

**Full Paper Submission to  
8th Equality, Diversity and Inclusion International Conference  
Recanat Business School, Tel-Aviv University (Israel)  
6-8 July 2015**

Stream 11

Making it Work beyond the Classroom: The Impact of Education and Training on Changes in  
Multicultural Identities, Diversity Beliefs and Attitudes

---

**More than a Handbook of Strategies: Self-Reflexive and Ethical Approaches to Integrating Black  
Youth in the Canadian Workforce**

Andrea A. Davis  
Associate Professor, York University, Toronto, Canada

**Abstract**

This paper offers an intervention into current conversations about cultural competencies in the workforce by reflecting on the specific experiences of Black Canadian youth in Canada's largest and most diverse city, Toronto. Locating its analysis of cultural competencies within the context of Canada's official multiculturalism policy, the paper begins by analyzing the usefulness of cultural competency theories in understanding and mediating the diverse ethnic and cultural relationships in Canadian society. Drawing particularly on Pon's (2009) critique of cultural competence as a new kind of racism, the paper suggests that the call for cultural competencies, like Canada's position on multiculturalism, rather than alleviating cultural inequities, runs the risk of obscuring how social and economic power operate to uphold whiteness as cultural norm. The paper concludes by drawing on findings from the research partnership, "Youth and Community Development in Canada and Jamaica: A Transnational Approach to Youth Violence," conducted between 2011 and 2014 and funded by the Social Science and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC), in an effort to promote discussions about how we might genuinely advance cultural competencies in Canada. It argues that not much will change for Black youth in Toronto if their social contexts remain unchanged, and if genuine and safe spaces are not provided for intercultural conversations about race and racism in Canada.

## **More than a Handbook of Strategies: Self-Reflexive and Ethical Approaches to Integrating Black Youth in the Canadian Workforce**

Andrea A. Davis

While cultural intelligence is a fairly recent concept, it has gained significant traction in the twenty-first century, now forming the basis of a widely respected theoretical framework seen as essential to success in businesses and governments within a growing context of transnationalism and globalization. This paper seeks to reflect on questions of cultural intelligence and its related concept, cultural competence, by examining the particular demands of cross-cultural relationships in Canada, the only country in the world with an official policy of multiculturalism. Drawing on current debates about the usefulness of cultural competencies as a way of measuring success in negotiating cultural diversity and difference, the paper examines what meanings the questions raised by these debates might have for Black youth struggling to integrate in the Canadian workforce. To better interrogate these questions, the paper locates the debates about cultural competencies alongside findings from a three-year transnational study of the effects of violence on Black youth in Canada and Jamaica. Drawing specifically on the study's findings that the institutional violence of racism and poverty are most pervasive and damaging in the lives of Black youth, the paper seeks to unpack how cultural racism operates in a multicultural Canadian society and the resulting implications for ongoing studies about cultural intelligence and competencies.

### **Defining Cultural Intelligence**

Introduced by Earley and Ang (2003), cultural intelligence is now widely recognized as the most critical component of the forms of intelligence (along with emotional, personal and social intelligence) required to successfully negotiate new cultural environments. Defined in its most simple terms as “a person's capability to adapt effectively to new cultural contexts” (Earley & Ang, 2003, p. 59), cultural intelligence is a multidimensional construct involving cognitive, motivational and behavioral skills (Ang, et al., 2007, p. 337). While metacognition, cognition and motivation are mental

capabilities, behavioral intelligence is expressed through verbal and non-verbal actions (Ang et al., 2007, p. 338) and has more to do with what one does, rather than how one thinks (Ang, et al., 2007, p. 337). Perhaps most importantly, according to its proponents, cultural intelligence can be learned by highly motivated individuals using a common metric to make sense of their new cultural landscapes (Earley & Ang, 2003, p. 61). Training in cultural intelligence, not surprisingly, targets identified skill areas by increasing the ability to decode new cultural cues, the desire to adapt to new cultural environments, and the potential to enact more culturally appropriate behaviors (Tan & Chua, 2003, p. 261). Livermore (2015) has further developed a four-step cycle—drive, knowledge, strategy and action—to help increase and measure cultural intelligence. Each step in the cycle raises a key question that can help leaders assess their own cultural intelligence and develop strategies for advancing cultural competencies: What is your motivation? What information do you need? What is your plan? And, what behaviors do you need to adapt? (Livermore, 2010, p. 3-4). Within the context of an aggressively competitive global market, as well as increasingly diverse societies, like Canada, organizations and governments both nationally and internationally are demanding more and more tools and resources to maximize success and gain a competitive advantage, thus increasing the demand for cultural intelligence training and greater cultural competencies.

Understood as “a set of congruent behaviors, attitudes, and policies” that converge in a system, agency or among professionals to enable effective exchange in cross-cultural situations (Cross, Bazron, Dennis, & Isaacs, 1989, p. vi), cultural competence represents the cumulative skills acquired through training to respond effectively in the workforce across a range of differences, including language, class, race, ethnicity and religion in ways that recognize and affirm the values of diverse cultures (Tan & Chua, 2003, p. 263). Crucial to cultural competence as an ongoing process, however, is not only the acquisition of new skills, but also the willingness to accept differences, learn and unlearn patterns of behavior, and confront and challenge stereotypes and biases (Tan & Chua, 2003, p. 263). Beyond any prescriptions in a policy manual, cultural competence incorporates a demonstration of respect,

acceptance and willingness to be open, to challenge one's own frame of reference, and to learn from new ways of being and interacting with others (Nurses' Association of Toronto, 2007, p. 28).

