equals through the reasonable accommodation of their differences or through the use of special measures designed to remedy past discrimination. This may mean treating some people differently so that there is equality of results and opportunity.

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**2. If everyone receives the same treatment, how can you say that Canadians discriminate?**

Equitable treatment is NOT equal treatment. Treating everybody the same, regardless of race, ethnicity or language, is identical treatment but does not necessarily mean “equal” treatment. A parallel can be drawn with the situation of people with different abilities, who use wheelchairs. They may be treated the same as everyone else but they would suffer differential impact if only stairs are provided. A reasonable accommodation of differences in this case would mean providing ramps to allow equal access. As well, differential impact can exist if linguistic, cultural and social differences are not taken into consideration in the delivery of services or in employment. Therefore, policies and practices should be adjusted to ensure equal treatment.

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**3. As we implement antiracist education policies and programs, are we not just creating problems where no problems existed before?**

Implementing antiracist education policies and programs does not create racial conflict any more than the establishment of speed limits encourages speeding. Antiracist education facilitates the full and equal participation of ethnocultural and racial minorities in all aspects of Canadian life. Through education, all citizens are given the clear message that racist or discriminatory behaviour is not tolerated by the community.

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**4. Is there racial discrimination in Canada?**

Unfortunately, there is. Discrimination can be subtle or overt. Many Canadians experience prejudice and discrimination because of the colour of their skins, faith etc. Fortunately, most Canadians want to do something about it. They believe that racism, prejudice and discrimination are harmful to everyone in our society.

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## 5. When referring to a person's racial background, what are the correct terms?

The terminology applied to racial and cultural groups evolves and is subject to change. For example, the terms Negro and Coloured, once acceptable, are considered to be offensive now. The preferred term is Black or of African heritage. The term Eskimo, while still in use in the USA, has been replaced by Inuit in Canada. Indian, referring to Aboriginal Peoples of Canada has been replaced by First Nations or Aboriginal Peoples. (Native Canadian is used but now is less common.)

Oriental is outdated. Asian/East Asian is more current. For people who trace their ancestry to India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, etc. the appropriate term is South Asian.

The following is a list of racial terminology currently in use in Canada. Please note that terms evolve and are subject to change.

Aboriginal	e.g. member of a First Nation of North or South America
East Asian	e.g. Chinese, Japanese, Fijian, Korean, Polynesian
African/Black	e.g. Black African, African American, African Canadian, West Indian of African descent
European /White	e.g. English, French, German, Greek, Italian, Irish, Macedonian, Polish, Portuguese, Scottish, Spanish, Ukrainian
Hispanic	e.g. Colombian, Ecuadorian, Guatemalan, Mexican, Peruvian
South Asian	e.g. Bangladeshi, East Indian, Pakistani, Sri Lankan, West Indian of South Asian descent
South East Asia	e.g. Burmese, Cambodian, Filipino, Indonesian, Laotian, Malay, Thai, Vietnamese
West Asian	e.g. Arab, Armenian, Egyptian, Iranian, Israeli, Lebanese, Palestinian, Syrian, Turk

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## 6. As a teacher, how do I involve parents and community?

Learn as much as you can about the racial and ethnocultural groups represented in your school community.

Invite parents/guardians of diverse backgrounds to your class regularly and often.

Let your parents know that there are interpreters available if needed.

Encourage participation in school advisory councils.

Show respect for the diversity in your school and the wider community.

Talk to your students and their parents to help you make diverse informed decisions.

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# Antiracist Education



## 1. Is Antiracist education important in all York Region schools?

York Region's population is ethnically and racially diverse, as are Ontario's and Canada's. Schools do not exist in isolation; each is part of the wider society. Students go on to further education, to job training, and to employment in diverse settings. If students are to participate effectively in the broader society, they need antiracist, inclusive education whatever the composition of their immediate community.

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## 2. What does an antiracist curriculum look like?

An antiracist curriculum will reflect and RESPECT cultural diversity.

RESPECT which:

- values all learning styles;
- acknowledges faith diversity;
- accepts all abilities; and
- seeks to understand race, culture, ethnicity, gender equity and sexual orientation.

An antiracist, inclusive curriculum must:

- acknowledge differences;
  - share similarities;
  - build trust;
  - demonstrate equity;
  - establish an open dialogue regarding common issues and concerns among people; and
  - validate the children and their heritage.
- 

## 3. Why should we make our curriculum inclusive?

An inclusive curriculum will motivate more of our students to engage in learning and achieve academic success.

