Foreword

Working alongside my classmates in "B[l]ack to the Future: Black Settlements in Canada for the 2020's and Beyond", we have been tasked with imagining a futuristic Canadian society that abolishes the current white supremacist ideology that we reside. Building upon the work of Charles Blow, specifically *The Devil You Know: A Black Power Manifesto,* this society would call upon Black folx throughout Canada to migrate to Nova Scotia. With the strict intention of shifting the province's political, social, and economic majority, the complete transformation of Nova Scotia would bring an unprecedented power to Black Canadians.[1] Although an impossible task to achieve within a senior seminar classroom, let alone within the structure of academia, this endeavor has driven us to reconsider our contemporary society through a historic lens. Such future, as I imagine it to be, is one rooted in the care-based practices exemplified in the abolitionist movement. A future society where no single member is left behind, overlooked, or neglected. This future is one that I have become invested in achieving and would one day hope to become a reality. Taking steps to creating this future society, however, requires a substantial critical examination of the current systems and institutions especially the historical foundations it resides upon.

However, before engaging in further discussion of the topic of this paper as well as its future potentials, I believe it to be crucial that I engage with my own positionality.

[1] Throughout this paper, I use the term Black and Black Nova Scotians interchangeably. The use of such terminology reflects the dual experiences of Nova Scotians that are of African descent as well as their unique experience as residents of Canada. This is not to essentialize or generalize the experiences of the vastly diverse and multitude of identities that African-descended people encompass. Use of terms such as "Coloured" and "Negro" is used exclusively within the quotations of primary and secondary sources.

By locating my privilege as a white, able-bodied, straight, cisgender woman, I have come to realize that this society has always acted in benefit of me. Especially after researching and writing on the historical and contemporary realities of the failures within the Nova Scotian education system against its Black students, the institution of primary, secondary, and post-secondary schooling in general, has always worked in my favour. I truly do not seek to take ownership of the stories and experiences of others, as this was simply not my reality as a student. On the basis of my skin colour, the education system since its earliest configuration as a tool for the colonization of Canada, has always been created for my benefit. This is further emphasized with my rural Ontario background, as the schools I have attended were relatively well funded and within the classroom itself, I never experienced feelings of isolation. Whether through the racial or gender representation of my teachers, who were often white women themselves, or the curriculum I was taught. I was and continue to be a part of the racial majority of every class I attend. This experience of privilege and belonging, however, is not the reality for many students of colour who face the daily onslaught of the systematic oppression within education. It is from my experience of privilege within the classroom that I believe that everyone should experience belonging and acceptance as well as academic success through schooling. Such a future of education that “is equitable, accessible, and inclusive for all learners” (Black Learners Advisory Committee, 1994, p. 15).

It is also important to note that Canada’s long history of education is rooted in the brutal violence enacted against Indigenous peoples as a part of the colonial project. Although such history is beyond the parameters of this paper, it is necessary to acknowledge the history of residential schooling as a deliberate act of genocide. It is the

lasting harm of nationwide residential schooling that the current Canadian education system is built on.

Introduction

> "Education as the practice of freedom becomes not a force which fragments or separates, but one that brings us closer, expanding our definitions of home and community" (hooks, 2015, p. 147).

Traced to the beginnings of the colonization of Nova Scotia with the French and British, the institution of education has always acted as an extension of state control on its people (Dei, 1997, p. 59). The explicit decision made as to who has access to education and who does not, although it has changed over time, strongly reflects upon the social and political culture of the era. For Black Nova Scotians, specifically, with the explicit intention of denying full citizenship, the institution of education holds a long history of violence, exclusion, and deprivation (Moreau, 2013, p. 297). [2] Reverberations of this history continues to impact current students who face numerous educational barriers that deny them the equitable schooling received by their white peers. In addition, hesitant provincial governments who may have initially acknowledged the existence of the systematic racism within education have continued to fail their Black students in lieu of budget cuts (Enidlee Consultants Inc., 2009, p. 10). For many Black education advocates, communities, students, and parents that remain skeptical

[2] As defined by Bernice Moreau, citizenship is "the right to full partnership in the fortunes and the futures of the nation" (Moreau, 2013, p. 297)

of promised reforms turn towards alternative schooling options. Going a step beyond reformed or alternative schooling to accommodate a revolutionary migration of Black folx to Nova Scotia, as outlined in this paper, this future would see the complete abolition of contemporary education. Such schooling not built upon the long history of systemic oppression and white supremacy, but one that centralizes the ideas and voices of marginalized people such as Black Nova Scotians. Built upon the vision of Black academics, advocates, educators, and teachers, this image of revolutionary schooling would seek to benefit all students in addition to greater society (Bruno-Jofre, 2019, p. 5).

