Teachers' Beliefs, Antiracism and Moral Education: problems of intersection

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ABSTRACT   *In this paper we explore potential problems of intersection between teachers' beliefs about the aims of education, a conceptual requirement of antiracism education and moral education. Our objective is to show how the reform of moral education to better accommodate antiracism concerns may depend on paying more attention to how teachers understand this intersection. Based on our analyses of teaching experiences and an exploratory, qualitative study of 20 recently certified teachers, we identify a framework for differentiating three ethical perspectives that teachers often take in articulating and justifying their beliefs about the ideal aims of education. Then, based on our analysis of contemporary programmes of antiracism education, we use illustrative material from our study to identify points of disjuncture that can occur between the aims of such programmes and teachers' beliefs through which those aims are filtered. In particular, we seek to illustrate how the essential political aims of antiracism education that focus on structural relationships between/among social groups can be, in the first instance, occluded by an ethical perspective that centres on the welfare of discrete individuals or, perhaps even more insidiously, reduced to a well-meaning and nice-sounding ethical perspective that focuses on the quality of interaction between/among individuals.*

Popular approaches to moral education over the last 25 years have restricted their attention to the individual moral agent and his/her dyadic interactions with other individuals. In so doing, they can be indicted with supporting a blindness within the field to some of the more egregious problems of contemporary society, such as racism. To counter this tendency, as Boyd (1996) has argued, moral education theorists need to enlarge their perspectives to accommodate moral problems that are located in relations between and among social groups. An implication of the analysis we present in this paper is that the problem of reforming moral education to accommodate some critical aspects of antiracism runs much deeper than this. It may require, in addition to better theories, addressing the practical problem of how teachers' most fundamental beliefs about education must also be changed.

Despite the burgeoning literature on "teachers' beliefs" or "teachers' thinking" in the last decade, very little is known about how teachers think about the aims of education. We view this particular gap in knowledge as a serious obstacle to effective

implementation of educational programmes. In fact, all aims expressed through educational programmes—including those of antiracism education and moral education—are, in practice, filtered through *teachers'* understanding of those aims and, ultimately, succeed or fail through teachers' practical activities intended to effect those understandings.

In this article we will address this gap in the literature. In particular, we explore how programmes of antiracism education may face significant problems of implementation when there are points of disjuncture between their defining aims and *teachers' interpretations* of those aims. We will first offer an analytical framework for understanding substantive variations in how teachers articulate their understandings of educational aims. This framework will consist of three distinct, sometimes competing *perspectives* that can be taken when educators provide *ethical* justification for beliefs about the most significant aims of education, perspectives that can be differentiated in terms of the particular social unit to which educational goods are predicated. Although this differentiation will, initially, be established conceptually, our primary intention is to make a case for paying attention to teachers' thinking about educational aims by showing how their *use* of these perspectives can shape their interpretations of antiracism education and its intersection with moral education. To this end, we will draw upon data from an exploratory study of recently certified teachers to illustrate these perspectives and their use, and to raise concerns pertaining to points of disjuncture between educational aims as they are embedded in theoretical approaches and interpreted by teachers.

Origins of the Framework

Our desire to understand the variety of beliefs held by teachers about educational aims generated the three formal ethical perspectives outlined in the following section. This interest surfaced in two separate, and methodologically distinct, contexts, both of which involved encouraging teachers to articulate their most basic assumptions about the aims of education, listening carefully to what they had to say and asking questions intended to clarify their personal beliefs. In addition, both contexts also involved asking teachers to articulate their more specific understanding of the nature and purpose of particular policy initiatives concerning aspects of social difference in Ontario education, such as multicultural and antiracism education. Before outlining the interpretative framework that evolved from these discussions, we will describe briefly these two generative contexts and the methodology that was used in each.