Student learning starts with what they already know. We need to take them from where they are and what they know to where they are going and what they need to know. They will see the curriculum as relevant when they see themselves as part of that curriculum.

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## 4. Why is it beneficial for students to “see themselves” in the curriculum?

An inclusive curriculum makes it possible for all students to see themselves in the curriculum and thereby affirms the value and sense of “belonging” of individual students and respects their gender, race, culture, religion, sexual orientation, and abilities. We owe it to each and every student to provide this for him or her.

An inclusive curriculum creates opportunities to engage more students in the learning process. These connections increase the chances that students will be successful.

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## 5. Why do we need an antiracist curriculum?

An antiracist curriculum gives voice to those who have been excluded or previously not seen or heard in that curriculum. At the same time, it allows more students to see themselves reflected in the curriculum.

An antiracist curriculum helps educators and students to think, analyze, and act on issues of justice, rights, and fairness, all of which are fundamental principles of equity.

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**6. What are the other benefits of an antiracist curriculum?**

An antiracist curriculum confronts biases, prejudices, stereotypes, and other forms of inequity. It gives students the critical and creative thinking skills to do the same. An antiracist curriculum provides opportunities to involve and incorporate the community(ies) into the curriculum by utilizing the diversity, wisdom, and expertise of parents, elders, and leaders. Antiracist curriculum crosses boundaries, creating opportunities for exploration of global, interdisciplinary ideas related to the subject matter being studied. It brings the contemporary world into the classroom.

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**7. What are some themes that lend themselves to implementing antiracist curriculum?**

An antiracist curriculum confronts biases, prejudices, stereotypes, and other forms of inequity. It gives students the critical and creative thinking skills to do the same. An antiracist curriculum provides opportunities to involve and incorporate the community(ies) into the curriculum by utilizing the diversity, wisdom, and expertise of parents, elders, and leaders. Antiracist curriculum crosses boundaries, creating opportunities for exploration of global, interdisciplinary ideas related to the subject matter being studied. It brings the contemporary world into the classroom.

All curricula should be antiracist. Antiracism is not a theme. It is not the content of a stand-alone theme but must be seen as permeating everything we do. It is simply a way of teaching that allows teachers to value and validate all of their students in whatever their lesson, whatever their subject and in the policies and practices of the school. There is only one curriculum and that is what you teach. The question is really whether you have an approach that is inclusive of everyone or is exclusive of some.

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**8. Where will I find the time for antiracist education along with all the other things I have to do during the school day?**

Antiracist education is not an extra subject that is added to the existing curriculum. The philosophy, principles, and practices of antiracist education should permeate the life of the school, be integrated into the curriculum, and shape the interaction between school personnel, students, parents, and the community.

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**9. All the students in my class are ethnoculturally and racially the same. Why do I need to consider differences?**

The chance that students will spend their lives in an apparently homogeneous community is increasingly remote. Students who are not given opportunities to develop awareness of and appreciation for people from racial, cultural and faith groups other than their own develop their sense of personal identity in a context that does not realistically reflect the wider society. They are thus deprived of essential knowledge and skills that they will need to function effectively in the broad range of social contexts they will encounter during their lives.

A close look at a class that at first seems uniform may reveal that it is actually ethnoculturally diverse. Even in a non-diverse classroom, however, teachers in all schools need to provide an inclusive curriculum, because all students need to be equipped with the knowledge, skills, and attitudes required to function effectively in a world that is becoming more of a "global village" every year.

The classroom is not the only environment students experience. What happens in the classroom needs to address the whole context of students' lives. Students raised in an apparently non-diverse community may not be exposed to examples of prejudice and discrimination within the community, but they are surrounded by an environment that is diverse. They compete with teams from other communities, encounter people from other groups on excursions and shopping trips, and receive a multiplicity of images of the wider world from the media and may, as adults, work, live and access services in diverse areas. The range and variety of external influences means that all students can potentially acquire and perpetuate attitudinal prejudices or become the victims of prejudice.

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### **10. I treat all students the same. Is there anything wrong with that?**

Well, yes. As educators, we often seek interventions which will compensate for the challenges many of our students bring to school as a result of their backgrounds. Effective teachers have demonstrated that schools can certainly create the conditions for success. Studies show that some groups were clustered at the bottom of most measures of academic achievement and had a higher drop out rate. This knowledge obligates us to avoid the tendency to be “colour blind”. Saying we treat everyone the same regardless of colour or socio-economic situations does not allow us to recognize the differences and their impact upon achievement and success.