Historic Foundations

In 1954 the province of Nova Scotia dropped any reference to “different races” from the *Education Act*, however, the long history of depriving Black students from schooling began long before legalized segregation (Slaunwhite, 2017, p. 52). The history of the formal education system for Black Nova Scotians began with the normalized brutality of slave-traders against the enslaved (Moreau, 2013, p. 298). Despite the abolition of enslavement, education remained largely exclusionary for most Black Nova Scotians as additional reforms to the *Education Act* prioritized communities in larger cities and greatly ignoring the primarily rural Black settlements scattered throughout the province (Mortley, 1995, p. 6). When schools were provided, the explicit intention of creating a docile serving class was the primary objective of the supplementary education distributed by White

missionary societies (Pachai, 2007, p. 102). When Black communities were able to establish their own schools, they were often run out of existing churches or in poorly funded buildings that were certainly not equal to White Common schools (Black Learners Advisory Committee, 1994, p. 22). De facto segregation would be further solidified with the *1865 Education Act*, although ensuring schooling was free to all students, the act gave authority to the Council of Public Instruction to implement legalized sanctioning of civil discrimination of Black students (Moreau, 2013, p. 302). In the history of Nova Scotia's educational system, it did not matter if the individual was enslaved, a Loyalist, Maroon, or Refugee, including their future generations, Black Nova Scotians were systematically denied the ability to obtain an equitable or significant education (Moreau, 1997, p. 185). Building on this long history of deprivation from the right to full citizenship through education, it is in this context that Black Nova Scotians enter the contemporary schooling system (Moreau, 2013, p. 297).

Contemporary Realities

Building upon the research of academics who have written extensively on issues within the classroom, the most common measurement of equitable education is measured through academic test scoring, delinquency rates, and enrolment in non-university preparatory programs (Lyon & Guppy, 2019, p. 285). The results of the measurements, however, are only an outcome of contemporary educational barriers and not the source of the issue Albeit less clearly defined,

lack of representation within the curriculum as well as the teachers and leaders within the education system, holds the capabilities of fostering a hostile environment for Black students(Codjoe, 2001, p. 359). Education has the capability of enabling social mobility for its students, however, due to the systematic barriers which Black students disproportionately face within the classroom, they are substantially held behind their White peers. Even though formal and informal systems have risen to the challenge to bridge the academic gap, the community led operations in addition to parental involvement is not able to create systematic change. Rather, by adopting an alternative education system that have been advocated by Black advocates, communities, students, and parents, a new future of schooling must be made.

Future Potentialities

As the contemporary issues of the schooling system are simply the continuation of the long history of systematically deprived education, there is only way to ensure a mass migration of Black migrants to Nova Scotia will be able to benefit fully from schooling. This is through radically building a new education system that goes beyond reforms and becoming an institution that is built on a foundation that is not rooted in White colonial supremacy. It is in the spirit of abolitionists such as Angela Davis, who call for the "abolition of one institution that [seeks to] advance the dominance of any one group over another" (Davis, 2005, p. 16). Such future, as called upon Black activists, would recenter the experiences of minority students through decolonized spaces. The

classroom would become a space where not only are Black students able to feel a sense of belonging through representation within the curriculum and educators, but also a place where the marginalized worldview of learners are brought back to the center (Adjei & Agyepong, 2009, p. 141). The physical structuring of this future education system would take on the form of the original rendition of Contact Alternative School that had a democratic structure (Smaller & Wells, 2017, p. 168). Such schooling could create a new type of student, one able to have input on all areas of their education and have the opportunity to participate in both individual as well as group learning (Smaller & Wells, 2017, p. 170). Within the classroom, the curriculum would take upon the form of Africentric pedagogy and its use of education styles that are not strictly Euro-centric. Such curriculum would not only "affirm the values, cultures, history, worldviews, knowledge and identity of Blackness" into the classroom but also "fosters the cultural, social, physical spiritual and academic development" of all students (Adjei & Agyepong, 2009, p. 141; Dei, 1997, p. 71). Such future imaging of what schooling can be has been already called upon by students, communities, and education advocates that are critical with the contemporary form of education (Kempf & Dei, n.d., p. 794).

Concluding Thoughts

By drawing largely on the historic institutionalized racism of Nova Scotia's education system, a connection can be easily made to contemporary government hesitancy against dismantling educational barriers for Black students. If we were to create any lasting and systematic changes for current Black students it is

imperative that a new education institution must be built. It is in the vision of abolitionists, in addition to Black advocates, academics, and communities who have already begun this process of change, that this future of education must be built upon. Not only would this significantly impact the futures of Black students but a complete overhaul of the education system has the capability to provide a wholistic education for the greater student body. Furthermore, such a radicalized act of rebuilding the education institution has the capability to effect greater social, economic, and political change in Nova Scotia (Bruno-Jofre, 2019, p. 5).

