

Education Roundtable in celebration of May as Asian Heritage Month
Friday, May 20, 2005, 11:30 a.m. - 2:30 p.m.
Room 1170, Bahen Centre for Information Technology

Meeting Notes

Forum Organizers

Professor Roxana Ng (Chair)
Professor Frank Cunningham
Professor Mark Cheetham
Dr. Kay Li (Coordinator and Secretary)
Ms. Eileen Lam

Representatives of Community Bodies and Boards of Education (in alphabetical order)

Mr. Barnett Chow (Youth Coordinator, Chinese Canadian National Council Toronto Chapter)

Ms. Soni Dasmohapatra (Community Development Coordinator, Council of Agencies Serving South Asians)

Mr. Chris d'Souza (Equity Officer, Dufferin-Peel Catholic Region)

Ms. Tam Goossen (Urban Alliance on Race Relations, Toronto)

Dr. Keith Lowe (Educator)

Mr. Kirk Mark (Coordinator, Race and Ethnic Relations Multiculturalism, Curriculum and Accountability Department, Toronto Catholic District School Board)

Ms. Tomoko Mizuguchi (Canadian Multicultural Council--Asians in Ontario)

Mr David Ong (Canadian Multicultural Council--Asians in Ontario)

Ms. Nancy Siew (Co-Chair of Asian Heritage Month—GTA Citizens Group)

Mr. Sandy Yep (Canadian Race Relations Foundation)

Professor Roxana Ng greeted the audience and gave an introduction to the Centre for Integrative Anti-Racism Studies (CIARS). The Centre works within a social justice and equity framework and enhances research and teaching in the areas of race, gender and class.

Chancellor Vivienne Poy welcomed the audience and explained that education is in the heart of Asian Heritage Month. The Month recognizes the contributions of Asians to Canada and to Western civilization, and draws communities together in dialogue and productive exchanges. She gave examples of fallacious racial assumptions and emphasized the racial heterogeneity in Canada. Chancellor Poy stated the need for teachers to present and maintain contextuality. Although the Museum of Civilization, the National Film Board of Canada, the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation and Industry Canada provide materials that can be used in classrooms to educate students about real stories of Canada's past, until a formal curriculum inclusive of Asian Canadian history and issues is formulated by the province, it will be up to individual teachers to provide this information to the students. Issues related to the Asian communities can be formulated according to the classroom situations, so that students from different backgrounds can feel that they are included in the curriculum. Chancellor Poy also

mentioned the resources available on the internet, such as those provided by the National Archive and the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation. She showed the importance of Asian Heritage Month as a time to pay attention to the Asian Canadian communities, and the need to mainstream Asian Canadian education and involve mainstream media.

Chancellor Poy recognized that people from the communities could be resources for the classroom. She said that her primary role in Asian Heritage Month was that of an educator and cheerleader, as all Canadians should be proud of who they are, and as the younger generation ought to play the role of global citizen in the world. The diverse classrooms provide wonderful opportunities to create a society in which their heritage is valued and their religious and cultural backgrounds are respected.

Professors Frank Cunningham, Mark Cheetham and Hy Van Luong introduced the audience to the Innis College, University College Canadian Studies Program, the Asian Institute and the Collaborative Program in Asian Pacific Studies respectively. Professor Cunningham explained that the first Roundtable at Innis College four years ago resulted in Asian Canadian Studies at the University of Toronto. Professor Mark Cheetham said that the study of Asian Canadian communities in Canada is very important in Canadian Studies. He took the opportunity to announce that a course on Asian Canadian Literature will be taught by Judy Fong Bates in the winter of 2006. Professor Hy Van Luong stated that the Asian Institute is a vibrant centre for interdisciplinary teaching and research. He explained that modern Asia consisted of east, south east, south, inner and central Asia. The Institute also houses the Collaborative Program in Asian Pacific Studies. Together with the Centre for South Asian Studies, the Asian Institute sponsors a large number of events on Asian and Asian Canadian studies.

Written Statements from Teachers and Students

Statements from teacher and student of Asian background were read. The main problems raised were:

1) Racial profiling: Racial stereotypes and assumptions are common. Students may be subject to teachers' racist assumptions, which may overestimate or underestimate the students' ability.

2) Alienation: i) A high school teacher of South Asian/Southeast Asian descent opined that students experienced racism both in schools and in the community. In schools, problems such as language and separation from parents result in many students' seeking refuge with close friends or gangs. A major problem is that teachers and guidance counselors do not reflect the racial composition of the student body; some have little understanding of their backgrounds and heritage; ii) In the community, students may be subject to racial profiling.

3) Inadequate curriculum: i) The curriculum does not include the non-West, and even if it does, the course is taught from a racist perspective; ii) The students are rarely given an opportunity to explore their history, culture and language within the curriculum.

4) Suppressed identity: The non-Western teacher found a need to keep a low profile in schools, to avoid any conflict with other teachers over aspects of her heritage or political affiliations.

5) Inadequate cultural activities: Just having multicultural assemblies that celebrate difference without attending to power differences between and among groups is not sufficient to address the diversity of our schools.