Herein lies one of the critical problems with cultural intelligence—the recognition that attitudinal components of cultural competence can be encouraged, but cannot be taught. Deeply engrained racial, gender and class biases and stereotypes, for example, established and normalized through historical practice, mediate in individual and group behavioral patterns and are very difficult to dislodge. Any discussion of cultural competence, therefore, must take into account the social contexts out of which cross-cultural interactions occur and the sociocultural barriers (including organizational and structural barriers) that hamper genuine cross-cultural understanding (Betancourt, Green, Carillo, & Ananeh-Firempong, 2003). While, as Tan and Chua concede, “cultural competence does not come naturally and requires a high level of professionalism and knowledge” (Tan & Chua, 2003, p. 263), evidence suggests, nonetheless, that cultural competencies create workplaces in which employees experience cultural safety, diversity is celebrated, and curiosity, creativity, innovation, and engagement are encouraged (Nurses' Association of Toronto, 2007, p. 37). In this kind of win-win situation, everyone seems to benefit.

A significant number of studies have, indeed, demonstrated the positive outcomes associated with higher cultural intelligence (Ang et al., 2007; Earley & Peterson, 2004; Eisenberg et al., 2013; Livermore, 2010; Thomas & Fitzsimmons, 2008). According to Livermore, cultural intelligence is not just important for demonstrating personal and collegial respect, but directly influences the potential for companies to succeed by helping management and leaders understand their diverse customer base, manage diverse workplaces and cross-border teams, recruit and develop the best talent, and adapt their leadership style (Livermore, 2010). Business executives who prioritize cultural intelligence benefit from enhanced performance, better decision-making, greater flexibility, international expansion and a higher degree of personal satisfaction (Livermore, 2010).

In addition, there is much at stake in the development of cultural competencies for a country like Canada that relies heavily on immigration and where individuals, organizations and government agencies have to interact across multiple cultural boundaries on a daily basis. Eighty percent of new Canadian immigrants are now arriving from non-white and non-European countries, are younger on average than other Canadians, and do not speak English or French as their first language (Nurses' Association of Toronto, 2007, p. 17). The changing demographics of Canadian society makes it important to address "the challenge of diversity" in order to minimize practices and attitudes that limit the potential of an increasing number of Canadians (Nurses' Association of Toronto, 2007, p. 17).

### **Cultural Competence or New Racism?**

In seeking to respond to current discussions about cultural intelligence and to locate those discussions within a specifically Canadian context, this paper is, however, cognizant of and sensitive to critiques of the deployment of discourse around cultural competencies in Canada as a new form of racism (Pon, 2009). While, as demonstrated, a significant number of studies laud the positive outcomes associated with higher cultural intelligence, some researchers raise concerns about problematic assumptions encoded within understandings of cultural competence that view cultures, for example, as fixed and static and, therefore, knowable. More and more researchers are calling for an understanding of cultural competence not so much as a defined set of skills and knowledge in which management and social practitioners can become proficient, but rather as an ongoing, negotiated social process and way of being (Moloi & Bam, 2014; Morris, 2010; Olsen, Bhattacharya, & Scharf, 2006; Sakamoto, 2007). According to Olsen, Bhattacharya, and Scharf:

Cultural competency is not a destination. The work of bridging cultures and creating responsive services is never 'done.' Communities continue to change. Service providers continue to interact with new cultural groups. And as individuals, we continue to discover new layers of our own cultural assumptions. Because of this, the development of cultural competency may be best thought of not as arriving at a set of skills and

knowledge, but rather as a journey and a way of being. (Olsen, Bhattacharya, & Scharf, 2006, p. 3)

Cultural competence, therefore, demands a high degree of self-reflexivity and ongoing commitment to personal and organizational change by recognizing that cultures are not static or fixed but are shaped by the shifting and evolving cultural contexts out of which they emerge. Made up of not only the beliefs, but also assumptions about behavior, roles, responsibilities and even body language transmitted over many generations, all cultures themselves construct normative and hegemonic practices that are often invisible to those within the cultural group. In this regard, it is important to remember that not only are cultures not static, but there is diversity even within cultures, and cultural differences are complicated by differences in status and power between the cultural groups in any given society (Olsen, Bhattacharya, & Scharf, 2006; Sakamoto, 2007).

Cultural competence approaches and practice have been critiqued precisely, however, for their tendency toward the apolitical and reluctance to incorporate any real analysis of how power operates within societies and across cultural groups. In this way, systems of oppression, including racism, sexism, ageism, homophobia, Islamaphobia and ableism, which operate primarily from a place of fear of differences can be effectively ignored (Sakamoto, 2007; Sue & Sue, 2003). Practitioners and service providers who are targeted for cultural intelligence training or assessment are also assumed to be culturally neutral, white, middle-class, and constituting the norm (Sakamoto, 2007). The process toward cultural competence needs to recognize that there is a hierarchy of cultural differences in any given society and that for marginalized groups in North America with the least access to institutional resources or social power, the lack of cultural competence on the part of service providers or law enforcement officers can be a matter of life or death. Disproportionately in North America, immigrants and members of racialized communities, including Aboriginal peoples in Canada, live in the poorest communities, attend overcrowded schools with the least resources, hold jobs that no one else wants, and have limited access to healthcare (Olsen, Bhattacharya, & Scharf, 2006).

To move conversations about cultural competence away from the problematic management of cultural differences and to better interrogate the dynamics of power at play in cultural and social relationships, Sakamoto calls for a “re-visioning of cultural competence that is simultaneously framed by anti-oppressive principles while also being open to different ways of knowing” (Sakamoto, 2007, p. 109). Cultural competence is possible only when we develop attitudes of “empathy, comfort with differences, self-awareness and reflectiveness, flexibility, and an appreciation of multiple perspectives” (Olsen, Bhattacharya, & Scharf, 2006, p. 6).