Historical Realities: Education as a Tool for Violence

Initially used as a tool for the colonization of Canada through the French and British, the institution of education has continually served throughout history as an object to serve the ideological agenda of the state (Dei, 1997, p. 59). The deliberate decision from the provincial government as to who would ultimately receive funding, and who did not, plainly sees the prioritization of White upper classes (Moreau, 2013, p. 293). For marginalized communities in rural areas, they remained the least of concern for the government as it was only with the *1836 Education Act* where funding was provided for the most remote communities in Nova Scotia (Mortley, 1995, p. 6). With the case of Black Nova Scotians, formalized education throughout its history can only be traced through the violence inflicted on the enslaved. Following abolition, this violence this continued through forms of deprivation and segregation. As James Walker writes,

“the most important manifestation of colour prejudice in Canadian history is in education” (Moreau, 2013, p. 293). Whether they were enslaved, Loyalists, Maroons, or refugees, all Black Nova Scotians throughout history were denied the opportunity to pursue an education of significance (Moreau, 1997, p. 185). Black Nova Scotians throughout its history was never viewed by the state as full citizens and ultimately denied the right to a fulfilling education that would have provided the tools for social and financial mobility (Moreau, 2013, p. 297).

The Enslaved

Dating to the earliest French setters in Nova Scotia, the existence of the institution of enslavement through the ownership of Black people held the sole purpose of providing economic prosperity for White slave-holders (Moreau, 2013, p. 298). While most of the enslaved were brought to the area already in the ownership of “seagoing entrepreneurs, merchants, and private families” in search for settlement, many were exclusively purchased by the inhabitants of Nova Scotia for the purpose of agricultural or domestic labour (Whitfield, 2010, p. 28). The scale of enslavement in Nova Scotia, however, would never reach a similar magnitude seen on the Southern plantations in the United States as the limited agricultural abilities of the maritime climate restricted such scale (Whitley & Hollweck, 2020, p. 299). As early Black inhabitants of Nova Scotia, the enslaved received a form of education through brutal violence. Although largely frowned upon, such brutality was publicly advertised by slave-traders in capturing the

attention of buyers stating, the “wills of slaves were broken, and their spirits transformed” (Moreau, 2013, p. 298). The practice of physical, mental, and emotional brutality towards the enslaved was a greatly normalized form of education (Moreau, 2013, p. 298). Although rare, slaveholders at times taught the enslaved skills of literacy, however, as seen in records the majority remained functionally illiterate (Winks, 1992, p. 364). As Nova Scotian activist Pearleen Oliver writes, “[Blacks] passed through an age when the theme song [of White society] was, ‘if you educate a Negro, you unfit him [her] for a slave’.” (Moreau, 2013, p. 298). The practice of enslavement continued in Canada into the early 19th century, becoming finally legally abolished in the British Empire in 1834 (Mortley, 1995, p. 349). Following this statutory proclamation, the enslaved were released, however, the government failed to establish any legislated or organized plan for the recently emancipated to become totally accepted within society (Moreau, 2013, p. 301). Rather, a vacuum of imposed racial hierarchy was replaced with segregation (Moreau, 2013, p. 301).

Missionary Schools: The Docile Worker

The largest group of Black settlers in Nova Scotia were the Loyalists arriving in 1776 (Moreau, 2013, p. 299).Promised by the government “full citizenship, equal opportunity with Whites, land, social assistance, employment, formal education, and the freedom of worship” (Moreau, 2013, p. 299). Such promises, however, were never fulfilled as many Loyalists would leave for Sierra Leonne in 1786

(Moreau, 1997, p. 186). Despite years of demanding the government -fulfill its promise for education for their children, petitions brought forward would remain ultimately fruitless (Moreau, 1997, p. 186). In the place of government assistance, two missionary societies emerge to provide funding for schools in Black communities from the Church of England known as the “Associates for the late Dr. Bray” and the “Society for the Propagation of Gospel” (Winks, 1992, p. 58). Schools founded on the support of the missionary group were found only in the largest Black settlements in the province, including Tracadie, Halifax, Preston, Brindley Town, Birchtown, and Shelbourne (Pachai, 2007, p. 100).

Although the teachers within missionary funded schools were primarily members from the Black community, the mass departure of Loyalists to Sierra Leone would leave many of these settlements without concurrent educators (Pachai, 2007, p. 100). Lessons within the missionary schools included reading, spelling and sewing, however, writing and arithmetic were not taught as they “were considered unnecessary accomplishments in children who would subsequently be required to perform the meanest tasks” (Pachai, 2007, p. 57). As agents of the colonial project, the objective of these missionary groups as primary founders of formal education in Nova Scotia, was not to create institutions that were integrated within society but one that ran parallel (Pachai, 2007, p. 57). The objective, therefore, of de facto segregated schooling was to form a distinct separation between the education received by White and Black Nova Scotians. This is made especially apparent with a statement regarding Black children by a missionary school mandate, that they were to be “properly instructed in the principles of Christianity and that the great and necessary duties of obedience and fidelity to their

masters and humility and contentedness with their condition" (Pachai, 2007, p. 102). This pattern of separate or segregated schooling between White and Black children would remain in Nova Scotia for more than a hundred years.