An antiracist educator does not make excuses for students because of their background or accepts anything but the best that a student can offer. Love, respect, empathy and concern are integral to the relationship between a teacher and a student but must be accompanied by demands and expectations that build character and prepare our students academically for the future.

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### **11. I teach a French Immersion class. Why should I practise antiracist education?**

Students in French Immersion classes come from and live within the same community and will face the same wider reality as all other students. It is, therefore, as important for teachers of French Immersion classes to practise antiracist, multicultural education as for any other teacher.

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### **12. HOW should I practise antiracist education in an apparently homogeneous classroom?**

Teachers can encourage cross-cultural awareness and appreciation and counteract influences that might lead students to develop stereotyped, prejudiced attitudes by providing opportunities for students to:

- find out about and appreciate the backgrounds, cultures, contributions, and points of view of a wide range of groups;
- practise informed decision-making;
- appreciate differences, see them as enriching, and resist the common, reflex reaction that interprets “different” to mean “inferior” or “wrong”;
- learn about current events with an international dimension;
- acquire the awareness and the ability they need to read, listen to, and view media productions critically; and
- understand the concepts of stereotyping, prejudice, and discrimination, become aware of how these elements manifest themselves in society, and understand why and how they are harmful.

The participation of parents and other community members as resource people can compliment such an approach. It is important for the classroom atmosphere to encourage students to maintain an open-minded, non-judgmental attitude as they develop awareness of customs and cultures other than their own.

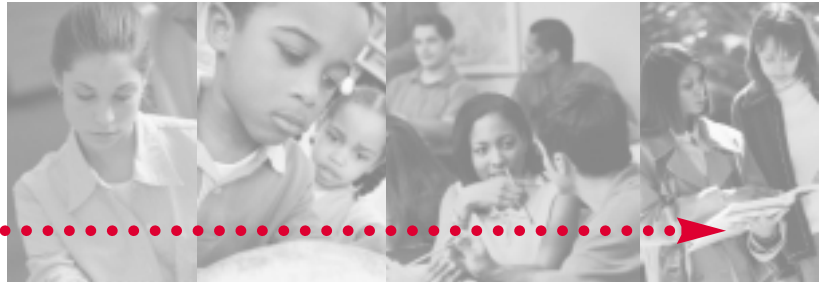
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### **13. Aren't primary students too young to have prejudiced attitudes? Why should I practise antiracist education with them?**

Research shows that even very young children can acquire attitudes of racial/ethnocultural superiority or inferiority in a variety of ways - through media influences, for example, and through observations of the effects of discrimination. Denial that differences exist confuses children. Teachers need to take a proactive approach, helping students acquire accurate information free from negative stereotypes.

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# School Issues



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## 1. If we do not have problems, do we need race relations programs?

Race Relations programs deal not only with overt problems but the more subtle expressions of racism. No school should ever wait for a racial incident to occur before acting. It is best to be proactive and prevent problems before they arise by improving policies, programs and practices.

Experience has shown that many racial incidents could have been averted if preventive measures had been taken earlier.

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## 2. Shouldn't a student speak English at home to facilitate second language acquisition?

When both the first and second languages are well developed, bilingualism seems to benefit some aspects of children's intellectual functioning. However, when neither language is well developed, children are often at a disadvantage. Therefore, many children benefit from learning their first language well. The language acquisition skills facilitate their learning English.

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## 3. Does speaking another language prevent children from learning English?

No. Language development is both maturational and conceptual. Elementary school children are developing their understanding of language and concepts. The maturity of our language development continues as we use the language and increase our vocabulary. We use language to help us understand conceptually and we understand conceptually as we are able to frame that understanding linguistically. It is important that children develop that maturity of language in the language in which they are most comfortable. Children will continue to make the transition to the second language more easily if their development in their first language is encouraged along side the second language rather than impeding the second language. In fact, a case can be made that in addition to understanding maturationally, students who can speak and think in more than one language have a different and more complete understanding of each of the languages and de facto, have a better understanding of English.

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## 4. Doesn't antiracist education promote cultural exclusiveness and prevent the adjustment needed for social harmony?

In recognizing and valuing individuality and diversity, an antiracist education policy promotes social harmony. A policy of suppressing or ignoring diverse needs and values heightens social tensions.

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## 5. Why do we recognize "target groups" e.g. Black History, First Nations Awareness Week?