While these voices are critical of some of the absences in contemporary discussions about cultural competence, they insist that it is both possible and necessary. In his 2009 article, “Cultural competency as new racism: An ontology of forgetting,” Pon, however, goes much further by calling for a jettisoning of the term altogether. Cultural competency, he argues, employs modernist and absolutist views of culture in stereotypical ways to “otherize” non-whites, calling on oppressive systems of marginalization such as colonization and racism, even while being careful to avoid explicitly racist language (Pon, 2009). In this way, theories about cultural competence function covertly like new or cultural racism to promote the “ontology of forgetting Canada’s history of colonialism and racism” (Pon, 2009, p. 60). This ontology of forgetting implicates Canada for its strategic silences concerning the nation’s role in the genocide and subjugation of Aboriginal peoples, the absencing of the historical Black presence in Canada, and ongoing exercises in white supremacy and racism. Cultural competency discourses free assumed white, middle-class and culturally normative service providers and practitioners from the burden of remembering the history of social violence embedded in the power and privilege of their own whiteness and Canada’s history of white supremacy, by allowing them to romanticize Canada’s construction of its own and their innocence and benevolence (Pon, 2009).

Contesting the notion of culture as present only in the bodies of immigrant newcomers, Pon further challenges, like Sakamoto, the assumption of Canadian culture as neutral and insists that the history of non-white peoples in Canada necessarily troubles any notion of a pure or absolute Canadian

culture; this pretense of absolutism functioning merely as one way to fix racialized experiences as different and accidental, and as always belonging outside the nation state (Pon, 2009, p. 67-68). Pon cautions against “a rush to practice” or the desire to quickly master and apply knowledge to others, which avoids the hard work necessary for an honest and genuine engagement with difficult knowledges. In a diverse society, like Canada, where questions of cultural difference are not isolated to the management of cross-cultural teams within organizations but increasingly inform daily relationships, what is necessary is a prioritization of self-knowledge and the recognition of the ways in which we are variously implicated in existing processes established and reified through racism and colonialism.

### **New Racism and Canada’s Policy of Multiculturalism**

Other Canadian scholars support Pon’s suggestion of a new racism at play in Canada. In his discussion of multicultural racism in Canada, Augie Fleras (2004), argues that despite multicultural policies that seek to identify Canada as a site of mutually beneficial social and cultural exchange, what is most often deployed in Canadian social relationships is a practice of “multicultural fundamentalism” that “‘miniaturizes’ other cultures even when celebrating diversity” (Fleras, 2004, p. 431). This cultural devaluation is achieved because the hegemonic Eurocentric ethos is positioned as “the universally assumed norm” against which other miniaturized cultures are evaluated (Fleras, 2004, p. 431). Multicultural racism locates its fear of racial differences, therefore, not in intolerance for cultural diversity, *per se*, but in the impatience with the kind of diversity that resists the goals of cultural conformity and national integration (Davis, n.d.).

An official policy of multiculturalism has, therefore, not led to increased equality for members of ethnic and racialized minority groups in Canada, but has instead functioned to preserve Canada’s cultural duality as a British (primarily) and French (secondarily) society in the Americas (Saloojee, 2004; Walcott, 2003). As Walcott explains, multicultural policy in Canada:



Textually inscribes those who are not French or English as Canadians, and yet at the same time it works to textually render a continued understanding of those people as from somewhere else and thus as tangential to the nation-state. It also characterizes those others as people whose static cultural practices are located both in a past and an elsewhere. (Walcott, 2003, p. 77)

In obfuscating questions of social citizenship and rights of belonging, the official state policy of multiculturalism further depoliticizes the issue of racism in Canada by keeping marginalized communities focused on their cultural differences, rather than on issues of systemic racial discrimination and exclusion in society (Bannerji, 2000; Saloojee, 2004). By deflecting critical attention away from the racializing nature of Canadian political economy, multiculturalism functions as “a political discourse of assimilation which keeps the so-called immigrants in place through a constantly deferred promise” (Bannerji, 2000, p. 9). Walcott further echoes Pon’s call for the kind of national remembering that will account ethically for the ways power mediates and manages social relationships in Canada by erasing or rewriting some bodies and cultural presences in order not to disrupt the script of normative Canadianness:

In a Canadian context, writing blackness is a scary scenario: we are an absented presence always under erasure. Located between the U.S. and the Caribbean, Canadian blackness is a bubbling brew of desires for elsewhere, disappointments in the nation and the pleasures of exile – even for those who have resided here for many generations. (Walcott, 2003, p. xiii)

What is required, according to Saloojee, is a more proactive multiculturalism policy “that is anti-racist, accommodates the needs of the First Nations peoples as well as the needs of racialized and newcomer minority communities, and creates conditions in which they can all develop their talents and capacities and become valued and respected as contributing members of society” (Saloojee, 2004, p. 422).

## **Multicultural Racism and Black Youth in Canada**

Incorporating Pon's critique of cultural racism and the critiques of Canada's multicultural policy, alongside the lessons learnt from the cross-cultural youth project I headed between 2011 and 2014, this paper seeks to now understand how we might engage a more meaningful "self-reflexive grappling with racism and colonialism" (Pon, 2009, p. 47) that takes into account the racialized experiences of Black youth in Canada's most diverse city, Toronto. While agreeing with Pon's critique of the limitations of cultural competence, the paper seeks to explore the potential for strategies in cultural education, interaction and exchange that might go beyond the development of a mere handbook of cultural competency strategies to both allow for meaningful interventions in Black youth employment opportunities and enhance organizations' abilities to function effectively in highly diverse, multicultural societies, like Canada. In this regard, the paper seeks to respond to the following question raised in stream 11 of the 2015 Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Conference: through which means can we change individuals' diversity beliefs [in Canada] so that they see cultural/ethnic diversity as an advantage at work [and in the wider society] rather than a hindrance?