Education Acts: Provincially Funded Schools

Nova Scotia passed the *1812 Education Act* with the strict intention of "encouraging the establishment of schools throughout the province" (Mortley, 1995, p. 5). Such legislation saw the creation of state-aided schooling by allocating funds to property owners with economic resources to build their own school (Mortley, 1995, p. 5). The implicit outcome of this act for many Black Nova Scotians meant that they could not create their own schools as most did not own the land of which they resided on (Mortley, 1995, p. 5). To acquire the additional government funds, communities were required to build their own school building, find a teacher, and to raise additional funds between "fifty and two hundred pounds sterling" (Pachai, 2007, p. 103). For most Black rural communities, such a task was impossible as many held no land in freehold and were already living in abject poverty and simply could not raise the funds required to raise a school building (Pachai, 2007, p. 103). The exclusion from the *Education Act* was not simply accepted by Black communities passively as by the 1820's nearly every settlement petitioned the government to receive funding, however, these requests remained unanswered (Moreau, 2013, p. 301).

A second addition to the *Education Act* occurred in 1836 allocating resources to communities who did not initially satisfy the earlier criteria (Mortley, 1995, p. 6). Although appearing initially beneficial to rural Black communities, the act also gave power to the Commissioners of Education of each municipality to allocate funds “to assist poor school districts in establishing schools for Black children, even if a common school may have already been established in the district” (Black Learners Advisory Committee, 1994, p. 16). Thereby allowing the municipalities to establish a separate Black school even if there may be a common school already available in the region. (Black Learners Advisory Committee, 1994, p. 16). In 1865, a third amendment to the *Education Act* established free schooling for all children stating “all common schools shall be free to all children residing in the section to which they are established” (Moreau, 2013, p. 302). An additional amendment, stated that “the school commissioners of any municipality could establish separate schools if they, rather than a body of petitioners, thought them necessary and if the government approved” (Black Learners Advisory Committee, 1994, p. 18). Such establishment of the free school system would see the free education of White Nova Scotians while also establishing the legal sanctioning of discrimination against Black Nova Scotians. (Moreau, 2013, p. 302). Construction of common schools would continue to remain impossible beyond Halifax and as Black settlements primarily resided in small enclaves throughout rural Nova Scotia, provincially funded schools continued to be built in the city (Moreau, 2013, p. 302).

Black Alternative Schooling

With each rendition of the *Education Act* resources increasingly became available for Nova Scotians. These resources funded buildings and teachers, increasing student enrollment, however, the allocation of such funding would only benefit White Nova Scotians (Lanning, 2000, p. 312). Although denied equitable education, Black communities continue to demand the government for funding or the acceptance of their children into the common schools created in their area (Moreau, 2013, p. 303). Often led by the church leaders of their community, lobby groups were able to have some Black children admitted to the Common schools. However, with prevailing racial tensions of this time period, admittance into the Common schools led to experiences of extreme hostility (Moreau, 2013, p. 303).

When Black communities were able to build their own schools, often with the additional funds from missionary societies, government contributions, or purely through their own resources, the education that they were able to acquire was not equitable with the Common schools. Forced to rely on the meagre facilities that Black communities were able to afford, buildings were often “deficit in ventilation, drainage and light” (Black Learners Advisory Committee, 1994, p. 20). Furthermore, such schools can be described as “overcrowded and ramshackle, creating an environment that was not inclined to encourage Blacks to attend” (Black Learners Advisory Committee, 1994, p. 22). Teachers in these schools often relied on a “recycled education”, whereupon their own minimal or nearly nonexistent education was taught to their pupils (Moreau, 2013, p. 307). The teachers often willing to work in these isolated Black communities for a

lower pay, tended to be under qualified and at times just barely literate (Black Learners Advisory Committee, 1994, p. 22).

Confederate Canada: Segregated Schooling and Integration

Into the twentieth century, equitable schooling continued to be largely unavailable for Black rural communities as limited teachers alongside poor-quality buildings and resources perpetuated separate schooling (Black Learners Advisory Committee, 1994, p. 22). Further education reforms enacted in 1918 would see the solidification of legalized segregated schooling as the municipal government could continue establishing Black schools even if there were a Common school existing in the community (Slaunwhite, 2017, p. 58). Despite amendments in 1939 and 1949 to the *Education Act* that provided funding for schools books, Black schooling continued to be of a drastically different quality than schools made available to White Nova Scotians (Black Learners Advisory Committee, 1994, p. 22; Mortley, 1995, p. 6). Well into the twentieth century, Black schools were described as “poorly maintained, inadequately heated throughout the winter months and without running water” (Black Learners Advisory Committee, 1994, p. 24).