The first context was a graduate course in philosophy of education at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education taught by the first author in 1994. This course, entitled "Critical Issues in Education: philosophical dimensions", focused directly on the abstract question of the aims of education. However, in order to ground this question in the current realities of public discussion of education in Ontario, the instructor proposed that the class take as a practical task the submission of a formal brief on educational aims to the then-sitting Royal Commission on Learning. This brief would be generated from individual class members' articulation

of their own views, interaction with other members around differences and similar-
ities in their expressed beliefs and critical engagement of relevant philosophical
literature pertaining to the issues raised in this interaction.

Although this course was a small graduate seminar, it was soon apparent that
the range of views being advocated was quite wide, and dauntingly so. For example,
one participant was an employee of the New Democratic Party, working in the
Ministry of Education; she talked almost exclusively in terms of promoting social
equity through education. In contrast, another participant was an elementary school
teacher who never made a comment in class, whether to express her own views or
to comment on someone else's, that did not pertain to the development of students'
self-esteem. It was evident to the instructor that these two students rarely under-
stood what each other had to say, let alone agreed with it. A third participant, a high
school religion teacher, consistently expressed views that sounded remarkably like
Martin Buber commenting on the current educational malaise, often seeking to
mediate the more intense disagreements. As a result of these disagreements, it soon
became apparent that few (if any) of the participants had much confidence that the
class would succeed in writing a collective brief on which they could agree.

As a way of breaking the deadlock in communication, the instructor proposed
that participants stand back from the content of the beliefs that were being promoted
by different class members and explore critically the discourse being used when they
tried to support their beliefs. He noted how one of the philosophical works that they
had read argued convincingly that all discussions of educational aims must eventu-
ally be *ethically* grounded (White, 1991), and perhaps differences among them could
be more effectively explored in terms of their discourse at this level. This discourse
was identified as "ethical" in so far as it made appeal to a wide variety of different
kinds of "goods" that might be prescribed for students and/or differentially dis-
tributed among them, as synthesised in the question "What kinds of educational
benefits are to be directed to whom?" Rather than argue about what these "goods"
should be, the students were urged to focus on the *different units of social reality* that
were being used in their attempts to justify their beliefs about the relative importance
of these "goods". These differences could then be synthesised as qualitatively
different "perspectives" that they were assuming in this ethical discourse about
educational aims. The instructor pointed out that there were three such different
"ethical perspectives" being used, and that failing to notice this produced much of
the disagreement and mis-communication. Specifically, the elementary teacher who
was preoccupied with self-esteem appeared never to take her sight off the welfare of
individual students; the high school religion teacher brought most of his insights back
to the quality of interactions *between individuals*; and the NDP member who
expressed passionate concerns about promoting equity through educational change
saw equity as a value dimension of *social group* interactions. This shift in focus from
the content of beliefs to the assumed relevant unit of social concern enabled
participants to submit a brief to the Royal Commission that utilised the three
differing ethical perspectives as a way of synthesising the variety of aims that all
could agree should be covered in any comprehensive view of education.

This philosophical activity also proved to be useful in the second generative context. This context was an empirical study conducted by both authors, designed to explore teachers' beliefs about educational aims and to examine how these are related to their interpretations of policy initiatives to promote more equitable education in contemporary Ontario schools. In particular, our first objective was a methodological one of developing a qualitative interview to elicit teachers' views of educational aims, which was grounded in the existing survey approach used by Goodlad (1990; Su, 1992). A second objective was to use this methodology to show how teachers' reactions to major educational policy initiatives—such as destreaming and multicultural and antiracism education—might be understood better within an appreciation of their personal beliefs about the ideal aims of education, broadly defined. A final objective was to explore the possibility that teachers' interpretations of the rationales for such policy initiatives could be differentiated in terms of their assumptions about the appropriate unit of social concern in justifying their beliefs about educational aims, as identified in the three ethical perspectives defined above.

Twenty recent graduates of the University of Toronto Bachelor of Education programme participated in this exploratory research. This sample of beginning teachers was generally representative of the diversity within the BEd programme: a greater proportion were female (60%) than male (40%), they represented nine (self-identified) ethnic backgrounds (Anglo-Saxon, Arab, Chinese, French, German, Indian, Irish, Italian, Portuguese) and they ranged in age from 24 to 47 years. In addition, they were entering the profession with varying academic and professional qualifications (e.g. BA, BEng, PhD, LLB), although none had held a full-time teaching position. The teachers volunteered to participate in the research in response to a one-page flyer describing the nature of the project, and after being fully informed of our procedures and their rights as participants.

