PUTTING INNER CITY STUDENTS FIRST:
A School-University Partnership

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Introduction and Context[1]

Research from Australia, the United States, the UK and Europe demonstrates that inner-city schools and students face significant socio-economic, political, and cultural barriers to academic success.[2] In Canada, however, while there has been a significant history of critical school-based research, there are still relatively few studies that specifically address the changing face of urban education in Canadian contexts. Global events and immigration patterns in the last decade have dramatically changed the cultural and political landscape of Canada, and of the world at large. Thus, new studies that consider the impact of these changes on public institutions - like schools - are greatly needed. The P.I.C.S.F. project is one such study.

Putting Inner City Students First (PICSF) is a research project connected to the Toronto District School Board's "Model Schools for Inner Cities" program. This important initiative has designated seven Model Schools in each of the most economically marginalized and under-serviced communities in Toronto, in order to provide their students with the supports necessary for academic and social success. Each school received an additional one million dollars to use for locally-determined school initiatives. A key feature of these schools is that they serve as hubs of learning for students, parents, community members, student teachers, and university faculty and researchers. Using multiple methods (e.g. interviews, digital photos and videos, observations, document analysis), PICSF has produced six case studies, situated in five of the Model Schools and two of their Cluster Schools[3], which document the aspects of change at the pedagogical, administrative, and institutional levels.[4] In addition to their overall conceptual similarities, the case studies share thematic underpinnings. As such, they have been grouped under the following three categories:

Schooling, Student Engagement, and Academic Achievement

i) The Learner, the Teacher, and the Space In-between
ii) Engaging Literacies: Identity Texts as Catalyst and Medium for Academic Performance

Schooling and Social Equity

i) Teachers' Perspectives on the Education of their Muslim Students in the GTA
ii) Performing Policy: Critical Multicultural Education in a Diverse Classroom

Schooling and Community Connections

i) PLAY (Place, Activity, Youth): Geographies of a Model School
ii) Principals and Parents: Connections and Disjunctures

This report discusses the contexts, questions, methods and findings of each study, as well as their implications for one or more of the following areas of pedagogy and research:

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[1] A previous version of this report was published in Rolheiser, C., Evans, M. & Gambhir, M. (2011), pp. 108 – 123.

[2] See: Anyon, J. (1997); Osler, A., & Starkey, H. (2005); Thomson, P. (2002)

[3] Cluster schools are those schools deemed "in the family of schools" of the Model Schools. They share geographic parameters.

[4] Please note that all names and other identifying details have been changed, in order to protect the confidentiality and anonymity of the participants.

- sustaining the mechanisms and systems that bring about and maintain improved quality of education for some of Toronto's economically and culturally marginalized populations

- creating professional development models and scholarly/professional resources for communicating the relevant transferable findings of PICSF to other school districts within Canada, and/or internationally

- refining a model for sustained collaborative relationships among schools, universities, governments, research centres, and community organizations

Theme One: Schooling, Student Engagement, and Academic Achievement

Name of researcher:	Dr. Kathleen Gallagher
Title of case study:	**The Learner, the Teacher, and the Space In-between**
Duration of case study:	2008 – 2010

Introduction

This case study is based on observations of, and conversations over a two-year period with, a single teacher who works in a school and community in "challenging circumstances". Her choices, descriptions and insights reveal how she sets her pedagogical goals, engages with the lives and families of her students, and navigates her professional relationships. Many of the families and students who attend the school are economically disadvantaged and the neighbourhood in which they live faces many challenges associated with poverty, unemployment, racism, drugs, and crime.

Of her own schooling experiences, Denise explains:

> I had the most negative, horrible experience being a student. And I think – well, I don't think, I *know* – that that's what pushed me into becoming a teacher because I thought, oh hell, there's got to be a better way to do this thing.

Denise Langley is a teacher who uses the personal, biographical details of her life to understand herself as a teacher and her sometimes precarious, always intense and often playful relationships with her Grade 8 students. We were privy to her personal pedagogical style over the course of two academic years.[5]

Theoretical/Conceptual Frameworks

This study shares the view that students, inside schools and out, live in an 'eco-system' (Sokal 2003) and that that system needs to be understood by teachers if they are interested in building relationships that promote learning and achievement. This socio-cultural framework is not new, nor is there agreement on the best way for teachers to understand, work within, and sometimes challenge, the larger education system of which they are a part.

A great deal of scholarship in education, for a very long time, has focused on the idea of 'community' in classrooms and schools and the notion of a teacher as a community builder (see Christensen 2008; Yon, 2000; McCaleb 1994; Handel 1999; Gibbs 2006; Darling-Hammond 1997; Gereluk 2006; Cohn-Vargas and Grose 1998; Clark 1983; Getzels 1978). What is less well documented is how teachers come to understand what is meant by

[5] I would like to thank my research assistants Celeste Dixon, Ivan Service, and Anne Rovers for their invaluable support of this study.

community, how their own biographies shape those understandings, and how hegemonic ideas about community often limit the potential of students.

In fact, it is often easier to notice when 'community' is present or absent in a classroom than it is to define what community is. Gereluk (2006) points out, the word community, coming from the Latin root, *communis* means being "linked together by obligation" (p. 7). Just like the neighborhood community linked together by geography, situation, or circumstance so is the classroom community of students. Whether the students or teacher like it or not, a community will develop and evolve. The question thus becomes, *what kind of a community will develop*? And that question, theoretically and practically, sits at the centre of this case study. This means the observations and interviews which provided the empirical data pointed early on to a strong notion of 'community' as central to the pedagogical contract and therefore, our theoretical interests became: what does a "conscious community" look like; how does a "supportive community" feel; how is a "healthy community" developed and how does a teacher understand and perform her central role in this work?

Research Questions and Methods

i. What role do issues of diaspora, and immigration and settlement play in school/student success or under-performance?
ii. What relationship does "inclusion" have with "achievement"?
iii. Do certain pedagogical practices better recognize the interplay between identity, social activity, and achievement?
iv. How do the student-driven pedagogies of drama impact on students' classroom relations and achievement outcomes?

Five one-hour interviews and seven two-hour participant observation sessions were scheduled between 2008 and 2010. One classroom discussion (one hour in length) with twenty-six students was also audio-recorded and transcribed.

All interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed using *Express Scribe*, by NCH Software[6]. From here, a coding manual was developed from the emerging themes and categories in the transcripts. This allowed for a consistent, systemic examination of each transcribed interview by separate research assistants. Through the use of *Atlas.ti*[7], a software that acts as a digital workbench for analyzing qualitative research, each transcript was coded separately by three research assistants using the collectively created manual and then identified excerpts were coded based on their associated category. One research assistant then manually assigned each excerpt into only one of the five major themes. A single quotation may contain various ideas within it and, thus, be associated with more than one code. For the purposes of data management, however, each quotation was assigned to a single theme and, in cases where a quotation was associated with multiple categories, the category that most exemplified the main idea or content of the section of text determined its assigned category. From here, we designed a spatial matrix that would account for the "spaces in between" interests of this study: not only *what* did we find but *where* did we find it (see spatial matrix below). From the matrix, we came to writing the narrative accounts of the prevalent themes that emerged from the data so that the professional life of one teacher in

[6] http://www.nch.com.au/scribe/index.html

[7] http://www.atlasti.com/

one setting could have meaning for others beyond the unique specificity of her teaching world.

Significant Findings

The following table maps the four major thematic findings from the research and where, in the teacher's professional life, those themes were most prevalent. Note that each narrative quotation from the interview data, fieldnotes and/or classroom conversation was assigned to only one theme and category within the matrix.

Table 1: Distribution of Empirical Data: Matrix of Foundational Themes within Spatial Categories

	Foundational Themes				
Spatial Categories	Understandings of school & community context	Relationships & the metaphor of family	Teacher navigating personal & professional identity	Pedagogy & the role of affect	Students' conceptions of curriculum and classroom space
Community Connections	O	O	X	O	O
School Environment	O	O	X	O	O
Classroom Environment	X	O	O	O	O
Classroom Instruction	X	O	O	O	X
Classroom Content	O	X	X	O	X
Pedagogical Insight	X	O	O	O	X

O = One or more quotations
X = No relevant quotations

Table 2: Themes with Examples from Spatial Categories[8]

Theme 1: Understanding School & Community Context This theme follows how Denise explores the relationship between the life of residents within the surrounding neighborhood and the activities, discourses, and dialogue that occurs within the school. Denise actively uses her knowledge of the local neighborhood, the challenges and issues families face, as well as the beauty and unique quality that it possesses to inform various dimensions of her role as an educator.	**Theme 2: Relationships and the Metaphor of Family** The hierarchy of power is played out in various ways within Denise's school and classroom. This theme looks at how one teacher incorporates the different elements of "family" as a metaphor in shaping how she interacts with parents and local residents, the development of school-wide programs, and her own pedagogical practices in the classroom. **Spatial Category 3: Classroom Environment**

[8] For the sake of brevity, the following section will define the four themes and offer *one* empirical example of how a theme was located within a spatial category in the analysis of our data.

Spatial Category 1: Community Connections Connecting the community with educational practice allows Denise to better understand how the outside environment impacts on the practices of the school and classroom. Denise genuinely tries to understand and make sense of the community context that her students live in as well as the challenges they face each day. She reflects this in her description of the relations between police officers and neighbourhood residents: *But the reality is that's not what they are facing out there. And so I think for a lot of times they feel like we are out of touch with what they really do go through out there. There's no one to run to. They're not going to run to the police officer and tell him. Because nine times out of ten, the police officers aren't [going to] listen to you anyway. And that's the truth. I've walked through this community. I've been through this community long enough to know that the police aren't necessarily going to take you at face value.*	Denise uses the metaphor of family to help students understand the culture and context of their classroom. Having to work each day with people with whom we do not always share a perspective presents obvious challenges. However, Denise explains to the students that they are to accept these conflicts and work through them together as it is their responsibility to do so as a "family": *…we're here in this building in this classroom 8 hours a day, five days a week. I see you people more than I see my own family." I said, "So we're a family. You know, we're a pseudo family, these are your brothers and sisters. You know, this is what it is. Like, you're here. You didn't choose me, just like I didn't choose my parents or my brothers and sisters. We're just here and we gotta deal with what we got.*
Theme 3: Teacher Navigating Personal and Professional Identity This theme explores what levers Denise has that allow her personal identity to influence or emerge through her professional one. In other words, how does she incorporate key elements from her own identity and history into her daily practices as an educator? **Spatial Category 4: Classroom Instruction** Denise reflects upon her own experiences as a teacher and student to inform her pedagogical approach during lessons. She draws upon her own challenges with learning to better understand the struggles of some of her students and to shape her practice in a way that best supports their growth and progress. In the example here, she describes how she uses drama activities and strategies to help students explore their own ideas by eliminating some of the language barriers her students face: *And because I also teach language I'm able to take what I see in drama and say, "You know what? That's really something we're doing over here. Let's now take that. Because now we know your idea. Now we have everything." And I guess' cause I've got a learning disability as well, and I share that openly with the kids, and I let them know, "This is what I'm good at. This is what I really struggle with. And so I can share with them, "You know what?" I always tell them, "When I was your age I used to write stuff down too because of the same reason. But everyone has a good idea. Everybody has good ideas. And I always start with ideas first. And with drama I can get all your ideas. And the kid doesn't have to*	**Theme 4: Pedagogy and the Role of Affect** Harnessing and understanding the emotional, identity, and relational aspects of students' lives within the context of teaching is at the heart of this theme. The theme illustrates that there are implicit dimensions to Denise's pedagogy that reveal her concern for students' emotions, relationships, and feelings. Much of this theme's analysis explores how her choices as a teacher reflect a balance of the academic and social-emotional aspects of curriculum and teaching. **Spatial Category 6: Pedagogical Insight:** This spatial category captures the teacher's ideas or understandings that are highly reflexive and can be understood as the "mental" space of her teaching geography. Another important aspect of being a teacher in challenging circumstances is learning how to keep one's personal beliefs and impulses in check and focus on teaching students important values and ideas that will help them be successful in life, even when success sometimes looks like mere survival: *Um, I think it's really important - cause it's so easy - you sit there and go "WOW, Your Mom said you ruined her life, and she kicked you out of the house ... agh! Can I go punch her in her face now?" You know, it's so easy to do that, but I think, remembering that no matter what that mother says, she's that kid's mother. And that kid is going to love that woman if she set her on fire. Because, that's your mom and you're twelve and that's your Mom. And so, for me, you know, I've had many conversations with this one particular student about the fact that: A) You didn't ruin her life and she may*

feel put on the spot.	*say that now, but I honestly don't think that's what she means. I think she's hurt too and - you know, you even if you look at what's going on now and even if your Mom doesn't, you know, whatever the circumstance is, you have to know you're lovable and I love you and you have to know you're a good kid. You're a pain in the butt, but you're a good kid. And, that this can't - it can't ruin you. You know, and how strong are you.*

Implications for:

Sustaining the mechanisms and systems that bring about and maintain improved quality of education for some of Toronto's economically and culturally marginalized populations

In many ways, Denise Langley is the best kind of teacher for such a district-wide initiative as the Model Schools for Inner Cities. She clearly sees her 'community' as extending beyond the walls of the school. One of the most significant lessons to take away from this study for both teacher education and teacher professional development is to rethink the process of becoming a teacher to make more conscious and explicit the ways in which teachers in their solitary classrooms are a part of a large system of education on which they can have impact. To deepen and broaden a teacher's notion of 'impact', to help her see her pedagogy as something which has reach outside her classroom and into her community would go a long way towards changing a school culture and re-activating the notion of teachers as significant change agents. But this move also requires that teachers see their impotence, too, the ways in which they are, often unwittingly, playing out system and provincial mandates not of their choosing.