The most substantial change to occur in Nova Scotia regarding education is the beginnings of legal integration in 1954 that dropped any reference to “different races” from the *Education Act* (Slaunwhite, 2017, p. 52). Complete integration, however, was a long and arduous process as reluctant politicians and policy makers did not immediately enact legal change(Slaunwhite, 2017, p. 60). In addition to hesitant politicians, the Nova

Scotian School Boards were adamant that integration was not an ‘education problem’ but a problem to be dealt with greater society (Slaunwhite, 2017, p. 60). In an attempt to shift responsibility of integration onto social welfare rather upon the education system that formulized it (Slaunwhite, 2017, p. 60). The integration of Black and White students began in earnest in 1964 (Pachai, 2007, p. 301). In practice, however, integration meant the closure of Black schools and their students to be bussed to White schools (Black Learners Advisory Committee, 1994, p. 26). Upon physical integration, however, racial tensions simply did not disappear. Rather, it became solidified within integrated spaces as Black children were prohibited to “use the same washrooms, entrances or exits to the schools as White children” (Black Learners Advisory Committee, 1994, p. 26). Without a comprehensive plan by the Department of Education to assist in the transition of integration, Black students were left vulnerable within the Common schools to the beliefs of racial hierarchy and superiority of the time (Black Learners Advisory Committee, 1994, p. 26).

Historical Realities: Conclusion

Social and civil segregation on the basis of race would be the practical reality for Black Nova Scotians for nearly the entirety of education history (Moreau, 2013, p. 299). From the brutality enacted on the enslaved to early integration, the formal education experienced by Black Nova Scotians was consistently characterized as violent, exclusionary, and deprived. Despite such acts of deprivation of education, Black communities pressed resiliently forward. Whether through demanding formal education

through petitions or by creating supplementary education, Black communities continued to give their children schooling. As education equated to social mobility and citizenship within the country, Black communities persevered to give their children better livelihoods. The reality of education within Nova Scotia is within the generational long history of systematic discrimination against its Black citizens. It is within this history that Black students enter the schooling system (Hamilton-Hinch et al., 2021, p. 69).

Contemporary Realities: Education Barriers

Black Nova Scotians approximately represent 2.5 percent of the total provinces population (Whitley & Hollweck, 2020, p. 300). While many have lived within Nova Scotia for more than three generations, within the education system Black students are over-proportionately represented in out-of-school suspensions, low achievement scoring, and enrollment into non-university preparatory programs. Such measurement of inequality within the classroom, although importantly linked to students greater social mobility and future success, does not capture the entire image of the educational barriers that face Black students (Lyon & Guppy, 2019, p. 285). Rather, these measurements are simply only the outcome of educational barriers. A much less linear method of measurement, and perhaps less clearly defined, is the qualitative data of curriculum and teacher representation in the fostering of hostile classroom environments (Lyon & Guppy, 2019, p. 285). These educational barriers are not a recent phenomenon for Black Nova Scotians, rather, these issues have and continue to be advocated by students, teachers, communities, and education advocates. All of

these concerns have been analysed and researched, as well as published in the 1994 Black Learners Advisory Committee (BLAC) report created to address such issues. However, as released in the subsequent report titled *Reality Check* in 2009, the provincial government has appeared to have largely forgotten the systematic racism within the education institution it had previously agreed upon (Enidlee Consultants Inc., 2009, p. 10).

Within the Classroom

The two key issues that education advocates, students, teachers, and academics point towards as the root cause academic educational barriers, are the overall lack of Black Nova Scotian representation within the curriculum and educational leaders such as teachers. Both factors have the capability to cultivate a hostile classroom, not only for Black Nova Scotians but also for other marginalized students.

Within the current curriculum, as education advocates, academics, and students assert, the monocultural lens of its content has failed to capture the complexities of Black histories and experiences (Codjoe, 2001, p. 365). As argued by George J. Sefa Dei, “lack of representation within the curricula not only produces a sense of invisibility for Black students, but also reinforces the power of Whiteness and the colonizing agenda of Euro-American society” (Adjei & Agyepong, 2009, p. 145). In addition, the curriculum is a fundamental component of education as the “carrier of philosophy, culture, and national agenda of any country” (Codjoe, 2001, p. 365). When Black Nova Scotian history is taught in classes, the representation within the curriculum is overtly

simplistic (Dei, 1997, p. 62). Furthermore, beyond the elementary social studies classes, there are no mandatory courses specifically devoted to teaching Black history as high schools have deemed these classes as optional (Chandler, 2020).

Within the classroom, teachers have ability to foster an environment that is supportive and welcoming (Hamilton-Hinch et al., 2021, p. 70). However, such an environment can become quickly hostile for its marginalized students when teachers give differential treatment to students based on race (Codjoe, 2001, p. 359). Students have reported instances of becoming stereotyped by their teachers in addition to being held to a much lower academic expectations than their peers (Codjoe, 2001, p. 359). As the primary influence on student's self-image as learners, teacher expectations as well as their encouragement and attitude greatly affects the success of their students (Codjoe, 2001, p. 359). Methods to oppose the creation of a hostile environment for Black students, include teachers successful engagement with their classroom with "critical race consciousness, creating a curriculum that encourages critical thinking, promoting culturally relative materials, and engaging with parents" (Hamilton-Hinch et al., 2021, p. 70).