Some special days, months and/or years have run through our curriculum since the days of Egerton Ryerson. They need to continue to be recognized. Others need to be recognized initially, while we understand ways of ensuring that students of those backgrounds can see themselves more appropriately throughout the program. Special months like Black History/African Heritage Month provide new knowledge of traditions, literature, people, etc. for all students about the various cultures that are included in "Black History". Other days like Valentine's and St. Patrick's need to be continued to reflect our ongoing traditions and contributions of more established groups in our curriculum.

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## 6. How can we possibly deliver antiracist programs when the majority of teachers in the system are not members of racial or other so-called minority groups and don't know what it's like to be so?

Teachers can imagine living in a world where one's culture is seen in a negative light and thus see the need for more culturally diverse materials. While acknowledging that they can never truly "walk in the other person's shoes", teachers can set about in a purposeful way to learn about other cultures; to create an environment for students that encourages inquiry, openness, respect, critical thinking, and inclusion; and to give to all students the gifts of high expectations, nurturing and equity.

Opportunities are provided by the York Region District School Board to develop ways of delivering an inclusive curriculum. Failure to belong to a minority group is not a valid reason for not delivering an antiracist curriculum.

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**7. I treat all my students alike. Isn't this more equitable than focusing on differences among students?**

Good education attempts to meet the individual needs of all students, not simply to treat all students alike. Antiracist education aims to realize as fully as possible one of the central principles of good education - that each student is an individual with unique strengths. To understand a student's individuality, it is necessary for the teacher to develop an awareness of the background and cultural perspective that shape the student's classroom behaviour and interactions with the world outside the school. Consultation with parents and community groups may help teachers develop this awareness.

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**8. By discussing differences, am I creating problems?**

Refusal to acknowledge or discuss differences implies that differences are non-existent or to be avoided. A proactive approach will help students develop the appropriate attitude that differences are both enriching and normal and that there is not a single "right" way to be. By taking the initiative in addressing issues related to diversity, the teacher can ensure an acceptable context and sensitive approach to such discussions.

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**9. I don't feel at ease talking about racial/ethnocultural issues. How can I become more comfortable with the topic?**

There are a variety of reasons why people may feel uncomfortable in dealing with racial/ethnocultural issues. It is important to identify what these reasons are. Some might be:

- (a) You are not really sure what racism is.
- (b) You don't really think racism exists.
- (c) You feel you lack the knowledge to discuss the topic or deal with it constructively.
- (d) You may feel it requires you to question your own attitudes and behaviour.
- (e) Others may think you are criticizing them or accusing them personally of prejudice or discrimination if you want to discuss equity.
- (f) Others may feel you are complaining about the way you are treated.

Just a few decades ago, many people felt uncomfortable for similar reasons about issues of gender equity. Gradually, people have realized that self-examination is part of the process of confronting these issues and that any initial discomfort usually gives way to feelings of increased understanding and confidence in one's ability to deal with a complex question. The same may be said of racial and ethnocultural issues. People's discomfort may be diminished by the attempt to understand and familiarize themselves with these issues.

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**10. We have a diverse student body and no problems. All students interact well. Why should I practise antiracist education?**

The absence of problems suggests that you and your colleagues are addressing issues related to racial and ethnocultural diversity. A worthwhile project would be to examine the learning environment, curriculum, and teaching practices in the school to determine how harmony has been achieved. Identifying the key practices and strategies responsible will make it possible to maintain and emphasize them to enhance the existing state of harmony.

However, before assuming that their school is problem-free, principals and teachers need to ensure that they are not simply failing to recognize or denying the existence of symptoms that indicate problems. For example, some students may be denying their backgrounds and accepting the culture of a predominant group in order to avoid conflict or some students may be quiet victims of bullying. Teachers can determine if the apparent harmony is real by examining the nature of student interaction outside of the classroom and/or the school environment.

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**11. Why should we expect schools to take the lead in antiracist education?**

Schools are part of the community. They play an important role in students' lives and have a formative influence on the attitudes students develop. Schools can and should assume a leadership role in this area. Where leadership in combating racial/ethnocultural discrimination is being provided by the community, it is the responsibility of the school to cooperate with community members in their efforts.

Schools may also act as a link between, and a unifying force for, the different community groups, to enable them to coordinate their efforts and adopt an integrated, comprehensive approach.

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## 12. Where will the money come from to promote antiracist, multicultural education?

The issue is not really a monetary one. Antiracist education is not an “extra”, but just good education that seeks to address the needs of each individual student. Ensuring a shift from ethnocentric education to antiracist education primarily requires a refocusing of priorities that will influence decisions about how existing funds will be spent.

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## 13. What are some steps that the school can take to promote family involvement?