The research partnership, "Youth and Community Development in Canada and Jamaica: A Transnational Approach to Youth Violence," involved a multidisciplinary research team from eight university and community organizations in Canada and Jamaica and was funded by the Social Science and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC). The research partnership facilitated the travel of a core group of 20 youth, ages 16 to 26, who participated in the project over its three years, across their respective national and cultural boundaries and provided opportunities for collaboration through research with other youth (youth forums and focus groups); educational interventions (history and literature workshops); and artistic training and performances (theatre and photography). The overarching goals of the project were to examine the intersections in the life experiences of Black Canadian and Jamaican youth, particularly in their perceptions of and experiences with physical and systemic violence, and to assess the impact of this violence on their educational and employment

trajectories.

The project originated from the assumption that more critical scholarship is needed to help Canadian institutions and lawmakers better understand how and why Black Canadian youth, especially in Toronto—Canada's largest and most diverse city—remain entrenched on the socio-economic and cultural margins of the society and why they continue to struggle to build clear pathways to success. While acknowledging youth as important assets in Canada's long-term national growth, the partnership recognized that youth, because of distinctions of race, ethnicity, class, sexual orientation, educational opportunities and geography, have differential access to the tools necessary for full engagement and that racialized youth, in particular, routinely feel marginalized and alienated (Dei, 1995; Gariba, 2009; James & Brathwaite, 1996).

The decision to expand the project to include an integrated study of Black Canadian and Jamaican youth emerged out of Toronto's specific social context in which violent crimes are linked consistently with performances of Jamaican masculinity, leading to growing negative assumptions about Black youth. Although studies of violence among racialized Canadian youth have identified poverty, racism, the educational system, family, health and community infrastructure as the primary causes (Abebe & Fortier, 2008; McMurtry & Curling, 2008; Wortley & Tanner, 2003), public opinion in Toronto has explicitly linked increases in violent crimes to Jamaican immigrants and youth of Jamaican descent (Chan & Merchandani, 2002; Frum, 2006; Henry & Tator, 2005; Rivers, 2005). These social opinions persist in part because violence proliferates in Jamaica, especially among male youth. In 2000, 20 to 25 year-old males were the principal offenders in major crimes in Jamaica and accounted for 37 percent of all murders (World Bank, 2003). Importantly, increases in violent crimes in Jamaica have also been blamed on the failure of countries, like Canada, to integrate young immigrants into full social participation (Headley, 2006). As the largest representatives of Black peoples in Canada, Jamaican Canadians, through the racialization of crime, have thus come to embody the most negative constructions of blackness as threatening difference in a country that still privileges a British

cultural “ideal” (Davis, n.d.).

While the research partnership was not designed explicitly with the goal of affecting cultural competencies, it was very much interested in developing the social competence of youth. According to Ma (2012), building social competence in youth involves increasing their ability to build positive interpersonal relationships and resolve interpersonal conflicts, develop self- and national identities, and become oriented toward responsible and caring citizenship in their societies and the world. In this sense, the partnership was designed to encourage changes in the behavior and action of Black youth in Canada and Jamaica, helping them challenge physical and systemic violence by rearticulating social identities through the arts, social history and literature. Drawing on Canadian research that confirms the connection between cultural engagement and civic involvement and its role in promoting behavioral and emotional wellbeing (Coles, 2007; Fix & Sivak, 2007; Grassroots Youth Collaborative, 2008; Wright & John, 2001; Wright, John, & Sheel, 2005), the partnership also sought to determine whether social competence might be enhanced for black youth in Toronto and Jamaica through programs that facilitate a greater understanding of the social, cultural and historical contexts that link their experiences across national borders. The partnership sought specifically to explore the extent to which cooperatively developed arts-based programs and educational interventions in the humanities could help youth understand the intersections in their cultural histories, develop a clearer sense of individual and social identity, and realize greater positive engagement in their societies.

Early findings from the project revealed that youth consistently prioritized systemic violence (poverty in Jamaica and racism in Canada) over physical violence. While youth did not ignore physical violence, they saw it as resulting largely from social alienation, poverty and racism (Davis, 2012, p. 333). More specifically, while Jamaican youth identified an unwilling disengagement from school because of a lack of resources, Black Canadian youth in resource-rich schools willfully disengaged from processes of learning in which they were stereotyped and culturally erased. Black Canadian youth, in fact, expressed deep dissatisfaction with Canadian educational practices at the elementary,

secondary and post-secondary levels, identifying systemic violence in the educational system as the most pervasive and traumatic violence they experienced (Davis, 2012, p. 337). Identifying themselves as written out of Canada's history and rendered culturally obsolete—the primary reason for their social and political disengagement—youth repeatedly demanded changes in school curricula to acknowledge the diverse cultural histories of Black peoples (Davis, 2012, p. 338).

Black Canadian youth also felt they were negatively judged based on their age, race and perceived social class as mostly first- or second-generation immigrants. In recognizing these intersecting oppressions, youth identified young Black men in “priority neighborhoods”<sup>i</sup> as the most vulnerable to physical and systemic violence and critiqued the ways in which male youth are stereotyped and profiled by the police (Davis, 2012, p. 337). Findings revealed, in fact, that negative constructions of Black masculinity within the educational system and by law enforcement officers translated into deeply entrenched cycles of discrimination and marginalization for poor Black male youth in Toronto who find themselves almost permanently locked outside of the usual processes of social integration and mobility accessible through advancement in the labor force.