Outcomes of the Educational Barriers

Perhaps the most drastic statistic that reveals the predominance of educational barriers for Black Nova Scotians is the rate of out-of-school suspension. Data from five of the eight school boards in Nova Scotia in the 2014 to 2015 year, revealed that Black students face out-of-school suspension between 1.2 to 3 times more than their

representation within the student population (Woodbury, 2016). In the Halifax Regional School Board, for instance, roughly 18 percent of out-of-school suspension were recorded from Black students even though they make only 7 percent of the total student body population (Woodbury, 2016). The following year, Black identifying students accounted for 22 percent of total suspensions within the Halifax Regional School Board despite representing only 7.8 of the student population (Woodbury, 2016). As out-of-school suspension have the potential to send a student home for a maximum of ten days, the overrepresentation of Black students disciplined in such manner is cause for major concern (Woodbury, 2016). This is, however, not a new issue that faces Black students but has actually been reported as a key concern in the 1994 BLAC report. As recommended in the report, disciplinary acts should be reframed as a tool for constructive behaviour management of students within the school setting (Black Learners Advisory Committee, 1994, p. 23). In the BLAC report, the source of over-representation was linked in the disintegrated relationship between the student, teacher, and parent (Black Learners Advisory Committee, 1994, p. 23). By re-establishing the trust that has been dissolved from years of over-policing Black students, discipline could potentially be reframed as a beneficial tool for both student and teacher alike (Black Learners Advisory Committee, 1994, p.23). However, as rates continue to increase within Nova Scotian school boards, it becomes quite visible that this shift of perception of discipline had not curbed the use of out-of-school suspensions for Black students.

If a vast number of Black students are unable to attend schooling due to out-of-school suspensions, it becomes unsurprising that an “achievement gap” has emerged as an educational barrier. Described as “one of the most troublesome and contentious

issue in North American education", the achievement gap describes the space between Black students test scores and their White peers (Hamilton-Hinch et al., 2021, p. 69). An example of this achievement gap can be found, for instance, in the sizeable space between elementary Black students testing score from 2013 to 2016 and their peers (Nova Scotia, n.d., p. 1). Scores from reading, writing, and mathematics, for example, outline an academic gap ranging from 7 to 21 percent difference in the 2013-2014 assessment year (Nova Scotia, n.d., pp. 1–9). As argued by academic Henry M. Codjoe, the achievement gap is built upon the societal perception that Black students are "an academic failure" (Codjoe, 2001, p. 244). Therefore, "manifested in discriminatory treatment by teachers, and administrators, and in curriculum and school practices that exclude Black students" (Codjoe, 2001, p. 244).

The most pervasive educational barrier that faces Black students within the classroom as well as their academic future beyond secondary school, is their overrepresentation in the general level or vocational program. Placed disproportionately into streams that do not lead to a post-secondary education, Black students face limited options following their high school education (Howard & James, 2019, p. 318). Whether achieved deliberately or unintentionally, the act of streamlining specific groups of students over others, informally segregates students within the classroom (McKenna & Willms, 1998, p. 26). Such streaming ultimately limits the future opportunities for some while advancing others. Although a natural aspect of schooling, underrepresentation of Black students in higher academics has been a recorded issue since the release of the BLAC Report. In the BLAC findings, the majority of Black Nova Scotian high school

students were found to be enrolled in non-university preparatory programs (Smith et al., 2005, p. 349).

Formal and Informal Support Systems

Facing significant educational barriers at the elementary and high school level, the support of informal and formal systems has allowed Black students to regain some authority in their education. Formal institutions such as Between the Bridges, the Delmore “Buddy” Daye Learning Institute, and the Black Educators Association, have successfully supported students in filling the gap of their education (Woodbury, 2016). Providing assistance with homework, numeracy, and literary skills, such community led organizations continue to support Black students (Woodbury, 2016). As formal institutions act as contemporary extension of the Black community, historically they have always played an integral role in supporting academic growth of Black children (Hamilton-Hinch et al., 2021, p. 78). These formal organizations, however, are unable to cure the systemic issues of educational barriers that face Black students. The most consistent predictor of a student’s achievement, however, is through the informal systems of parental involvement and support at home (Smith et al., 2005, p. 365).

Involvement within the home, whether this being a guardian, caretaker, or parent, with a child’s education can actively foster a positive relationship with schooling. Seeing an overall reduction of absenteeism and dropping out, improvement of homework habits, and academic achievement (McKenna & Willms, 1998, p. 22). How much this individual can be involved, however, is largely dictated by the external factors of social

and economic capabilities, as well as the simply the time they have available to become involved (Dei, 1997, p. 62). For many newcomer and marginalized parents, the general culture of the school itself can dictate their involvement, especially as many do not feel welcome within its space (Dei, 1997, p. 62). For Black caregivers specifically, they are often accused of not caring enough in the education of their children or blamed for their children's underachievement within the schools culture (Howard & James, 2019, p. 319). When Black caregivers are able to become heavily involved with the school, such as school councils, they frequently report feeling unwelcome as they are often "dominated by the White middle-class parents" (Howard & James, 2019, p. 319). Involvement is greatly dictated by one's economic and social capabilities, and in spaces where they are the minority, it makes it all the more difficult to participate within the school culture to become more involved.