The steps that schools can take may include the following:

- provide an inviting reception area;
  - schedule meetings and interviews at convenient times, i.e. family responsibilities, religious observances, etc.;
  - have a staff that reflects the diversity of the community;
  - provide clear and effective communication for all parents, e.g. translation of informational materials into appropriate languages;
  - learn about parents’ aspirations and concerns for their children; and
  - schedule professional development activities to improve skills in working with parents and community members.
- 

## 14. How can I make a difference?

By helping each student retain his or her sense of pride and self-worth, you can improve the student’s chances to achieve and succeed. For all students, but specifically a student who is faced with racism, you can make a tremendous difference. All students are helped by open, accepting teachers who understand and value their backgrounds and experiences, and whose teaching is based on an unstereotypical view of all students and their potential. Maintain an environment which is welcoming and inclusive. Recognize that students may need different kinds of support in order to achieve and make every effort to provide that support.

As an antiracist educator, make a commitment to learn about the backgrounds and racial and cultural identities of your students. Focus on the context of their lives, as well as their academic performance.

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## 15. How do I get started?

Start by talking with friends and colleagues. Familiarize yourself with the Board’s policy. Organize a focus group on antiracist education.

Ensure that your classroom is a supportive and safe place for all students.

Examine your own assumptions of, and expectations for, students in your class.

Set an example. Pronounce students’ names correctly. Try to take steps to feel confident about discussing the cultural and racial diversity of your students.

Find opportunities to focus attention on topics and issues that are of interest and concern to students of minority background.

Provide positive role models by inviting visitors and speakers of all backgrounds to class/school.

Avail yourself of professional development opportunities.

Read the Board’s Selection Procedure for Learning Resources before selecting learning materials.

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## 16. How do I promote equality in relationships?

Use “we” or “our” only when it includes all of your students. e.g. We celebrate Christmas in Canada. That is not an inclusive statement. “Many Canadians...”, “some boys and girls in our class...”, “Christians” , etc. are examples of more inclusive statements.

Ensure that leadership will be shared among all students. Use mixed groups, and develop strategies to get all students to participate in class discussions.

Praise students whose attitudes and behaviour show a commitment to fairness and inclusion.

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### 17. How do we acknowledge racial and ethnocultural diversity in the routines of the school?

Highlight and explain the cultural and faith celebrations in morning announcements.

Ensure that the cafeteria menus should reflect the tastes and dietary needs of students and staff who eat there.

Ensure that school events, including sports should be free of bias and stereotypes. (e.g. ... "slave days" are offensive.)

Develop appropriate education activities to recognize cultural and faith festivities and holidays. Strive for an "equitable time" for all groups in your school.

Display the Antiracism and Ethnocultural Equity Policy poster in a prominent place in your school.

Show empathy to students who are in the process of acculturation.

Make staff, students, parents, and community aware of the school's code of behaviour and of the racial and ethnocultural harassment procedure.

Encourage staff members to intervene immediately and appropriately when they become aware of a racial incident.

Have school newsletters reflect the direction that the school is moving to ensure inclusion and tells why it is doing what it is doing.

Demonstrate zero tolerance for racism

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### 18. Can Christmas concerts be held at our schools?

A school may have such a concert. The process, nevertheless, of how a school celebrates Christmas is not simple and straightforward. The context for faith celebrations including Christmas concerts is vitally important.

The Minister of Education in a 1992 letter to Chairpersons of public school boards, with copies to principals, wrote that "schools may continue to organize school concerts". However, please note that the Minister used key phrases such as "must be sensitive", "must not indoctrinate in", or "give primacy to".

The Minister wrote:

*"Christmas is a major celebration traditionally enjoyed by many Ontarians. Such activities as concerts and festivities may certainly be organized by school staffs to educate students about the customs and beliefs related to Christmas.*

*Ontario's public schools must be sensitive to various faiths and cultures that make up our province, and must not indoctrinate in or give primacy to any particular religious faith. This means that schools may continue to organize Christmas concerts and festivities, just as they should make every effort to educate students, at appropriate times throughout the school year, about celebrations of other religious traditions.*

*Music, festivals, dances, and drama are some of the ways in which children of many backgrounds can have an opportunity to display their talents and share their celebrations."*

### 19. Can Christmas concerts be multicultural?

Christmas is celebrated by many different cultures in a variety of ways around the world. This is a great opportunity for schools to reflect this diversity.

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## 20. How do I make “Christmas Concerts” inclusive?