Names of researchers:	Dr. Jim Cummins and Saskia Stille
Title of case study:	**Engaging literacies: Identity texts as catalyst and medium for academic performance**
Duration of case study:	January 2009 – ongoing

Introduction

This case study was designed to explore innovative ways of enabling students to engage with literacy by mobilizing their home language resources and prior knowledge, and by using digital technology tools such as PowerPoint, iMovie, and digital story telling software to publish and disseminate students' work. Working collaboratively with English as a Second Language (ESL) and classroom teachers at the elementary level, our team of university-

based researchers assisted teachers in integrating knowledge media into literacy teaching and learning activities, and assisted students in the creation of bilingual "identity texts." We use the term *identity texts* to describe the products of students' creative work or performances carried out within the pedagogical space orchestrated by the classroom teacher. Students invest their identities in the creation of these texts, which can be written, spoken, signed, visual, musical, dramatic, or combinations in multimodal form. The identity text then holds a mirror up to students in which their identities are reflected back in a positive light.

Theoretical/Conceptual Frameworks

The project is embedded in a set of theoretical frameworks that highlight the role of societal power relations in the achievement trajectories of students from marginalized social backgrounds (Cummins, 2009). These power relations, conceived as operating along a continuum from coercive to collaborative, express themselves in the patterns of identity negotiation orchestrated by teachers with their students (Cummins, 2001). Classroom interactions that enable students to create identity texts, which showcase their intellectual, linguistic, and artistic talents, challenge the devaluation of identity that many bilingual/ELL students experience in contexts where their home languages are not explicitly acknowledged as intellectual and cultural resources.

Research Questions and Methods

The research focused on the following research question: *To what extent can the creation of identity texts and engagement with information and communication technology tools increase students' literacy engagement and sense of academic accomplishment?*
Teachers, students, and researchers collaborated in this action research project. The research team worked directly with students to help them use various technology tools to create their identity text projects. Sources of data for the research included field notes on the interactions and outcomes that were observed, document analysis, individual and group interviews, and planning notes.

Significant Findings

The findings highlight the role of cultural production within the classroom in promoting identity affirmation and literacy engagement among students who are still in the process of learning English and catching up academically. They also illustrate the role of technology in enabling students to develop identities of competence in academic work. These themes are elaborated below.

Identity affirmation

Students exceeded their own expectations of what they could accomplish academically. As one student expressed it: "I liked the project because it was so hard". Furthermore, showcasing students' work in both English and their home languages to parents, caregivers, and family members presented the students in a new light to these significant people in students' lives. As a result of the work they produced in the classroom, students were seen as individuals with linguistic talents, creativity, and intellectual potential. This is illustrated in the following quote from a teacher:

> Having the opportunity to share your story with someone is empowering –

> what you have to say matters. Your history, your background, your views, they matter ... the students were very proud of this work. It had intrinsic value, not just doing it for the sake of doing it.

Literacy engagement

Students were so engaged with their projects that they sometimes did not want to leave the classroom for recess. They also discussed their projects at home and got help from parents and older siblings. The level of student engagement is illustrated in the following quotes:

> I wrote my story, I talked about my family, I practiced. I was practicing so much because I wished I could do good. I tried to balance stuff; I worked a long, long time, and my brother helped me.

> I learned about choosing pictures, about typing. I know how to make this story now ... and I did it in Urdu, English, and Pashto.

Technology

The project illustrated how digital technology tools can serve as "amplifiers" of a student's voice. The use of technology facilitated the production of identity texts and enabled students' creative work to be shared with multiple audiences. This is illustrated in the following quotes:

> The computer helped me to do my work, it helped me to find [information] and it helped me to do the design.

> People can see my things that I [wrote] about, my dad can see it from Afghanistan, and all my family can see it.

Implications for:

Sustaining the mechanisms and systems that bring about and maintain improved quality of education for some of Toronto's economically and culturally marginalized populations

The creation of identity texts by recently arrived immigrant students led to the following outcomes:

- Encouraged students to connect new information and skills to their background knowledge
- Enabled students to use their first language (L1) as a cognitive tool
- Enabled students to produce more accomplished literacy work in the school language
- Affirmed students' identities as intelligent, creative bi/multilinguals
- Extended their knowledge of the relationship between their L1 and their second language (L2)

The project highlights ways in which teachers can create a "counter-discourse" to the implicit devaluation of students' languages, cultures, and identities that occurs in classrooms where students' home languages are excluded or treated with "benign neglect."

The findings address several of the specific objectives of the Putting Inner City Students First project. For example, the implementation of instruction that recognizes both the value of

students' home languages as cognitive tools and the power of technology, when harnessed to an enrichment rather than a remedial pedagogy, to fuel students' engagement with literacy.

Students' projects and teachers' reflections will soon be made available in print and visual/video format on the OISE Language-as-Resource website. Knowledge mobilization will be pursued through a professional development process which we have termed actuality implies possibility—in other words, if a particular instructional approach or innovation has happened, then it *can* happen.

Theme Two: Schooling and Social Equity

Name of researcher:	Dr. Sarfaroz Niyozov
Title of case study:	**A Teacher's Perspective on the Education of Her Muslim Students in Toronto**
Duration of case study:	January – May 2009

Introduction

This study explored how an elementary public, inner-city schoolteacher, with twenty-five years of experience, understands her Muslim students' presence in her classroom and school, their educational and social needs, what challenges she faces in working with her students, and how she addresses these challenges. As an extension of my study in high schools, this study is critical to dealing with increasing cultural and religious diversity in Canadian schools and its implications for curriculum and teacher development as well as broader notions of citizenship and multiculturalism in Canada. In addition, teachers' work with Muslim students is an under-researched area, surrounded with unfavorable images and stories about public schools and their teachers. This study aims at rebalancing this portrayal.

