



Decolonizing Education: Implications for the Nova Scotia Inclusive Education Policy

Inaugural Annual Deveau/Delmore “Buddy” Daye Learning Institute Lecture — A Summary

Background

On December 18, 2020, the Delmore “Buddy” Daye Learning Institute, in partnership with the University of Toronto/Ontario Institute for Studies in Education’s Centre for Integrative Anti-Racism Studies, and supported financially by the Jeannine Deveau Education Equity Endowment Fund, hosted the first of what is to become an annual lecture series. The inaugural lecture was presented online by the renowned Anti-Racist scholar, Dr. George Sefa Dei (Nana Adusei Sefa Tweneboah) of the University’s Department of Social Justice Education. The lecture was moderated by African Nova Scotian educator, scholar, and advocate, Shaniqwa Thomas; and American Sign Language interpretation was provided by Marcia Adolphe and Carmelle Cachero. Just over 100 people — community members, academics, and educators in Nova Scotia and across Canada — participated in the nearly two-hour event.

Dr. Dei’s lecture, “Decolonizing Education: Implications for the Nova Scotia Inclusive Education Policy,” provided an analysis of the Nova Scotia Department of Education and Early Childhood Education’s *Inclusive Education Policy* from the perspective of decolonization — a perspective that Dr. Dei calls “a political and intellectual act that begins by asking new questions.”

Below are excerpts from the Introduction, Policy Statement, and Policy Objective sections of the *Inclusive Education Policy*; a selection of Dr. Dei’s comments, questions, and recommendations; a selection of comments and questions submitted by participants; and the question of next steps.

Nova Scotia’s Inclusive Education Policy

In a September 9, 2019 press release, the Nova Scotia Department of Education and Early Childhood Development announced a new provincial policy, created in response to a recommendation from the Commission on Inclusive Education, that will “support inclusive education for all students.”

The *Inclusive Education Policy* itself states that inclusive education “is a commitment to ensuring a high-quality, culturally and linguistically responsive and equitable education to support the well-being and achievement of every student. All students should feel that they belong in an inclusive school — accepted, safe, and valued — so they can best learn and succeed.”

The *Policy* states that successful inclusive education requires, as one of seven elements, “a focus on equity by supporting success for students who are historically marginalized and racialized (African Nova Scotian and Mi’kmaq students) or who come from other groups that have been traditionally under-represented and under-served, including, but not limited to, students with special needs and those struggling with poverty.”

Further, the *Policy* states that it “reflects the importance of the well-being of all students and the impact it has on their achievements. [/] Inclusive schools are equitable, and culturally, linguistically, and socially responsive. They have structures, processes, and practices that are student-centred, appropriate, and collaborative.”

Lastly, the stated objective of the *Policy* is to “ensure every student has access to an equitable and high-quality education that is culturally and linguistically responsive, accepting, and respectful in supporting and valuing their learning and diverse abilities.”

The full text of the *Inclusive Education Policy* — its Introduction, Policy Statement, Policy Objective, Guiding Principles, Directives, Roles and Responsibilities, Monitoring, and Application — is available at: Nova Scotia Inclusive Education Policy ([PDF - English](#)) ([PDF - French](#)).

Lecture — A Selection of Dr. Dei’s Comments, Questions, and Recommendations

Below is a selection of comments, questions, and recommendations Dr. Dei made during his lecture. Dr. Dei’s spoken words and slide notes have been paraphrased for the purpose of this summary, with the exception of passages in quotation marks, which have been only lightly edited for clarity. A video recording of Dr. Dei’s lecture is available at ([Video - YouTube](#)); and the slides for his lecture are available at ([PowerPoint Presentation - PDF](#)).

Opening Comment

- After affirming the importance of Sylvia Parris-Drummond’s opening acknowledgement that the Delmore “Buddy” Daye Learning Institute is located in Mi’kma’ki, the ancestral and unceded territory of the Mi’kmaq People, Dr. Dei added that “we also want to recognize our Ancestors and the Elders, both those who are present and those who are here spiritually.”

Key Questions

- “How can we provide anti-colonial, inclusive education to assist young Nova Scotia African and Mi’kmaq learners develop a strong sense of identity, self, and collective agency, resistance, and empowerment?”
- “How do we re-envision schooling and education, espousing at the centre values such as social justice, equity, accountability, resistance, and anti-colonial responsibility?”
- “How do we actualize an ‘Inclusive Education Policy’ on the ground?”

Key Concepts

- “Inclusive education should be a breaking away from the past. ... How do you hope to accomplish change by adding to what already exists? ... That which already exists is the *source* of the problem. ... If you only add instead, you only reproduce the status quo.”

- We can look to Africentric schools and Mi'kmaw Kina'matnewey's schools as "models of anti-colonial and decolonial inclusion."
- Decolonization must be "a subversive approach, not a superficial add on, requiring actions to dismantle and rebuild."

Recommendations for Inclusive Education Policy Documents

- "extensive consultation, communication, and 'buy in' with internal and external bodies/partners, especially the underserved"
- "a systemic/institutional approach with an explicit anti-colonial commitment"
- "acknowledge legacies of racism and oppressions beyond expressed institutional commitments, i.e., how racism and colonial violence manifest themselves within our institutions"
- "comprehensive anti-racist, anti-colonial training for educators and school administrators"
- "identify priority areas for immediate attention/redress"
- "sustained institutional funding commitment to follow through policy goals and recommendations"