The traditional Christmas concert in Canadian schools would be inclusive if there were concerts for the other faiths in the school and greater community at the time of their most important holidays. That “route” to inclusivity can be problematic because of the amount of time that would be taken from other curriculum areas for concerts during the school year.

Frequently, schools have attempted to make the Christmas concert more inclusive by making the concert a multifaith celebration. Some communities are satisfied with this arrangement. However, there are at least three possible concerns: 1) some Christians may feel that the celebration of Christmas is being diluted (“taking the Christ out of Christmas”); 2) other faith groups may feel that it is inappropriate to celebrate, for example, Eid or Diwali in December; 3) some parents, both Christian and others, may feel that it is inappropriate for a religious/cultural festival such as Chanukah to be given “equal billing” at the ‘Christmas Concert’.

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## 21. What are some of the ways that a school can be inclusive in its faith celebrations?

Visual representations of faith celebrations, classroom discussion, announcements, and/or assemblies are other ways of being inclusive. Therefore, concerts are not the only way of recognizing faith.

(It is important to repeat that the practice, whereby a number of celebrations are held at Christmas rather than at their respective appropriate time, tends to imply that those are not as important as Christmas but need to be recognized anyway.)

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## 22. How does a school address faith issues?

Part of the answer can be found in many of the answers already given in this booklet. A school that is antiracist and inclusive is able to put faith celebrations within the appropriate context. The York Region District School Board is committed to a curriculum in which all children see themselves reflected and their identity is affirmed. The identification of significant faith days to be celebrated within your school community should be shared activities including parents, students and staff. This planning process offers a rich opportunity for parents and children to learn more about the diversity in York Region and Canadian society.

The following suggestions may help:

- consult with community and faith leaders;
- have activities be curriculum based – this tends to be of an instructional nature and doesn’t compromise a student’s belief; and
- recognize that holiday activities are only part of many other kinds of activities about a cultural group.

In a final analysis, if you decide to have a Christmas concert, what other faith celebrations do you have planned?

...and remember: **Curriculum  
Inclusive  
Communication**

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## 23 What is the Board’s policy concerning exemptions from music for religious/cultural reasons?.

There is no Board policy concerning exemptions from music for religious/cultural reasons. The Sensitive Issues document may provide helpful guidelines. If a student is unable to participate in the music program, the school will:

- determine the rationale for the concern (we exempt for faith considerations not cultural): and
  - determine whether other accommodations are possible such as: provide alternative topics for the use of students withdrawn from the music class, relate the alternative topics to the regular program, and/or
  - provide an alternative setting for the student to work on the topics while the music class is in progress.
-

**24. What do I, as a staff member, do if a parent is being racist to another parent?**

In a very diplomatic tone, express to the parents that in accordance with the Board's Antiracism and Ethnocultural Equity Policy (260.0, March 31, 1995), and the procedure on Racial and Ethnocultural Harassment, the Board condemns and does not tolerate any expression of racial, cultural or religious prejudice by its trustees, staff, students or visitors. As visitors to the school, you request that the parents refrain from racist comments to one another. Visitors will be expected to abide by the intent of the policy. Failure to do so could result in exclusion from the premises.

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**25. What are some extracurricular activities which may broaden students' views of our diverse culture?**

A class discussion is the most effective way to generate ideas. Note that ideas ought to be incorporated into a curriculum context. Examples are

- \* wear something to express ancestral heritage, e.g. hats, kilt, turban, blouse
  - \* in-school presentation of facts of interesting ancestor or relative or famous person from that culture
  - \* language lesson to compare letters and sounds, e.g. display and practise greetings or sayings in different languages
  - \* penpals
  - \* cultural fair
  - \* music, dance, drama presentation brought into school
  - \* videos, movies, photographs
  - \* art activities, comparison of techniques, tools, use of colour, etc.
- 

**26. What are some strategies that could be used to get parents from diverse backgrounds to become involved in school activities?**

The question administrators and school councils must ask is why these groups are difficult to involve. Some possible reasons include lack of comfort with a school system that is (or is perceived to be) so different from their own experience of school; inconvenient times for meetings; language barriers; poor sense of identification with the school because of its lack of inclusiveness in the existing school culture; and others. We must find ways to accurately identify and then remove any obstacles.

To do so requires reaching out to the communities through their own institutions and organizations in order to ask for assistance. Meetings can be arranged at cultural centres or places of worship. Make arrangements for an interpreter. Meeting times can be made more flexible.

Invite parents to participate. A phone call or note, i.e. the personal touch often results in a very positive response. Some of our schools send home letters and/or newsletters in a variety of languages.