Theoretical/Conceptual Frameworks

This study's framework was built on key questions, my work and an extensive literature review in the areas of teachers' work with Muslim students (see: Niyozov, 2009), Muslim/Islamic education globally (e.g., Merry, 2007; Niyozov, 1995; Zine, 2008), comparative, cross-cultural (Val-Rust & Dalin, 1991; Kubow & Fossum, 2006), anti-racist (Dei, 1996), and multicultural education (Banks & Banks, 1996). The framework consists of four over-arching and inter-connected categories: *teachers' worldviews*, *pedagogy*, *relationships*, and *biography*. Each of these categories/themes has its own sub-themes guiding the study. For example, "teachers' worldviews" refers to the purposes or goals of teaching; reasons for teaching particular subjects in a particular school; roles in and outside their classrooms and schools; and knowledge of Islam and Muslims (including students, parents, and communities).

Research Questions and Methods

i. How does a teacher in an inner city, public, elementary school in Toronto understand her work with Muslim students?
ii. How does she recognize and address her Muslim students' particular needs and aspirations?
iii. What challenges does she face in teaching her Muslim students and how they address these challenges?

This was a qualitative study, using interviews (n = 5), observations (n = 2), and follow-up conversations (n = 2) with one experienced female teacher, "Monica". In 2009, when the study was conducted, Monica was teaching students who were Canadian-born, but who lived

in non-English speaking environments. In that setting, she was a special education teacher, team-teaching in an integrated classroom. Her primary task was to teach them all subjects in accordance with The Ontario Curriculum, including English. Working on social skills development was a major part of the curriculum as well. Monica's class had twenty-five students, eight of whom were special needs. Approximately 55% of the students were Muslims.

Each observation lasted for 1 ½ to two hours, and each interview lasted for forty-five to sixty minutes. The follow-up discussions were either face to face or via telephone, and lasted for about thirty minutes.

Significant Findings

During her six years of teaching in the inner–city school, Monica has developed a complex understanding of her Muslim students' identities, realities, needs, and aspirations. She does this by learning the meanings of their names, the countries, cultures and religions they come from, observing their dress and behaviors and, most importantly, by discussing religious and cultural issues in her class. Her students share the wealth of their cultural knowledge and learn from each other. They like to talk about Christmas, about Santa Claus, about Eid, Ramadan, Diwali, Chinese new year, and so on. By allowing her students to talk about their cultures and languages, Monica helps ensure that cognitive skills such as language, comprehension, and social skills such as appreciation, respect are learned.

In this way, Monica uses her students' prior knowledge to improve basic literacy skills like reading and writing, listening and speaking. This also helps her learn more about her students. According to Monica, the students might come to class with misconceptions, biases and prejudices; at the same time, she understands that because this is the knowledge the children bring with them to school, they may not see it as biased. Monica considers this knowledge as the material a teacher has to engage with politely and seriously.

Monica also learns about Islam and Muslim from sources other than her students: from children's books (e.g., *A faith Like Mine*), the media, and scholarly literature. She tries to learn about complex theological (e. g., Shi'a-Sunni differences; Shari'a laws) and socio-economic (e.g., women's status, polygamy, girls' education) issues among Muslims. She is constantly curious about how different Muslims approach hijab, halal food, prayer, etc., and wonders about the inconsistencies and complexities of their faith. She does not see Muslims as one monolithic mass. That is why one particular student's practice and view on Islam is as important as that of any other student's. She senses that there might be a difference between what her particular student says about his/her Islamic practice and what adults, the media, or scholars might say.

Monica is supported in raising such religious and cultural discussions in her class because of the school context where she works. This school has a strong anti-racist milieu; here, the former principal was not afraid to have strong teachers around him. Here, the teachers engage in intellectual discussions about teaching, curriculum and pedagogy. And here, the staff have committed themselves to serve their students' and community's needs, which is at odds with the general educational climate of not bringing in issues related to politics, culture, and religion into schools and classrooms, to stay neutral, and to not take an ethical stance. In this school, most children and their parents surprise you with their honesty, their openness about issues and about their needs and problems. Monica is able to bring forward these

issues because she is experienced, knows how to discuss sensitive issues in a respectful manner, and does not impose her own point of view.

Monica understands, however, that not all of what her students say and do should be uncritically celebrated. Such engagement must be done politely, sensitively: “You do not have to bluntly tell the student he or she is wrong or stupid. You show an alternative viewpoint, ask about what other views are; you make them think about it, respond to negative remarks by bringing in simple examples.” For instance, when a student made an inappropriate remark about Jews, Monica responded with, “You know the head of school is Jewish. Now would you say things like that of him?”, or “Some of my friends are Jewish”. On another occasion, when one of her students removed a Muslim student’s hat by force, Monica spent a good deal of time explaining to the student why they should not do so, and connected it with a well-known case in the school when a Muslim girl’s hijab was removed by another student.

In sum, Monica’s pedagogy reflects her critical perspective on what the teaching and education of her students, including Muslim ones, means. This pedagogy includes a complex vision of her students’ particular experiences, Canadian society and the world at large; how she sees herself as an educator and citizen; the high expectations that she has for her students; the support she receives from her colleagues; and the challenges she faces in providing meaningful instruction to her students (e.g., increasing demoralization, EQAO, tests, overload, contradictory demands, misunderstanding and blaming of teachers, attack on public schools, superficiality toward serious global and Canadian issues). Monica is a skilled teacher whose experiences should be documented. Educators like her need to be given podiums to speak about what it means to be a teacher in Canada today (Thiessen, 1993).

Implications for:

Sustaining the mechanisms and systems that bring about and maintain improved quality of education for some of Toronto’s economically and culturally marginalized populations

There is a need for providing more of the non-romanticized, critical and diversified resources on curriculum and pedagogy, as well as a support system for learning about Muslim students’ complexity and diversity, and the critical perspectives on issues in Muslim communities within and outside Canada.

Creating professional development models and scholarly/professional resources for communicating the relevant transferable findings of PICSF to other school districts within Canada, and/or internationally

This could be done through offering courses, workshops, and seminars that present various perspectives on Muslim education and communities, both historical and contemporary. Such studies should have a comparative approach where both intra-Muslim as well as inter-faith comparisons are made. They should critically engage both the views of the participants, instructors and scholarship in the fields of Muslim Education and Islamic Studies.