The participants were interviewed individually in one session lasting approximately 60–90 minutes. They were asked first to reflect on their personal beliefs about the aims of education, ideally speaking, and then to respond to a series of probe questions intended to clarify and elaborate these beliefs. A second part of the interview included written responses to survey questionnaires on the goals of education and purpose of schooling developed by Goodlad (1990; Su, 1992) and discussion of participants' interpretations of the items and their rationales for their rankings of them. Finally, participants responded to questions regarding current equity initiatives from the Ontario Ministry of Education, with particular emphasis on their interpretations of the rationales for these policies. The interviews were audio-taped, transcribed, and analysed qualitatively in terms of participants' differential assumption of the three ethical perspectives in their efforts to explain and justify their prescriptive claims about educational aims.

When we examined the data generated from these interviews, we were struck first by the range of differences in beliefs expressed about the aims of education, an experience analogous to that of the participants in Boyd's philosophy course. Similarly, some of these differences became easier to understand when we focused less on the content of what the teachers were saying about particular aims and more on how they justified their beliefs. When pressed to explain their choices about what

should be the aims of education participants in the study made ethical appeals based on a variety of human "goods", but in making these appeals they could be seen clearly as assuming one of the three different ethical perspectives which focus on different units of social reality. We turn, then, in the next section to a more refined elaboration of these ethical perspectives, with the eventual objective of illustrating how these perspectives on educational aims can problematically intersect with antiracism education, especially for moral educators.

Distinguishing Three Ethical Perspectives on Educational Aims

To distinguish what we are calling "ethical *perspectives*" on educational aims, we attend to the direction in which teachers look when they identify whom the "goods" thought to be educationally produced should benefit. That is, the three ethical perspectives identified here do *not* represent, themselves, different beliefs about the particular kinds of goods around which educational aims should be constructed (e.g. basic skills or self-realisation). In our experience, it is often the case that people will disagree fundamentally about such content preferences, while at the same time assuming the same ethical perspective in focusing justification for their preferred content. Similarly, it is also possible for two people to agree about what content is most important, but then justify the importance of this content from two quite different ethical perspectives. In both cases, the underlying criterion that differentiates such perspectives concerns the question of what *social unit* should be the most important focus of attention for educational aims. In our framework, three different answers to this question entail three distinct ethical *perspectives* for thinking about the benefits of education. These perspectives can be summarised as follows.

1. Concerns for Personal Well-being: the Individual Perspective

When this perspective is assumed, a teacher focuses his/her educational intentions on a concern for individual students and their personal well-being. It is the *individual's* well-being that matters, and education is seen as contributing to that well-being in some important way(s). This well-being can be given many different kinds of specific content, but it usually has some notion of self-realisation or human flourishing serving as guide and/or constraint. A good example of the use of this social unit in educational discourse today is that expressed so consistently by the elementary school teacher in Boyd's philosophy course: it is the *self-esteem* of individual students that matters over everything else. Another example, somewhat in tune with this concern, but still implying a difference in terms of the immediacy of what is important, would be a concern to encourage a positive attitude toward lifelong learning. A third example, potentially at odds with both of the first two, would be a concern for facilitating students' mastery of specific cognitive and social skills, such as represented in the traditional academic disciplines and certain inter-personal coping mechanisms, respectively. As exemplified in the latter, although this content may even refer to other individuals or to forms of social organisation, such reference is interpreted from the point of view of discrete individuals and how their personal welfare is furthered.