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**27. What are some ways to get school councils involved in antiracist education?**

- guest speaker at council meetings
  - provide council members with articles/literature re: antiracist education
  - create a student/teacher/parent antiracist education task force
  - embed antiracist education as a focus in your School Plan for Continuous Improvement
  - ask school councils to organize and give advice around what they hear
  - if not representative, ask school councils to try to address reasons for the lack of representation.
- 

**28. I have a request from the Gideons to distribute Bibles to the grade 5 students? What should I do?**

Please refer to Standing Memo S:89, dated October 16, 1996.

In summary, the memo acknowledges that religious groups are welcome to use our schools, however our schools and school staff should not be involved in the distribution of religious materials. This is the responsibility of the particular religious group.

Facilitate the booking of space outside the instructional day but note that it is up to the particular group to communicate with parents and schools.

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**29. Are there any school days where I cannot schedule an exam, test, co-curricular activities, meetings, etc.?**

Please refer to Standing Memo S:10. It lists 13 major faith days in our community where we do not schedule additional activities.

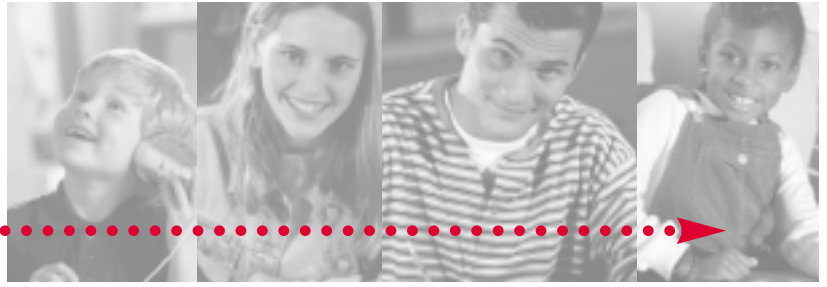
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**30. What if I do not have students or staff members of that faith?**

Memo S:10 applies to all schools and all worksites in all occasions and situations.

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# Glossary



The following are key terms in the areas of antiracist education. The definitions of terms in these areas will no doubt evolve and be refined as work in antiracist education continues and commitment to it grows.

## **Aboriginal Peoples.**

The original inhabitants, or indigenous peoples/First Nations, of Canada and their descendants. Aboriginal peoples include the Indian, Inuit and Métis peoples of Canada.

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## **Antiracist Education.**

An approach to education that integrates the perspectives of Aboriginal and racial minority groups into an education system and its practices. The aim of antiracist education is the elimination of racism in all its forms. Antiracist education seeks to identify and change educational practices that foster racism, as well as racist attitudes and behaviours that underlie and reinforce such policies and practices. Antiracist education provides teachers and students with the knowledge and skills to critically examine racism in order to understand how it originated, how to identify and how to challenge it.

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## **Anti-Semitism.**

Unconscious or openly hostile attitudes and behaviour directed at individual Jews or the Jewish people, leading to social, economic, institutional, religious, cultural or political discrimination. Anti-Semitism has also been expressed through individual acts of physical violence and through the organized destruction of entire communities.

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## **Attitude.**

A state of mind which makes a person react or behave in a predictable manner (i.e. in a particular way) whenever the person encounters certain social situations, events or objects.

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## **Barrier.**

An obstacle. In employment, the term refers to the hidden, invisible and/or visible obstacles to equity in work or promotional opportunities. In anti-racism, the concept is extended to include obstacles to racism-free environments, services and other service delivery issues.

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## **Bias.**

A limited and often inaccurate way of perceiving the world or a given situation. A negative bias towards members of a particular ethnocultural, racial, religious, or linguistic group, expressed through speech, written materials, and/or other media, harms the targets in many ways.

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## **Community Partnerships.**

Relationships between institutions and diverse groups within the community in which the experiences of people from these groups are recognized, and the groups are involved in the decision-making processes of the institutions.

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## **Culture.**

The totality of ideas, beliefs, values, knowledge, language, habits, and way of life of a group of people who share certain historical experiences. Culture changes continually and thus often contains elements of conflict and opposition.

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## **Discrimination.**

The denial of equal treatment, civil liberties, or opportunity to individuals or groups with respect to education, accommodation, health care, employment, or access to services, goods or facilities. Discrimination may be based on one or more of many characteristics: race; nationality; gender; age; religious, political, or ethnic affiliation; marital or family status; physical, developmental, or mental handicap.

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**Equity.**

Is measured as the equality of outcomes for groups, especially in institutions such as schools or corporations. Equity starts with equality of opportunity and, if an institution is diverse and inclusive, leads to equality of outcomes for all groups.