Name of researcher:	Dr. Dominique Rivière

Title of case study:	**Performing Policy: Critical Multicultural Education in a Diverse Classroom**
Duration of case study:	May – June 2010

Introduction

This case study was initially conceived to be an extension of my doctoral research (Rivière, 2006), which focused on the ways in which students' performances in a drama classroom could offer important contributions to how "identity" was conceptualized in provincial multicultural curriculum and policy (Ontario, 1993). Part of this revision included re-working the Ministry's six "objectives" of multicultural curriculum such that they became six "reflective practices". These practices were designed to highlight for policymakers and educator the ways in which students *performed* their social identities. Originally, my PICSF study was designed to capture one teacher's journey as s/he applied one or more of these reflective practices in her/his classroom. Due to some unforeseen setbacks and other delays, however, I had to revise the purpose and intent of this case study.

As a Model School, teachers at the research site had received nearly three years' worth of professional development, training, and support – from various sectors – in how best to place the identities and experiences of their marginalized students at the centre of their work. This meant that these teachers were already designing and implementing curricula in ways that matched the reflective practices I had developed. Thus, the focus of my case study was not so much on capturing the experiences of a teacher new to this kind of curricular and pedagogical approach, but rather on capturing the details of how a *master* teacher – "Rebecca" – employed such an approach. Rebecca taught in a Junior level classroom for students with "exceptional needs".[9] The goal of my study was to highlight the institutional aspects of teaching and learning in this type of Model School classroom that might be transferable to more "regular" diverse classroom contexts.

Theoretical/Conceptual Frameworks

The following theoretical frameworks inform this case study: identity, socialization and schooling, and critical multicultural education.

Identity

In my research, identity is understood to be "socially-constructed". This notion of socially-constructed identity presupposes its fluid nature, in that identity-construction is a dialectical, *relational* process, by which "…the identity positions within which we locate ourselves or are located by others are neither neutral nor equal" (Giles & Middleton, 1999, p. 34). That is, identities are defined as much by what they *are not* as by what they *are*. Relations of identity are also inextricably linked to relations of power and, often, of domination (LeCourt, 2004).

Socialization and Schooling

[9] I have used the term "exceptional needs" to obscure the precise nature of this teacher's classroom; otherwise her anonymity might be compromised.

McCarthy (1998) maintains that, unless both the *institutional* and *social* contexts of education are examined, understanding how racial inequality operates in education remains very complex. A link must be made between social structures (e.g. economic, social, political, or ideological) and what real people (e.g. students and teachers) actually *do* in schools. Yon's (2000) notion of the discursive space of schooling is a useful framework for making such links. By "discursive", Yon is referring to how discourse (which he defines as a set of assertions and ideas that creates webs of meaning) shapes how individuals think about, produce and disseminate new forms of knowledge. Thus, the power of socio-cultural and political discourses of racial, cultural, and/or ethnic identity structures the ways in which students are perceived to engage (or not) in school.

Critical Multicultural Education

Critical multiculturalism challenges the conventional understanding of multiculturalism as "celebrating" diversity, by arguing that it serves to mask the structural inequalities inherent in Canadian society that prevent not only equality of opportunity, but equality of outcome for many Canadians (see: Mackey, 1999; Ng, 1993).

Therefore, critical multicultural education requires that schools' curricular, pedagogical, and policy practices are oriented towards non-essentialist conceptions of students' cultures; towards challenging Western hegemonic knowledge in all school contexts; and towards recognizing the broader social, political and economic contexts in which education takes place (see: Nieto, 2004).

Research Questions and Methods

i. How does a Model School educator place the identities and experiences of her marginalized students at the centre of her curriculum and pedagogy?
ii. What are the salient and transferable features of this teacher's curricular and pedagogical approaches to (multicultural) education in diverse classrooms?
iii. What does using a "performative" lens (Denzin, 1997; Pollock, 1998; Alexander, Anderson & Gallegos, 2005) bring to the analysis of those features?

The methods involved three one-hour classroom observations; two two-hour Grade Team meeting observations; two one-hour semi-structured interviews; and analysis of the Grade Team's lesson planning documents.

Significant Findings

Being an "exceptional needs" teacher, in particular, and teaching in a Model School, in general, demands a focus on the *social* aspects of teaching and learning. This leads to specific pedagogical practices – and ways of interacting with students, more generally – that reveal the *institutional* aspects of teaching and learning that (may) often go unnoticed in "regular" classrooms. This is especially important in diverse classrooms, because certain institutionalized pedagogical practices can reinforce the marginalization of certain students. Thus, analyzing the relationship between the "institutional" and "social" contexts of teaching and learning in this "exceptional needs" classroom is important for finding ways to interrupt this cycle. Some examples from the study are discussed below.

When I asked Rebecca whether or not knowledge of her students' identities influenced her decisions about curriculum content, she replied

Rebecca: With my Grade 5s, we're doing Ancient Civilizations? And, I actually have a student from Mexico … And so she has chosen – I found her all the books – to do, um, Ancient Mexico … You know, I have a Chinese student, so, you know, he's going to be doing Ancient China, you know. So we do kind of try and have those… uh, opportunities for the kids.

This seems like a very straightforward approach to recognizing the diversity in one's classroom. In a follow-up interview, however, when I asked Rebecca if her students were interested in drawing connections between the experiences of the European societies they were studying and the experiences of their own heritage societies during the same time period, this is what she said:

Rebecca: Like, María was quite excited that she did learn about Ancient Mexico. And one of the other gir- Like, Parvati, like she wanted to do Mexico too, because of María [DR: [laughter]]. Like, that kind of stuff. So, I – I thought she might have chosen, uh, India, [DR: That's really…] because she's…

Dominique: Is she Indian?

Rebecca: I think she was born in Bangladesh, but her family background is Indian. [DR: Oh, okay.] So… But then again, that might be why she *didn't* choose India.

Purposely designing curriculum that links to students' ethnocultural identities creates spaces for their other identities (and identification processes) to emerge. In other words, students have *multiple* identities, and multiple reasons for choosing one to be more salient than the others. Therefore, pedagogical practices that assume that the identities that *society* deems to be the most salient (e.g. race/ethnicity, religion, gender) are the same ones that *students* deem to be the most salient (cf. Rivière, 2005) are problematic, because they don't take into account students' understanding, interpretation, and expression of their multiple subject positions. In short, they deny students' agency and right to self-determination.

Speaking with Rebecca about her individual practice as an "exceptional" needs teacher, she often mentioned that one of the most difficult things about her job was finding relevant and academically challenging materials for her students. Thus, she often had to "make do" with the materials at hand, improvising and innovating wherever she could.