### **Black Youth and the Canadian Labor Force**

This paper begins with but ultimately seeks to go beyond the research partnership. The partnership, with its emphasis on changing the behavior of marginalized, racialized youth, allows the space within this paper to reflect on the concerns raised by youth themselves as they negotiated successfully with each other across multiple cultural boundaries. The concerns that emerge out of this cross-cultural exchange allows us to consider how we might change public perception *about* these youth, while identifying strategies to build strong multicultural relationships in the workplace and beyond. In so doing, the paper considers key implications in discussions about building cultural competencies in Canada. It argues that not much will change for Black youth if their social contexts

---

<sup>i</sup> This is a term used to describe 31 designated “at-risk” racialized and immigrant neighborhoods in Canada. Neighborhoods are designated based on a number of socio-economic indicators, including

remain unchanged, and if genuine and safe spaces are not provided for intercultural conversations about race and racism in Canada.

The findings used in this paper's discussion emerge out of two all-male focus groups held between May and June 2013 in Toronto. A total of 24 Black males between the ages of 18 and 24 participated in the focus groups.<sup>ii</sup> Participants were recruited through local youth organizations in Toronto and meetings took place in their local communities. To encourage trust, as the principal investigator I introduced the project and ensured that participants understood that their involvement was voluntary and could be withdrawn at any time.<sup>iii</sup> Once the informed consent forms were signed, I left and did not participate further in the focus groups. This was to ensure that participants were not made to feel uncomfortable because of my gender, age and social and class position as a university professor and would be, therefore, less likely to censor their conversations. Community youth leaders, who lived in those communities and with whom the youth were familiar, were briefed by the project team ahead of the focus group and facilitated the sessions. Using a combination of preset questions and free-flowing conversation, youth were specifically asked to describe and discuss their experiences—if any—with violence. Each session took approximately ninety minutes and was tape-recorded. Racialized graduate students, working on the project, functioned as note-takers and transcribers. This paper draws only on those findings relevant to discussions about young Black men's social integration, education and upward mobility through the labour force.

In discussing constructions of black masculinity, Black youth participating in the study recognized immediately the ways in which their racialized status, gender, age and class combined to mark them as a visible threat and danger in the Canadian imaginary, and they were very well aware of how these constructions circulated in the media and affected their long-term chances of social

---

<sup>ii</sup> The research also included one all-female focus group, but those findings are not included here.

<sup>iii</sup> The findings from another male and female integrated focus group are also not included, as one male member of that group did not provide consent.

integration. One youth, for example, described the specific association between Black masculinity and violence:

It's something that was portrayed on the news. And they associated violence with Black youth basically. [But] violence is not associated with a specific skin tone, with a specific race. Violence is something that's always been around you.

By insisting that violence informs the very fabric of Canadian society, this youth deflected accusations about his blackness, maleness and age back on to the wider society. Another youth importantly flagged Canadian society's lack of information or low cultural intelligence about Black youth's experiences in the city as framing the ways in which they were differentially constructed:

Those that are making decisions for the black community and for low-income neighbourhoods are people that have never experienced it. And, the voices of Black youth are not being heard. So, I think a big misunderstanding is these people—lawmakers, decision makers—are not actually in the community, so they don't know the experience. They're looking on it from the outside view and they're not getting the voice of these youth 'cause a lot of them want to do better but they don't necessarily know how to do better.

By calling the wider society to be accountable, to *seek to know* how differences of race, gender, class and age operate in Toronto's diverse communities, the youth were calling for reflections on how cultural racism intervened in their social and cultural interactions within the very society in which they were born, marking their cultural identities as permanently fixed, unchangeable and unknowable.

In elaborating further on the cultural misunderstandings that frame discussion of Black youth and their experiences with violence, one youth responded by addressing directly the question of choice:

I think the biggest misunderstanding is that a lot of people think that violence is a choice, like it's cool, like people do this just to do it. But . . . a lot of it is not necessarily a choice.

By critiquing the notion of choice, this youth was responding strategically to the most often stated accusation that minority cultural groups that fail to advance in their societies are really hampered by their own poor choices, rather than a lack of opportunities. In North America, this critique is levelled most frequently against Black males who are constructed through the mirror images of the criminal and the endangered species (Ferguson, 2000). According to Ferguson, by constructing Black men as either criminal perpetrator or endangered victim, we hold them responsible for their fate: “the discourse of individual choice and responsibility elides the social and economic context and locates predation as coming from within” (Ferguson, 2000, p. 82). As criminal, it is their own maladaptive behavior, then, that causes them to self-destruct and as endangered species, they are unable (unlike others around them) to socially evolve (Ferguson, 2000, p.83).

Another youth clarified the question of individual choice by placing it precisely back within Black youth’s social and class contexts, highlighting the limited options available to young Black men in Toronto:

At the end of the day, you try to better yourself through pursuing school or getting a job. But I wouldn’t be able to get a job because of the address that I have. I’d go to interviews, literally hand out my resume and they’d see my area on the news with some guy getting shot. They’re not going to want to hire me. And sometimes I’d have to change my address. . . . So I change the address to my aunt’s address and do the same thing and then get interviews. And then you notice that, hey, your whole neighbourhood is being stigmatized for being violent and nobody wants to hire you because of that.

It is precisely the limited employment opportunities available to poor Blacks living in Toronto’s inner-cities that cause many Black male youth to perform acts of nihilism, participating part time or wholesale in a drug and gang lifestyle:



So now these guys aren't getting hired. What else are they going to do? They're going to want to sell drugs. They're going to make money off of selling drugs. You can't stop them from selling drugs.