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**Ethnic Group.**

A group of people who share a cultural heritage, which often includes national affiliation, language and religion. Everyone belongs to an ethnic group. Individuals who are members of the same ethnic group can experience and express their ethnicity in a variety of ways.

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**Ethnicity.**

Like race, it is a social and political construct used by individuals and communities to define themselves and others. Ethnicity is also a process which is changed over time both by social conditions and individuals. Ethnicity tends to be based on common culture, language or nationhood.

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**Ethnocultural Equity.**

Is achieved through the removal of systemic barriers which impede the full participation and fair outcomes for communities of European ethnicity that face systemic discrimination because of language.

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**Ethnocultural Group.**

Every Canadian belongs to some ethnic group and shares some cultural heritage particular to people of a certain national religious and/or language background. There are a wide variety of ethnocultural groups among people of African, Asian, European, and North, Central, and South American backgrounds in Canada. Some Canadians experience discrimination because of ethnocultural affiliation (ethnicity, religion, nationality, language).

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**Eurocentric Education.**

A curriculum that affirms primarily the experiences and achievements of people of Anglo-Saxon and Western European background, and minimizes and marginalizes the experiences, contributions and achievements of people of other origins.

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**Exclusion.**

The state of group disempowerment, degradation and disenfranchisement maintained by systemic barriers and supported by an implicit ideology of ethnic or racial superiority.

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**Inclusive Language.**

The deliberate selection of vocabulary that avoids both the inadvertent or implicit exclusion of particular groups.

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**Intolerance.**

Unwillingness to endure and/or lack of respect for the beliefs and practices of an individual or group by another individual or group. Racial intolerance refers to the unwillingness to permit equal opportunity and full societal participation to members of other racial groups; religious intolerance is the unwillingness to endure those of other religious beliefs.

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**Minority Group.**

A group of people within a given society that differs in race, religion, or national origin from the larger part of the population. Such groups may have little or no access to social, economic, political, cultural or religious power.

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**Prejudice.**

Negative prejudgement of a person or a group. This judgement is always made without adequate evidence.

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**Race.**

A social category used to classify humankind according to common ancestry, or descent; differentiation is based on general physical characteristics, such as skin colour, hair texture, and facial features. This categorization has no biological validity.

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**Inclusive Language.**

The deliberate selection of vocabulary that avoids both the inadvertent or implicit exclusion of particular groups.

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**Racial incident.**

The expression of racial assumptions and beliefs. Racial incidents may involve banter, jokes, name-calling, harassment, teasing, discourteous treatment, graffiti, stereotyping, threats and/or insults. Racial incidents may also involve physical violence and/or genocide.

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**Racial slur.**

An insulting or disparaging statement directed at a particular racial group.

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**Racism.**

A set of implicit or explicit beliefs, erroneous assumptions, and actions based on an ideology of the inherent superiority of one racial group over another. Racism is evident within organizational and institutional structures and programs, as well as in the thinking and behaviour patterns of individuals.

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**Social justice.**

A concept based on the belief that each individual and group within a given society has a right to equal opportunity, civil liberties, and full participation in the social, educational, economic, institutional, and moral freedoms and responsibilities of that society.

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**Stereotype (verb)**

To attribute the supposed characteristics of a whole group to all its individual members. Stereotyping exaggerates the uniformity within a group and the differences between groups.

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# Sources



- *Reflections: A Resource Document for Teachers of J.K. – Grade 9, 1996* – The Metropolitan Toronto School Board
- *A Guide to Key Antiracism Terms & Concepts* – 2nd edition – Ministry of Citizenship.

## Creating Schools and Classrooms for Equity

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**The Antiracism Action Team would like to hear from you.**

I have additional information and/or comments. *Please identify questions, and page number(s).*

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I have a question(s) that should be included in this booklet.

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Do you have any information that might be considered in providing an answer to this question?

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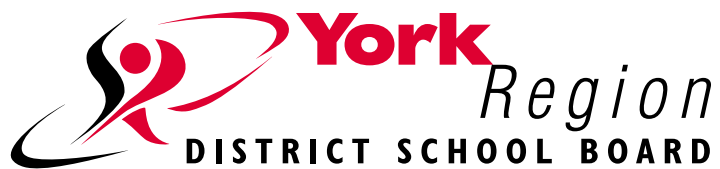
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Please photocopy and forward this form to:

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Race Relations Coordinator  
The Education Centre, Aurora.

*Thank you.*



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