Rebecca: Yeah. When I – when I go to the [exceptional needs] conferences, I still see all these teachers buying, you know, the workbooks, and fill in the blanks, and do the puzzles [DR: Wow…], and this and that. Now, I've taken all of the – Like, I had a lot of those? They're all gone. They're gone. I haven't even kept them for… thinking that, you know, when I retire from here, somebody else might want them. They're gone. They're gone.

Dominique: Interesting.

Rebecca: I don't even look at them. All those, sort of, Level 2 thinking stuff? You know, you don't want that. Yeah.

Dominique: Do you think, um… Do you think that's connected, perhaps, to A desire to have higher expectations for your kids?

Rebecca: Yes. […] That's exactly what it is.

Because of these high expectations, Rebecca purposefully makes her teaching practice match the context of her students' needs, at any given moment:

Rebecca: Uh, what you said when I provide the one-on-one support… I believe that with these students, I can't just say, collect their assignments at the end of the day, mark them, underline things, and hand it back to them. They can't make those corrections on their own. If they could, they wouldn't have done it in the first place, right? [**DR:** Right.] Um… So, um… I like to conference with them, I like to make it immediate. […]

Dominique: Okay. Um, so what do you find useful about, you know, approaching teaching [exceptional students] that way?

Rebecca: Um… I – I think that they… If I ask the children to make a correction – like I want them to find the word in the dictionary, instead of just… Like as I said, I could underline it, leave them… *Or*, I could go through and make all the changes for them, but then they'll never learn it. Right? So, uh, I think having them... uh, be able to make those corrections… but, you're, you're *scaffolding* it for them a little bit. You're making it easier for them. You're telling them, you know, "Look here. You'll find that information here", or whatever. And, plus, it's immediate and meaningful. It's from their personal writing… or whatever we're doing. Like, it's their responses. So it's personal, it's immediate, it's something they're gonna learn.

[…]

And it puts the ownership back on them, so that they're responsible for their learning.

The dearth of suitable curriculum materials and resources for "exceptional" students reinforces a deficit view of their needs and abilities. Therefore, individual teachers need to develop pedagogical practices that "make up" for this lack. These practices need to be contextual and engaging, so that the curriculum content is meaningful for students, and allows them to develop a sense of agency.

Implications for:

Sustaining the mechanisms and systems that bring about and maintain improved quality of education for some of Toronto's economically and culturally marginalized populations

During my interviews with Rebecca, it became clear that a key *institutional* feature of her teaching practice was the Grade Team meeting that occurred before the beginning of each term. At these meetings, all teachers from the same Division (e.g. Primary, Junior, Intermediate) would discuss the units that needed to be covered, the curriculum expectations that needed to be met, the key texts that needed to be used, the key concepts that the students needed to learn, and the possible forms of authentic assessment that could be employed. Using a "backwards design" format, the teachers would then develop a "pathway" for a given unit, which was integrated across multiple subject areas (e.g. Social Studies and Science). A primary focus of the Grade Team meetings was on how to recognize and reflect the students' identities and heritages throughout the curricular activities.
Having observed some of those Team discussions, and analyzed the resultant "pathways", I believe that these meetings are integral to bringing about and maintaining improved quality of education for marginalized students. They allow for teacher innovation, professional support, and the development of an infusion of equity-minded practice throughout the curriculum.

Theme Three: Schooling and Community Connections

Name of researcher:	Dr. Caroline Fusco
Title of case study:	**PLAY (Place, Activity, Youth): Geographies of a Model School**
Duration of case study:	2009 – 2010

Introduction

My main research focus was to examine what role physical educational landscapes in a model school played in the health of urban schools and their communities. I am interested in how embodied practices of health and physical education and discursive constructions of health are exercised at different scales (e.g., teacher, school policy, student) in the space of the school. Educational landscapes that take account of the diversity of students and the complexity of spaces in a city like Toronto have a key role to play in advancing the health of urban schools and their communities and, in doing so, must contribute to children's (equitable) perceptions and experiences of success, achievement and engagement in schooling.

Theoretical/Conceptual Frameworks

For some time now, I have been interested in questions of space and how neo-liberal ideologies or regimes of 'healthification' (Fusco, 2007, 2009) pervade physical activity spaces. Healthification is a term that I have coined to describe how the continuous deployment of a broad range of specialized strategies and technologies, expertise and techniques (e.g., policy and educational initiatives, architectural arrangements, urban planning, measures of public order, health and safety regulations, self and other observations) produce 'healthified' spaces and subjectivities. According to urban sociologists, (Fitzpatrick & LaGory, 2003) 'place matters' thus it is important that the intersections of biopower[10], health and the material conditions of space and place be addressed. In this case study, I took up these concerns in order to examine whether healthification and governmentality[11] produce conceptions of space, spatial practices, and experiences of (lived) space (Lefebvre, 1991) for students in the model school.

Research Questions and Methods

i. What role do healthy school and physical activity initiatives play in student success in a model school?

[10] Foucault's concept of bio-power describes how the body and society are regulated and disciplined through technologies of power and control that aim to foster the "'productivity and health'" of entire populations (Foucault, 1978).

[11] I understand governmentality, in the Foucauldian sense, in which government is inextricably bound up with the activity of thought and the emergence of a distinctly new form of thinking about and exercising power in certain societies (Dean, 1999; Rose, 1999).

ii. Is there a correlation between physical health and school health?
iii. How do various stakeholders imagine a healthy school space in a model school environment?
iv. What role does the school play in the social health of the neighbourhood?
v. What are the existing social inclusions and exclusions that impact on the social and physical health of students?

Methods involved spatial ethnography; classroom observation; focus-group interviews with nine teachers and staff, and sixteen Grade 5 and 6 students; children's drawings; and field notes.

Significant Findings

This model school invested a large part of their model school funding into sports and extra-curricular physical activities. The teachers and staff believe that such investments have impacted on student achievement and community-relations with/through the school. This investment has required an understanding about, and commitment to, the value of physical activities and their relationship to the (physical, social, emotional) health of the students and school and to student achievement. The following quote illustrates teachers' and staff theories about the role healthy school and physical activity initiatives play in student success in their school. They corroborate the correlation between physical health and school health and imagine that their school space can communicate health across student, parents, teachers and neighbourhood stakeholders:

> **Teacher A:** So I thought I would love to get out after school and being a mother of three children that are all in university now and high school, I love the idea of kids staying after school and doing a sport. So they don't have to go home, they don't have to sit in front of the T.V. because I'm always – I pushed that for my kids and their sports. And it's only an hour with one group, an hour with the other, they're all able to do it, the sign up sheet was great, so they all want to do it, the parents of the younger kids especially come out, mothers come, they sit in the stands, they talk, they're socializing, they're clapping for their child even if he takes you know ten swings at the ball to try to hit it, everyone's clapping and the child who you know hit the ball finally on the tenth try is running down to first and waving at his mom and is thrilled and – they're thrilled, I'm thrilled. And I think that this is what it's all about. It's self-esteem, they feel good, they feel great.