6) Inadequate textbooks: The textbooks do not include Asian countries, e.g. China

7) Inadequate tolerance of difference in classrooms: e.g. intolerance of Chinese communism in the classroom

Problems identified in the Roundtable

The problems identified may be grouped under the following categories:

- 1) Students
- 2) Teachers
- 3) Community
- 4) University
- 5) Schools, School Boards and Ministry of Education
- 6) Curriculum, resources and cultural activities

1) Students:

- i) High school students are not always conscious of latent racism in schools.
- ii) High school students need to be educated on Asian Canadian history.
- iii) Children of new immigrants have to enter a new education system, and may experience a superiority-inferiority complex and stress related to accommodating the new education system e.g. learning English.
- iv) While there are various provisions in schools to address minority cultural history, such as Multicultural Day or history courses, students feel that they are uncertain where they stand, since the curriculum does not deal with their heritage in depth.
- v) There is a need to define racism. Students may think that they are not subject to racism because they may not be aware that racism goes beyond name calling. Racism is also systemic, in that it is in textbooks, in how minority groups are portrayed, for example.
- vi) Cultural history education should be bottom up rather than top down. Teachers should allow students to create their own personal histories by exploring their personal lived experiences, rather than telling the students their cultural history. Students should grow up understanding history through their own research, and construct and understand what they are.

2) Teachers:

- i) There is a need for teacher education to be inclusive of issues concerning racism and the contributions of minority groups in Canada. Teachers need to update themselves continuously in dealing with Asian Canadian students and in addressing racism and equity issues.
- ii) Teachers need to be aware that some forms of anti-racist and multicultural education, the teachers may be promoting racism and stereotypes, e.g., the uncritical celebration of multiculturalism.
- iii) There is a need to address anti-racism, social justice and equity correctly by providing teachers the tools. This may be achieved through teacher education and by examining real cases of individual biases in schools.
- iv) The teachers' mode of presenting the cultural history curriculum is important.

- v) The teachers have to be attentive to how foreign countries are portrayed, and to how issues may be received by their audience.
- vi) Teachers have to encourage students to be more critical.
- vii) Educators teaching anti-racism have to reflect on themselves critically, and note that the definition of identity is open-ended. The self has limitless potential for development and should not be reduced to racial stereotypes.
- viii) While it is important for school boards to have anti-discrimination and multicultural policies, teachers are ultimately the change agents in the classroom. Their important role needs to be taken seriously by boards of education and by themselves.

3) Community:

- i) Community bodies (such as Chinese Canadian National Council) have a role to play in educating students.
- ii) Young people are needed to champion for Asian Heritage Month. They should be involved in preparations and celebration of AHM. Their voices should be central to AHM.
- iii) Asian Heritage Month events are not just for Asians, but are for all Canadians.
- iv) There is a need to reach out to younger people and to encourage them to think of Asian values and virtues that are shared by everybody.
- v) Media coverage of the Asian Heritage Month is inadequate. Often, media coverage does not reach mainstream audience.
- vi) The Anti-racist and Multicultural Educators Network of Ontario (AMENO) invites teachers to think about their own bias, address structural problems and lobby to make changes.
- vii) People are resources.
- viii) Asian Heritage Month can provide a focus to sum up a whole set of critical thinking to put things together.
- ix) Critical awareness can be raised by inviting people to talk about themselves.
- x) Dialogue between racial groups is important because their struggles are interrelated.
- xi) Participating in democratic elections is essential.
- xii) Community groups take part in the educational process by getting involved in activities in the schools.

4) University:

- i) The university can be a partner in teacher training, and can out-reach to school boards formally.
- ii) Educational research can and should address the special needs of new immigrant children.
- iii) Those in the university can form a small caucus.
- iv) Curriculum reform in the university is needed because this would ultimately have an impact in curriculum reform in the schools.

5) Schools, School Boards and Ministry of Education:

- i) School boards and the provincial government should recognize that teachers need continuing education.

- ii) There is a need to create mechanisms for implementing recommendations, especially given the present lack of proactive measures by the Ministry of Education. While there are policy documents, there is an absence of representation from the administration, who have the authority to implement policies and recommend changes in schools. Mandatory implementation is needed to break down the racial stereotypes in the classroom.
- iii) Schools should adopt a zero tolerance policy with regard to racism.
- iv) Cultural activities in schools are inadequate. Cultural shows are frequently organized from Westerner's perspectives.
- v) The ways cultural shows are staged may promote cultural discrimination rather than cultural identity.
- vi) The amount of cultural shows for students of Asian heritage is not representative of their population in the schools.
- vii) Regarding racism in schools, there is a need to look at racism as a terminology and how racism is experienced in schools.
- viii) Communities, citizens and organization such as AMENO and the Urban Alliance on Racism should get together to prepare a letter to the school boards and the Ministry of Education. Senator Poy's signature may be sought to support this action. The letter may be sent to the Ministry of Education in the context of equity.

6) Curriculum, resources and cultural activities:

- i) The curriculum should be expanded to include Asian Canadian history.
- ii) The present curriculum is inadequate. The Canadian History curriculum either does not have or does not have enough materials on minority cultural history. Little critical perspective is included.
- iii) The curriculum should focus on equity issues and address injustices such as land claims and genocide related to First Nation People, colonization and slavery in Canada.
- iv) An equitable curriculum may link Asian Canadian History to Canadian history, and explore shared concerns.
- v) There is a need to reorient anti-racist and multicultural education to avoid racism and stereotypes.
- vi) Inadequate curriculum makes students feel left out.
- vii) Ancient civilization courses are seen from Western perspectives covering ancient Rome and Egypt, but leave out other cultures such as Asian, Islamic, Chinese or Indian ancient civilizations.
- viii) There is a need to redefine the "classics" to include minority cultures.
- ix) Anti-racism workshops should start early to benefit younger students.
- x) A central organization is needed to monitor the websites providing the cultural information, to assess whether they are providing the correct information and balanced viewpoints, and to explain reasons for contradiction.
- xi) A list of Asian-Canadian textbooks and literature can be compiled and recommended to school children of different levels.