Recommendations for Teaching and the Curriculum

- "promote African Nova Scotian/Black, Mi'kmaw, and other racialized communities' cultural knowledges in the curriculum (as defined broadly)"
- "mandate race and anti-Black racism courses in the P-12 curriculum and beyond"
- teach critically, use "critical historical texts that debunk of Greek/Roman Whiteness assertions," and "allow students to see themselves in their own representations"
- "teach omissions and hidden histories that speak to social injustices, violence, and local resistances"
- "teach African Nova Scotian/Black, Mi'kmaw, and other racialized peoples' histories across all grades P-12, beyond the Social Studies curriculum to all subjects, including STEM; and integrate 'African/Indigenous/Asian History Month' year-round in the curriculum"
- "promote Indigenous languages in schools"

Recommendations for the Implementation of a Decolonial Curriculum

- "develop an equity standard assess the effectiveness and success of policy implementation across all courses"
- "[implement] accountability measures to address the 'non performative speech acts' of our institutions (per Sarah Ahmed), i.e., the practice of policy in name only or 'on the books'"

- “incentivise the development of academic programming initiatives that promote decolonizing and anti colonial teaching and learning methodologies”
- “create funds to support such initiatives”

Concluding Remarks

- “reframe schooling as community, i.e., as working with African and Indigenous ideas/conceptions of relationality, sharing, reciprocity, collective responsibility, and accountability”
- “see the school as a ‘place of refuge’ for critical learning; a place for us to be in ... working to tear down colonial structures”
- “refuse coloniality, and ask what schools do we want, and are willing to fight for? (with a knowledge that another possible is possible)”

Participants’ Comments and Questions

Throughout Dr. Dei’s lecture, participants submitted comments and questions online. Below is a sample of the more than two dozen submissions, lightly edited for clarity.

- “Dear Doc. Nana Dei, How do we promote Africentric immersion programs like French Immersion???”
- “On the issue of decolonization. We first have to begin with ourselves. There is a lot of internalized racism in the Black community. Who belongs here, who does not. Who is an African Nova Scotian, and who is not. Some people are denied rights on privileges based on these perceptions. People are outcasted as “foreigners and immigrants.” So we have to start with ourselves in this business of decolonization. In fact, one could say there is an anti-African sentiment in the African Nova Scotian community. The Mi’kmaw community seems to have more unity, at least looking from the outside.”
- “Wonderful presentation, and there is much to reflect on, especially from a rural perspective. Question/comment: It is difficult to get "an explicit anti-colonial commitment" because they have yet to recognize the damage colonization has caused US. How do we get there, because policies don't change mindsets. As an 8th generation ANS [African Nova Scotian], we are far from knowing all of our history.”
- “Prof. Dei, how do you imagine an inclusive policy, curriculum, and pedagogy in Africentricity and disability are at the fore of decolonizing and combating ableism? It seems that the NS policy divides culture, race, indigeneity, and dis/ability in a way that divides and conquers.”
- “There are many grounds for oppression, racism being one; however, in both the well-served groups and under-served groups, there are those oppressed by sexism, those who are economically disadvantaged, etc. How does it impact the dichotomy between the colonizer and the colonized when there are many oppressions that cross-cut both?”
- “We now have a centralized education system that is explicitly run by the province, Minister of Education, since the elimination of [elected] regional school boards. How do we prevent politicians

from performative allyship and false outrage about anti-Black racism, given people of African Ancestry do not constitute a critical mass of population?”

-“Great Presentation!!!”

-“Wow, Thank you so very much. Enlightening.”

Next Steps

African Nova Scotians have a long history of agency and advocacy in education: From the residents of North Preston building a one-room schoolhouse in their community in 1816; to the African Methodist Episcopal Church starting schools for African Nova Scotian children in the 1840s; to African Nova Scotian communities’ numerous petitions against the Free Education Act of 1865 that legalized segregated schools in Nova Scotia; to the founding of the Nova Scotia Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NSAACP) in 1945, with one of its four goals being “to improve the educational opportunities of Colored youth”; to the NSAACP’s role in ending legalized segregated schooling in Nova Scotia in 1954 (though the last segregated school did not close until thirty years later); to the founding of the Black Educators Association in 1969 to “assist African Nova Scotian communities develop strategies toward an equitable education system”; to the Black United Front’s 18-page brief to the *Royal Commission on Education, Public Services, and Provincial-Municipal Relations* in 1971; to the 1994 *BLAC Report on Education*’s forty-six recommendations to create a “quality education system for Black learners in Nova Scotia”; to the late Wade Smith’s call for Africentric schools in 2006; to Black parents and students’ repeated challenges to the Halifax Regional Centre for Education’s attempts to close Saint Patrick’s-Alexandra School, prior to its eventual closure in 2011; to the Digby Education Committee’s settlement agreement with the Tri-County Regional Centre for Education, Nova Scotia Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, and Nova Scotia Teachers Union in 2011; to Black voices in the summer and fall of 2020 calling for the Nova Scotia government to fulfil its legislated duty to fill 13 vacant seats on the Council on African Canadian Education; to two young African Nova Scotian women leading a “Black Minds Matter” walkout at their high school in November 2020 to protest racist behaviour in the school and a lack of Black history and culture in the curriculum; to countless other instances of resistance and action; there has never been a time when African Nova Scotian organizations, communities, and individuals have not worked to create an education system that is, to use the words of the *BLAC Report on Education* twenty-seven years ago, “equitable, accessible, inclusive for all learners.”

The African Nova Scotian community’s friend and ally Dr. George Sefa Dei has shared with us a thought-provoking analysis of the Nova Scotia Department of Education and Early Childhood Development’s *Inclusive Education Policy*, and has challenged Nova Scotia to create an explicitly anti-colonial and anti-racist public education system to better serve our learners, and all learners. Thank you, Nana!

So the question then becomes: In keeping with our long history of agency and advocacy, how are we, the African Nova Scotian community — along with our allies in government, in education, in academia, and in the wider Nova Scotian community — going to take up Dr. Dei’s challenge?