This second quote illustrates how Grade 5 and 6 students experience the 'new' physical educational landscape and their desires to be part of the culture of activity:

> **Interviewer:** Yeah. And would you say that physical activity and sports and all these things has anything to do with you liking this school so much?
>
> **Student:** Yeah.
>
> **Interviewer:** In what way?
>
> **Student:** They have a lot of stuff that you can join. And if you don't – if you have a team and you don't make it into one thing, you can go to another thing that you like.

Interviewer: Do you have any examples of that that happened to you?

Student: Yeah. Like the – like the things – like hockey, I wanted to join it, but I didn't get to it and now I joined the cricket team.

Within the context of the school and its physical activity initiatives for student success, there are also moments when educational landscapes continue to reproduce dominant discourses of health, which impact on teachers' empathy for students' everyday lives. Although well-intentioned, certain health practices in the school (e.g., the banning of junk food) construct *an ideal* healthy citizen. This may inadvertently marginalize students and families who are not able to provide healthy snack foods for their children. Moreover, when physical activities are recognized only for their functional purposes (e.g., energy-release, prevent fidgeting, make student more attentive, improve grades, learn to be Canadian) this can serve to corroborate neo-liberal agendas of individualism, moralizing and personal responsibility, which flattens out and/or reinforces differences (e.g., gender) among students. The following two quotes illustrate these tensions in teacher narratives, while a third quote from a student demonstrates how children experience these competing discourses and how learning about health and physical activity is a combination of experiencing physical activities, regularly enacting "the healthy lifestyle", and explicit instruction.

Teacher 1: And you've always been an advocate of kids having nutritious Food. I know you've talked to a lot of parents?

Teacher 2: Oh, about chips!

Teacher 1: Because you deal with a lot of social things too. And [L], you know, will tell the parents, you know, 'You're child had a bag of chips today for lunch. Perhaps, you know, tomorrow they can have….' whatever, but like you've talked to them and had lots of meetings with parents on this.

Teacher 2: And the parents will say, 'They only eat chips.' And we'll say, 'No, actually they had a cucumber today and then carrots yesterday and an apple tomorrow', because the snack is five days a week, but the lunch is just two, which is apparently going to three next year.' So, I think it is important.

Teacher 1: Because the kids will eat things here that – because their friends are eating them that they might not choose to have at home.

Teacher 1: I've definitely seen them – definitely seeing structured play as beneficial because it cut down on the amount of trouble they can get in at recess, let's put it that way. So, socially they're on the same team so they're helping each other. They've also been able to have a teacher there to sometimes supervise when they do get into trouble – problems, you know, arguments and stuff like that. So, yeah, that definitely helps – it helps, you know, them running around outside they need to burn off of that energy. So when they do come back

after recess they are a little more – I don't know if they're more focused because they're not squirming around as much. I can't decide whether they're just more tired or they're more focused. Either way, they're paying better attention.

Teacher 2: That being said, I think it's important children do get that break at recess and that doesn't always happen here at this school. There are some children who are kept in regularly to finish up work and perhaps those would be the kids that would need to be out a lot. But each classroom is run in a different way with expectations on work completion, so you might see differences that way. That's just my own bias.

Teacher 1: It's a catch twenty-two because you're – sometimes that's the only thing you have. It's a final.
Teacher 2: It is true, but there are – especially when I taught grade two, like, and not to talk about boys, but boys need to run, they need to sit, they need their break, they need their time away and then – I think it builds up. Girls too, but I really noticed it when I taught grade two that it was the boys, just that maturity hasn't yet kicked in the way the girls can sit for a longer period of time.

Student: In the after school activities there's like a kids club there and there's like a forty-five minute physical education class like where you run and everything and for – it's like two hours – like an hour and thirty minutes, forty-minutes just like where you run and the other forty-five minutes you go inside and have a healthy snack and learn about eating healthy foods and everything.

Implications for:

Sustaining the mechanisms and systems that bring about and maintain improved quality of education for some of Toronto's economically and culturally marginalized populations

This case study has several implications. First, teachers can use physical activity experiences outside the classroom to support the classroom activities and tasks. This interaction creates and sustains a type of knowledge that can inform student reading and writing. The physical and social health of the school space supports student achievements. Second, school-community partnerships, particularly to do with the introduction of sports activities to new immigrants, provide inclusion opportunities for families, and prevent newcomers from being viewed as inconveniences and excluded from school cultural activities. Third, when health is broadly understood in school (i.e., emotional, social, physical) and is valued by administrators, teachers, staff (e.g., custodians) and volunteers (e.g., parents), this may increase a sense of connectedness that ultimately impacts on students' (positive) perceptions and experiences of their educational landscapes. Finally, funding mechanisms such as Model School Funding provide crucial resources for sustaining and growing programs to enhance the physical, social and emotional health and culture of schools.

Names of researchers:	Dr. Joseph Flessa and Rachael Nicholls

Title of case study:	**Principals and Parents – Connections and Disjunctures**
Duration of case study:	Spring/Summer 2009

Introduction

There is a large body of normative and professional writing on school improvement that highlights the importance of parental involvement. Typically, such work highlights the role of the principal in encouraging home-school connections and makes recommendations. Our study diverges from this typical approach by focusing on *how* principals learn about the families and communities they serve. What inquiry process, explicit or implicit, do principals follow to learn more about the context in which they work? As researchers we seek to discover the ways principals learn about and make connections with the parents and communities they serve.

Theoretical/Conceptual Framework

Using an inquiry approach, we considered the relevant theory and literature, including policy incentives (Stone, 2002), parental engagement (Pushor & Murphy, 2004), urban schools in challenging circumstances (Flessa, 2009; Valencia, 1997; Valencia, 2009) to gain understanding about the way that principal learning and reflexive inquiry counterbalanced prevalent deficit frameworks about urban families and communities.

Research Questions and Methods

i. What do principals in model inner-city schools say they know about the parents and communities they serve, and how did they learn it?
ii. What do principals say are the purposes of parent and community involvement?
iii. What do principals in model inner-city schools say are the nuts-and-bolts of encouraging parent and community involvement?
iv. How do principals evaluate their own work with parents and community partners?