Contemporary Realities: Conclusion

The current educational barriers that face today's Black students are built upon the foundation of a long history of systematic exclusion and deprivation. As argued by Black academics, advocates, and researchers, barriers from within the classroom, such as curriculum, teacher-student relationships, have the ability to become a hostile environment. This culture of hostility can then quickly affect Black students' greater academic success through high rates of out-of-school discipline, poor test results, and disproportionately enrollment in non-university courses. Even though formal and informal support mechanisms have historically assisted students in their academics,

they ultimately are unable to dismantle the systematic inequalities of education by themselves. It will be, rather, through a collective effort that the entire education system must be rebuilt.

Future Potentialities

As the foundations of the current education system in Nova Scotia are deeply rooted in the historic oppression of Black people and contemporary governments refuse to enact any substantial change, there is only one way to move forward. This is to build something entirely new, a future education system that is built on a foundation not rooted in White supremacy or colonial history. Such an optimistic vision of this future education is founded on the BLAC report, which writes,

> "Our vision is of an education system which is equitable, accessible, inclusive for all learners. A system where every child is challenged to achieve personal excellence; where race, class, age, financial resources, and gender are recognized and addressed every day as Nova Scotian educators prepare all learners for full participation in society and in their communities. Social and economic inequities are not allowed to deny equal opportunity for access to education" (Black Learners Advisory Committee, 1994, p. 15).

It is in the spirit of abolitionism, that advocates the complete abolition of the prison industrial complex, that the reconstruction of the education system should not simply replace the current hierarchies of Euro-American with a Black center (Lund, 1998, p. 192). Rather, such schooling will take on the structure of

the initial rendition of Contact Alternative School with a curriculum founded in Africentric pedagogy. Built upon the lessons and successes of 'Black-focused' schooling, which were developed out of a desire to redress the exclusion and shortcomings of mainstream schools (Kempf & Dei, n.d., p. 794). If we are to eradicate systematic racism within the institution of education, this future of school must depart from our current notion of restriction of Black students (Howard & James, 2019, p. 333). It must become a space that recenters the voices, experiences, and histories of the marginalized and renders White colonial supremacy irrelevant (Dei, 1997, p. 70).

Structure: Contact Alternative School

Located in Toronto, Ontario, Contact Alternative School opened in the spring of 1972 with the express intention of providing schooling to inner-city youth that were left behind in mainstream high school education (Smaller & Wells, 2017, p. 13). Central to the school's pedagogy, was the re-centering of the opinions and experiences of the students by allowing them to give input of the school's operation through town hall-like meetings (Smaller & Wells, 2017, p. 168). Furthermore, the curriculum emphasized the enhancement of the students self-worth and social skills through co-operation while also emphasizing achievement on the basis of individual needs, interests, and abilities (Smaller & Wells, 2017, p. 168). Classes included both group and individual instruction, allowing co-interaction between all grade levels as well as giving teachers the ability to personalize instruction (Smaller & Wells, 2017, p. 170). The environment within the

classroom was generally more relaxed, through both dress and interactions with teachers, as well as more varied and intellectually interesting (Smaller & Wells, 2017, p. 170). The operation of Contact was largely accomplished as a staff collective (Smaller & Wells, 2017, p. 174). Faculty met weekly and all aspects of the school, from the curriculum, to student policy, to trips, and events, were determined by the staff (Smaller & Wells, 2017, p. 174). Such heavy responsibility laid upon the staff was only able to succeed with the sheer determination of the faculty to making schooling work for these youth (Smaller & Wells, 2017, p. 174). Contact Alternative School continues to be run in Toronto, however, the initial structure it attempted upon opening is no longer in practice. Compared to its initial non-hierarchal structure, Contact now has a principal and two vice-principals that are responsible for a total of nine alternative schools throughout the city (Smaller & Wells, 2017, p. 176). The concept of the collaborative and student directed schooling has now been replaced as changes within educational bureaucracy required them to be (Smaller & Wells, 2017, p. 176).

Curriculum: Africentric Pedagogy

Building upon the Contact Alternative School democratic structure, a new pedagogy must be created to ensure that the overall environment and climate of this future school will be a space where students experience belonging and inclusion. As “physical placement is not synonymous with inclusion”, the curriculum must become the philosophy and foundation to the culture of the school (Whitley & Hollweck, 2020, p. 299). A future iteration of Contact, however, must begin with Africentric pedagogy that

centralizes the “African and African-Canadian experience”, (Dei, 1997, p. 70). As Paul Adjei and Rosina Agyepong write, an Africentric curriculum should “ affirm the values, cultures, history, worldviews, knowledge, and identity of blackness in society” (Adjei & Agyepong, 2009, p. 141). As described by George J. Sefa Dei, the employment of Africentric pedagogy would bring forward “knowledge [that] stems from observing and experiencing the social and natural worlds through the self, family, and communal interactions” (Dei, 1997, p. 70). With an Africentric pedagogy, that would additionally see the rise of Black teachers within schooling as it becomes a generally more accepting space, the curriculum would become a better reflection of Black students histories and contemporary realities. Holding real possibility that Black students at large would have the ability to develop a positive self-image within the classroom and have a sense of belonging within the education system (Hamilton-Hinch et al., 2021, p. 82).