In a North American society where instant gratification is prioritized and constructions of economic success are driven by media images of uber-rich athletes and entertainers, selling drugs can easily be seen as another glamorized lifestyle, allowing already marginalized men to perform some measure of the power and success reserved for white hegemonic masculinity:

If I see my neighbour, Jonathan, went to university and he came back and he's still in the hood and he works at McDonalds, why am I going to go there? Why am I going to put myself in \$40, 000 debt and not have a job after, when Big Joe over there never went to university but he's driving the seven series and always gives me a 20 when I see him? There are more drug dealers willing to employ me and teach me the ropes than there are legal employers. And, those drug dealers are going to pay me a lot more than regular employers [will]. . . . And then look at rappers and the fame—people like when they're being talked about. If I go somewhere and everybody sees my name and they say, "He's making his money; he's making his money," a lot of people like that spotlight, and that kind of life is going to give you that spotlight.

Given these overwhelming odds, youth conceded that their only choice in the search for social upward mobility without the risks of criminal activity was to abandon their communities and families. This, unfortunately, further entrenches the notion that something is intrinsically wrong with those communities, with their cultures and their families, whose members seemingly had failed them by their own inabilities to socially adapt and mirror the class, if not racial, "norms" in the society:

There came a time in my life where I said, hey, I'm going to focus more on school and sports and that helped me get out of the situation. And once I knew that I was kind of bettering myself, I decided to leave the whole community and go to a different city for

university. But even though *you* leave, the situation in your area still happens and when you come back it's still the same thing.

Agreeing that leaving their communities did not create any widespread, long-term or sustainable change, youth suggested a wider range of strategies including greater opportunities for experiences outside their communities and class group, and more diverse role models. One youth articulated, for example, the impossibility of completing the trajectory from university to the labour force (which many middle-class white Canadian children take for granted) without strategic support and motivation:

In order to make a change is to be able to spotlight the positive stuff that young black people are doing in the community and give them other outlets, give them more opportunities, and allow them to see other black people that are doing positive things. 'Cause, I'm not going to want to go to university if I don't see other people going to university doing stuff with their degree. 'Cause, lawyers don't live in the hood; doctors don't live in the hood, and these people that are doctors and lawyers don't come back to the hood and show these youth that they made it. So, if I'm not seeing it, how am I supposed to act out what I'm not seeing? If there are no positive people for me to look up to, then how do you expect me to do that? That stuff is almost impossible.

Youth, in calling for a wider range of role models and mentors, also offered a critique of the cultural assumptions made about Black masculinity, that assume that Black boys are not good in academics but are "natural" athletes or have the assumed cultural capital as "natural" performers to make it in the music industry:

Why do we have rappers? Why do we have sport athletes in the schools taking to kids? Why do we not have black doctors, black teachers, black billionaires in the schools talking to these kids? I think just as important as it is to publicize sports and athletes, you should have this doctor or this lawyer come and show that there are different

opportunities out there. It's emphasizing and publicizing positive black people, so that these kids do have a role model.

In this study as in the earlier findings, despite the negative social odds they face, Black Canadian youth demonstrate attitudes of extreme resiliency and are willing to take responsibility for their future outcomes. They also recognize that change is difficult and continue to call for social and institutional resources that can help them take the steps they need to greater integration and economic and social success in Canadian society:

For me, you act out what you see. So, if I see negative I'm going to act out negative because negative is what I know; negative is safe. Success is scary. Positive is scary. Change is scary. So, making the transition to these stuff a lot easier is what's going to change our lives.

### **More than a Handbook of Strategies**

Drawing on the voices of the youth involved in this research study, the cooperative strategies they envision for change in their lives and in their communities, this paper concludes by offering three interrelated and long-term initiatives as potential critical practices in the development of cultural competencies in Canadian workplaces, particularly in the integration of Black youth employees. These strategies respond to three of the steps in Livermore's four-step cycle: knowledge, strategy and action (Livermore, 2015). They assume that Livermore's first step, drive, has already been developed at the organizational or individual level.

#### **1. Critical education workshops:**

These workshops respond to the knowledge requirement in Livermore's model by providing the information needed to better understand the cultural, class and racial differences that separate Black Canadian youth in Toronto's priority neighbourhoods from most white and middle- and upper-class youth. The workshops should provide instruction in the historical and social contexts of Black people's lives in Canada that would engage questions about cultural and systemic violence, historical erasure

and the absencing of the Black presence in Canada, and racism. Local members of Black community organizations could facilitate these workshops, as they did the project's focus groups discussions, providing both training for organizations and employment for youth.

## **2. Sponsorship of high-achieving youth:**

This second strategy responds to the strategy component of Livermore's model, by providing a plan to move beyond the mere acquisition of knowledge gained about Black communities in Canada to actually contributing to critical change in these communities. This strategy would require organizations to sponsor high-achieving racialized youth, living in priority neighborhoods, by providing them not only with scholarships for university education and training, but also ongoing mentorship and role modeling.

## **3. Hiring of qualified youth:**

The third strategy moves beyond knowledge acquisition and sponsorship to engage Livermore's final step in his process: action. It follows logically from the first two strategies with the assumption that at least some of the sponsored youth will successfully complete university and be incorporated as employees within the organization, putting in place the process to create a more culturally diverse workplace in a way that is genuine and self-reflexive, as well as transformative for everyone involved. Mentorship would need to continue for another two to three year period until the young employee is fully acclimated. Once the three strategies are completed, the cycle can resume with the integrated young employees leading critical education workshops and serving as mentors.

All three strategies are interdependent and sequential and require considerable commitment over perhaps a ten-year period. This avoids, however, what Pon identifies as a "rush to practice" or the temptation to apply quick and easy knowledge, which avoids the hard work of honest and genuine engagement (Pon, 2009). By encouraging a thoughtful and respectful engagement of cultural differences that understands cultural learning as ongoing and as shared, these strategies are also sensitive to Olsen, Bhattacharya, and Scharf's (2006) insistence that cultural competence be seen as a

negotiated social process and way of being (Olsen, Bhattacharya, & Scharf, 2006). They also take into account the recognition that cultural differences are mediated by systems and relationships of power that seek to maintain certain cultural hierarchies of power (Pon, 2009; Sakamoto, 2007).