Data collection methods included accessing public documents through the school board and each school website. We then visited and interviewed four Model School principals in the spring of 2009. Each interview was one to one-and-a-half hours in length. Following the interviews, we observed the participants through a school tour. Interviews were transcribed and used along side documents to develop themes.

Significant Findings

The findings of this research give interesting insights to how principals learn about the community, what principals felt the purpose of parent involvement is, and how principals evaluate their own work with parents and community partners.

The principals in this study described rapidly changing school communities from year to year

and a demographic imperative to view parental and community needs and expectations as ever-changing. Their inquiry approach to parental involvement meant structuring both official meetings (parental council meetings, family literacy evenings) as well as smaller scale events like teas with the principal organized by families themselves. Nicole also spoke of considering parent engagement outside of traditional forms like School Parent Councils:

> I don't think that School Council is the only way to go. It is the official voice of the parents but one of the things that we are trying to do at the school is to empower parents to navigate the system effectively…, I think that process of learning is important… so that they can advocate effectively for their kids.

Given the overarching derogatory stereotypes that circulate in urban schools regarding students' home life, principals viewed these interactions as important ways to combat deficit frameworks in their own work. **Jessica**, the principal of Village School, spoke about conducting multiple formal interviews with various cultural groups when she began at the school. She conducted the interviews because she said:

> I was trying to gather information about different aspects of their lives… because I felt that I needed to understand where their children were coming from and to try to have culturally responsive pedagogy. I needed to have a deep understanding of the cultures.

Heidi described an initiative developed at Bridge School to establish a connection between parents and teachers and to develop the school as a learning hub for all. On Tuesday nights, the school hosted a dinner and learning night where school staff and parents eat dinner together. Then parents attended workshops about a variety of issues while teachers attended additional qualification courses. Connecting the dinner and learning evenings on the same night, Heidi explained, "…was part of the trust building and part of the discussion about getting to know people…". Principals also perceived these meetings as modeling a flexibility and curiosity useful for teachers and other staff.

Importantly, no principal described any concrete incentive or support that encouraged her to pursue parental involvement as a part of her daily routine. No principal could point to professional development offered by the district or province, nor any aspect of principals' evaluation by supervisors that emphasized parental involvement. **Dawn**, who has worked at her school for a decade suggests:

> We juggle a lot of paper, a lot of protocol, and a lot of procedures, and you can really get stuck there. In terms of time commitment, the job just gets bigger and bigger. For me personally, I have to hold on to the people part, because I see that as most important; the kids and the teachers being able to come and get what they need, and the parents knowing that the school is a place for them and for their children.

The principals in this study pursued parental involvement based on their own understanding of the importance of establishing trusting relationships between families and schools.

Implications for:

Creating professional development models and scholarly/professional resources for communicating the relevant transferable findings of PICSF to other school districts within Canada, and/or internationally

One implication for sustainability and professional development is to attempt to address the silence from districts on supporting and encouraging principals to take parental involvement (and inquiry into their own practice with parents) seriously. Although policy statements exist, implementation more broadly will require professional development and some more specific articulation of how parental involvement approaches have an impact on how principals are assessed and evaluated by superintendents. As long as principals are required to take this work on as a voluntary, entrepreneurial endeavor, it is unlikely to become a part of most principals' core understanding of their job. Assessment will be a controversial topic, but neglecting it will leave parental involvement policy in the realm of aspiration not systemic change (see: Flessa 2008).

Our case studies of dedicated educators resisting prevailing deficit-based perspectives about communities, making important connections beyond the walls of the school, and continuing to learn while on the job contribute to our understanding of what kinds of partnerships are possible. In this way, our work is similar to Auerbach (2010) and Pushor (2010). Part of trying to understand how to take such experiences to scale—how to make them *typical* in urban schools rather than exceptional—requires an examination of the policies and incentives that shape leaders' work. In what ways are principals rewarded for taking on the work of home-school-community connections and in what ways are they discouraged from making these connections? To move parental engagement from aspiration to reality, to bring schools and communities into closer collaboration requires attending to the incentives that shape the day-to-day work of the principal. We observed a handful of principals whose inquiry-based approach to their contexts provided them with the information they needed as a starting point for connections with homes and families. Finding ways to encourage more principals to approach their work similarly would be a step in the right direction.

Conclusion

When the case studies are considered as a whole, it becomes apparent that a key implication of the *Putting Inner City Students* project relates to supporting an improved quality of education for marginalized students. We have offered some unconventional – some might even say radical – understandings of classroom and community, of enrichment and achievement, and of the complexity and diversity of student identity. We argue that these, in turn, lead to engaging pedagogical practices that allow marginalized students to "dominate the dominant curriculum".[12]

Another significant implication of *PICSF* considers the elaboration of professional development resources that communicate the relevant transferable findings of the study to other urban school districts within Canada, and abroad. We suggest that this requires a commitment on the part of educators and researchers to continue working with and improving upon the findings of the project, through courses, workshops, seminars, etc. These meetings would, necessarily, be comparative, critical, and would take seriously the responsibility of schools to support equity by advocating for systemic change.

By looking at individual teachers' and administrators' practices, and also various pedagogical projects in these diverse classrooms, we have come to recognize the complexity of this work and the nuance that is required of educators in schools where the needs, both academic and social, are great. We have spent time with teachers whose expectations are very high and whose sensibilities about the diversity in their classrooms (language, religion, culture, socio-economic, ability…) are finely attuned. We have met principals who resist deficit thinking about their parent communities, and do so at times with little systemic support. And we have witnessed programs that have placed front and centre the social and physical health of students. What we see in common among these six cases are educators who do not rely on good intentions alone, but who ask questions of their interventions and are seldom satisfied with their work. Self-reflexive and community-minded as they are, these teachers and administrators are not prepared to settle for 'good enough'.

They are not the first to understand this, but our collaborators in the schools not only believe, but also know, that equity and excellence are not mutually exclusive. They know that in order to expect much and to receive much from their students, they need to reconcile themselves to better understanding their students' families and communities; they need to see academic achievement as intimately connected to social, physical and psychological well-being. Sometimes to the detriment of protocol, familiar ways of doing business, conventional curriculum, and even conventional wisdom, these educators privilege relationships, however precarious they might be at times. They know that the school and the community, however differently they function must, in the end, have some understanding of, and respect for, one another.

Note: Please visit the PICSF page on our website for additional project resources: http://cus.oise.utoronto.ca/Research/Putting_Inner_City_Students_First/index.html

[12] Social Justice High School - http://sj.lvlhs.org/sj/about_us.jsp

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