Global Experiences of “Black-focused” Schooling

The overall success of Black-focused schooling, such as Black Institutions, Charter Schools, and Black Supplementary schools, in countries such as Canada, United States, and the United Kingdom, all provide valuable insight into the future of Africentric schooling (Kempf & Dei, n.d., p. 791). Created with the intention to “validate knowledge, help to shape visions, inculcate values, and provide the foundation for community stability”, Black-focused schooling is built upon essential values of Africentric pedagogy (Kempf & Dei, n.d., p. 791). Developed out of the desire to redress the educational shortcomings of mainstream schools, the success of such schooling has seen the

creation of over 100 African-centered schools in the United States (Kempf & Dei, n.d., pp. 793–794). Schools such as the Nairobi Day School and New Concept Development Centre of Chicago who employ non-European methodologies in the curriculum, such as through combining Black history and music, or Arabic numeracy skills within math classes, have begun to rewrite the potentialities of schooling (Kempf & Dei, n.d., p. 796). Or within a Canadian context, the Toronto Africentric School that opened its doors in 2009 and is currently sustained through the activism of Black community members, teachers, and parents (Aladejebi, 2021, pp. 1–2). Despite its controversial beginnings, the Africentric Alternative school continues to increase in enrolment while also producing strong standardized testing scores (Aladejebi, 2021, p. 2). The future potentialities of an Africentric school, albeit with an alternative structure, therefore, holds significant grounds in the hundreds of successful 'Black-focused' schools throughout the globe.

Future Potentialities: Conclusion

The conception of an alternative future of schooling is not a unique idea, rather, it is built upon the numerous Black academics, advocates, and communities, who are actively engaged in developing schooling that redresses the exclusion and shortcomings of mainstream schooling (Kempf & Dei, n.d., p. 794). However, it is by combing an alternative structure with Africentric pedagogy that we can achieve a complete departure from mainstream schooling systems. By reinforcing the role of the student and teacher as a collaborative relationship, rather than one of a strict hierarchal

structure, students can become central players in their educational experience. It is with the addition of Africentric pedagogy that this schooling would challenge the “historic inferiorization of Black students’ experience and rich cultural knowledges” (Adjei & Agyepong, 2009, p. 141). Employing an Africentric pedagogy affirms the diverse realities of Black students, while also bringing forward voices of other marginalized students to the center (Howard & James, 2019, p. 319; Lund, 1998, p. 192).

Optimistic Education Futures: Conclusion

From its earliest implementations as a tool for the colonial project, the education system has and continues to fail marginalized groups in Nova Scotia. With specific reference to the histories and experiences of Black Nova Scotians, this education originated as violent brutality against the enslaved, an act of deprivation against rural Black communities, and exclusion in the form of de facto and legalized segregation. It is upon this long history of education in which current Black students enter their schools. As government systems have historically ignored or passively implemented change, such as the complete ignorance in the creation of *Education Acts* or the legalization of integration, it is unsurprising that the current provincial government continues to fail its Black students. Although initially acknowledging the existence of systematic racism within the education institution, the provincial government has become nearly forgetful of its existence (Enidlee Consultants Inc., 2009, p. 10). The present provincial government is simply not doing enough for current Black students (Enidlee Consultants Inc., 2009, p. 10). Black led formal and informal organizations are simply not able to

enact systematic change, rather, they can only act as support to Black students education. Therefore, if a mass migration were to successfully move to Nova Scotia, an entirely new system of education must be created. Just as abolitionists have called for the complete destruction of the prison industrial complex, there exists a call from Black advocates to establish schooling that is equitable which can only be accomplished through a complete restructuring of education (Aladejebi, 2021, p. 3). Such future potentiality of schooling must be able overcome contemporary educational barriers in addition to creating a space where Black students, as well as other marginalized students, feel a sense of belonging within the education system (Dei, 1997, p. 63). As imagined in this paper, the structure of such future schooling will take form only after the democratically run Contact Alternative School with a foundation deeply rooted in Africentric pedagogy has been established. Instead of simply "replacing one set of authorities with another", this schooling system will be built up from an entirely new foundation of Black and marginalized voices (Lund, 1998, p. 192). It is with philosophies outlined by Black activists as part of the Africentricism movement, that this future of schooling will foster "the cultural, social, spiritual and academic development of students within a holistic framework" (Dei, 1997, p. 71). Creating not only a positive future where Black students feel welcomed and not a target within the classroom but also establishing an education system that has the ability to contribute to greater social, economic, and political future of Nova Scotia (Bruno-Jofre, 2019, p. 5).

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