While none of these strategies have yet to be tested in any empirical studies, they are meant to begin a conversation about how we might bridge the gap between cultural competence as a mere set of transferable skills/knowledge and meaningful social practice. They also provide a critical starting point from which to begin to engage new ideas about cultural competencies in relationship to questions about race and racism. Cultural competence, Olsen, Bhattacharya, and Olsen acknowledge, “is not a luxury, but an important foundation for organizations—making it possible to serve all communities, bridge across differences, and ultimately improve the social, health and educational outcomes of children and youth” (Olsen, Bhattacharya, & Scharf, 2006, p. 4). This study agrees.

It is my hope that the strategies proposed in this paper will constitute the next stage of my research project. It is also my hope that this intervention from the Humanities and from the perspective of Black Canadian youth will raise thoughtful questions that may otherwise have been missed in debates both for and against cultural intelligence and competence. It seeks to encourage the further development of interdisciplinary approaches to understanding how cultures function, are located within, and positioned differently in Canadian and other workforces.

## Works Cited

- Abebe, A., & Fortier, C. (2008). *Rooted in action: A youth-led report on our demands and plans to address the root causes of violence in our communities*. Retrieved from <http://foryouth.ca/wp-content/uploads/2009/02/rooted-in-action.pdf>
- Ang, S., Van Dyne, L., Koh, C. K. S., Ng, K. Y., Templer, K. J., Tay, C., & Chandrasekar, N. A. (2007). Cultural intelligence: Its measurement and effects on cultural judgment and decision making, cultural adaptation and task performance. *Management and Organization Review*, 3: 335–371.
- Bannerji, H. (2000). *The dark side of the nation: Essays on multiculturalism, nationalism and gender*. Toronto: Canadian Scholars' Press.
- Betancourt, J.R., Green, A.R., Carillo, J. E., & Ananeh-Firempong II, O. (2003). Defining cultural competence: A practical framework for addressing racial/ethnic disparities in health and health care. *Public Health Reports*, 118, 293-302.
- Chan, W., and Mirchandani, K. (Eds.). (2002). *Crimes of colour: Racialization and the criminal justice system in Canada*. Peterborough, Ontario: Broadview Press.
- Coles, A. (2007). Focus on youth: Canadian youth arts programming and policy. Retrieved from [http://www.canadianyoutharts.net/pdfs/Coles\\_Focus\\_Youth\\_Arts.pdf](http://www.canadianyoutharts.net/pdfs/Coles_Focus_Youth_Arts.pdf)
- Cross, T., Bazron, B., Dennis, K., & Isaacs, M. (1989). *Towards A culturally competent system of care, volume I*. Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Child Development Center, CASSP Technical Assistance Center.
- Davis, A. (n.d.). Jamaican as synecdoche for black identification: How 'Jamaican' comes to represent the black Canadian body. In R. Caceres (Ed.), *Meaning of blackness*. San Pedro: Universidad de Costa Rica (20 pages in typescript accepted; expected pub. 2015).

- Davis, A. (2012). Project groundings: Canadian and Jamaican youth (re)define violence. In C. E. James & A. Davis (Eds.), *Jamaica in the Canadian experience: A multiculturalizing presence* (pp. 329-342). Halifax, Nova Scotia: Fernwood Publishing.
- Dei, G. J. (1995). Integrative anti-racism: Intersection of race, class, and gender. *Race, Gender & Class* 2(3), 11-30.
- Doolittle, Robyn. (2014). Toronto to expand 'priority' neighbourhoods to 31. *Toronto Star*. March 9. Retrieved from [http://www.thestar.com/news/city\\_hall/toronto2014election/2014/03/09/toronto\\_to\\_expand\\_priority\\_neighbourhoods\\_to\\_31.html](http://www.thestar.com/news/city_hall/toronto2014election/2014/03/09/toronto_to_expand_priority_neighbourhoods_to_31.html)
- Earley, P. C. & Ang, S. (2003). *Cultural intelligence: Individual interactions across cultures*. Stanford, California: Stanford University Press.
- Earley, P. C., & Peterson, R. S. (2004). The elusive cultural chameleon: Cultural intelligence as a new approach to intercultural training for the global manager. *Academy of Management Learning and Education*, 3, 100–115.
- Eisenberg, J., Lee, H. J., Brück, F., Brenner, B., Claes, M. T., Mironski, J., & Bell, R. (2013). Can business schools make students culturally competent? Effects of cross-cultural management courses on cultural intelligence. *Academy of Management Learning & Education*, 12:4, 603-621.
- Ferguson, A. A. (2000). *Bad Boys: Public Schools in the Making of Black Masculinity*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.
- Fix, E., & Sivak, N. (2007). The growing case for youth engagement through culture. *Our Diverse Cities*, 4, 145-151. Retrieved from <http://canada.metropolis.net/pdfs/ODC%20Ontario%20Eng.pdf>
- Fleras, A. (2004). Racializing culture/culturalizing race: Multicultural racism in a multicultural Canada. In C. A. Nelson & C. A. Nelson (Eds.), *Racism, eh?* (pp. 429-443). Concord, ON: Captus.
- Frum, L. (2006). William Bratton talks to Linda Frum. *Maclean's Magazine* 119(3), 12-13.

- Gariba, S. A. (2009). *Race, ethnicity, immigration and jobs: Labour market access among Ghanaian and Somali youth in the greater Toronto area*. Retrieved from ProQuest Dissertations and Theses. (Order No. NR60963).
- Grassroots Youth Collaborative. (2008). *Ignite the Americas (youth arts policy forum): Post-forum report*. Retrieved from [http://www.grassrootsyouth.ca/wp-content/uploads/downloads/2010/04/IgniteTheAmericas2008\\_PostForumReport\\_eng.pdf](http://www.grassrootsyouth.ca/wp-content/uploads/downloads/2010/04/IgniteTheAmericas2008_PostForumReport_eng.pdf)
- Headley, B. (2006). Giving critical context to the deportee phenomenon. *Social Justice* 33(1), 40-56.
- Henry, F., & Tator, C. (2005). *Racial profiling in Toronto: Discourses of domination, mediation and opposition*. Toronto: Canadian Race Relations Foundation.
- James, C. E., and Brathwaite, K. (1996). The education of African Canadians: Issues, contexts, and expectations. In K. Brathwaite and C. E. James (Eds.), *Educating African Canadians* (pp. 13–31). Toronto: James Lorimer & Company.
- Livermore, D. (2010). *Leading with cultural intelligence: The new secret to success*. New York: American Management Association.
- Ma, H. K. (2012). Social competence as a positive youth development construct: A conceptual review. *Scientific World Journal*. doi:10.1100/2012/287472
- McAlister, G., & Irvine, J. J. (2000). Cross-cultural competency and multicultural teacher education. *Review of Educational Research*, 70(1), 3-24.
- McMurtry, R., & Curling, A. (Co-chairs.). (2008). *The review of the roots of youth violence*. Retrieved from [www.rootsofyouthviolence.on.ca](http://www.rootsofyouthviolence.on.ca)
- Moloi, C., & Bam, M. (2014). Exploring cultural competence from a sociological point of view. *Mediterranean Journal of Social Sciences* 5(3), 332-337.
- Morris, J. (2010). In-between, across, and within difference: An examination of ‘cultural competence.’ *International Journal of Child, Youth and Family Studies* 1(3/4), 315-325.



- Nurses' Association of Toronto. (2007). Embracing cultural diversity in health care: developing cultural competence. Retrieved from <http://rnao.ca/bpg/guidelines/embracing-cultural-diversity-health-care-developing-cultural-competence>.
- Olsen, L., Bhattacharya, J., & Scharf, A. (2006). Competency, what it is and why it matters. Retrieved from [http://www.issuelab.org/resource/cultural\\_competency\\_what\\_it\\_is\\_and\\_why\\_it\\_matters](http://www.issuelab.org/resource/cultural_competency_what_it_is_and_why_it_matters)
- Pon, G. (2009). Cultural competency as new racism: An ontology of forgetting. *Journal of Progressive Human Services*, 20(1), 59-71. doi: 10.1080/10428230902871173
- Rivers, E. Rev. (2005, December 2). The sins of the fathers are visited on black youth. *The Globe and Mail*, A23.
- Sakamoto, I. (2007). An anti-oppressive approach to cultural competence. *Canadian Social Work Review*, 24(1), 105-114.
- Saloojee, A. (2004). Social cohesion and the limits of multiculturalism in Canada. In C. A. Nelson & C.A. Nelson (Eds.), *Racism, eh? A critical inter-disciplinary anthology of race and racism in A. Canada* (pp. 410-428). Concord, Ontario: Captus Press.
- Sue, D. W., & Sue, D. (2003). *Counseling the culturally diverse: Theory and practice*. New York: John Wiley & Sons.
- Tan, J. & Chua, R. Y. (2003). Training and developing cultural intelligence. In P.C. Earley & S. Ang, *Cultural intelligence: Individual interactions across cultures* (pp. 258-303). Stanford, California: Stanford University Press.
- Thomas, D. C., & Fitzsimmons, S. R. (2008). Cross-cultural skills and abilities: From communication competence to cultural intelligence. In P. B. Smith, M. F. Peterson & D. C. Thomas (Eds.), *Handbook of cross-cultural management research* (pp. 201-218). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Walcott, R. (2003). *Black like who?: Writing Black Canada* (2nd rev. ed.). Toronto: Insomniac Press.
- World Bank. (2003). *Caribbean youth development: Issues and policy directions*. Washington, DC: The World Bank.

- Wortley, S., & Tanner, J. (2003). Data, denials, and confusion: The racial profiling debate in Toronto. *Canadian Journal of Criminology and Criminal Justice*, 367-389.
- Wright, R., & John, L. (2001). *National arts and youth demonstration project*. Retrieved from <http://www.publicsafety.gc.ca/prg/cp/bldngevd/2007-es-12-eng.aspx>
- Wright, R., John, L., & Sheel, J. (2005). *Edmonton arts and youth feasibility study*. Retrieved from [http://www.mcgill.ca/files/naydp/EAYFSFinal Report.pdf](http://www.mcgill.ca/files/naydp/EAYFSFinal%20Report.pdf)

**Andrea A. Davis** is an associate professor and chair-elect in the Department of Humanities at York University in Toronto, Canada. She holds cross-appointments in the graduate programs in English, and Gender, Feminist and Women's Studies and has published widely on black women's fictional writing and constructions of gender and sexuality. As the former director of the Centre for Research on Latin America and the Caribbean (CERLAC), Davis helped to strengthen research links between Canadian and Caribbean researchers, and York University and the University of the West Indies (Mona). She led a research partnership exploring Jamaican and Toronto youth experiences with violence, which was profiled in the Council of Ontario Universities' Research Matters Campaign, 2012-2013. This research now informs professional development work with high school teachers in Jamaica focusing on the teaching of boys. Her most recent publications include *Jamaica in the Canadian Experience* (2012), co-edited with Carl E. James.