2. Concerns for Social Welfare: the interpersonal perspective

In contrast to the first perspective, what we are calling the "interpersonal perspec-
tive" does not focus on discrete individuals and their personal welfare but, rather, on
the quality of the *interaction* of individuals. Again, the content of what is considered
to be the "good" of interaction can vary, but the focus of this perspective necessi-
tates attention to the quality of how individuals relate to each other. A good example
of a common expression of this perspective would be the high school teacher in
Boyd's philosophy course, described above as sounding like Martin Buber. In such
instances the perceived interaction is at the level of dyadic relationships, such as the
practice of promise-keeping, or the intention to exemplify and nurture attitudes of
respect toward others or, alternatively, in seeing caring relationships as what is often
missing from teacher–student encounters. This perspective can also be generalised
to patterns of individual interaction that affect (negatively or positively) social
welfare, such as through the pedagogical practice of co-operative learning or general
attitudes of tolerance and positive appreciation of social diversity among students.
From this perspective, it is the good of a specific form of interaction that is the
teacher's primary focus. Education is then seen as having the aim of shaping that
form in some positive direction.

3. Concerns for Relationships Among Social Groups: the political perspective

When a teacher assumes this perspective in considering educational aims and their
justification, he/she focuses not on individuals taken in isolation, nor on the interac-
tion of individuals *qua* individuals but, rather, on the social groups in which
individuals and much of their interaction are embedded. Following Young (1990),
we characterize this perspective as seeing individuals as "partly constituted" by their
group membership(s), rather than the other way around. These are groups that are
defined *in relation to* each other and in terms of which individuals form much of their
identity, such as black/white, masculine/feminine, working class/upper class, etc.
From this perspective, a teacher's concern is to address the relative benefit(s)
accruing to different groups and to individuals in so far as they are identified within
them (whether by themselves or others), and how education might contribute to (or
counter) inequities of status, opportunity and power of individuals solely in terms of
their group identification. Thus teachers might, for example, be concerned with
examining curriculum materials and/or their own in-class patterns of attention to
students in terms of gender or racial discrimination. Or, to give an example in terms
of ourselves, we—the authors of this article—would be attentive to how our shared
racial identification (white) may shape how we structure the problematic of this
article, and how our different genders may affect what we choose to attend to in
seeking solutions. Others might be focused more on the more obviously political
question of how schools can be more responsive to the inequalities of effective voice
in public discussion of school policy across ethnic communities. Some might also
use this perspective in arguing for or against the "melting pot" vs. the "mosaic"

orientation toward cultural diversity, in considering the pros and cons of multicul-
tural education.

A Conceptual Requirement of Antiracism Education

In so far as each of the three ethical perspectives outlined above focuses attention on
a particular unit of legitimate educational concern, a unit that is more or less salient
in different circumstances as the appropriate beneficiary of some educational
good(s), each perspective is clearly an important conceptual lens for educators.
Moreover, although we will not do so here, we suggest that it could be argued that
any comprehensive and justifiable theory of the aims of education (at least in
democracies that take commitments to diversity seriously) must not only be able to
accommodate all three perspectives, but also make claims about how they are to be
weighted relative to each other and how the inevitable tensions between them should
be resolved, at least in broad principle. However, here we will concern ourselves
with a much narrower utilisation of the differentiation of the perspectives—an
analysis of what is conceptually required by critical antiracism education.

When we read the literature on antiracism education and, specifically, that part
of this literature that seeks to differentiate antiracism education from other broad
socio-moral educational concerns, such as some forms of multicultural education
and moral education, we find it helpful to keep the three ethical perspectives in mind
(in addition to those cited below; see, for example, Lee, 1991; Razack, 1993;
Sleeter, 1993; Rezai-Rashti, 1995; Giroux, 1997; Thompson, 1997). In particular,
keeping them in mind helps to identify and highlight a crucial conceptual require-
ment of the educational aims that are built into antiracism education, one which we
believe must be met by practitioners if programmes of antiracism education are to
be implemented effectively. In short, although they are more or less explicit in doing
so, most contemporary theorists of antiracism education assume what we are calling
the third perspective, "Concerns for Relationships Among Social Groups: the
political perspective", in arguing for their ethical prescriptions for educational
change. These scholars do not limit their focus to the *attitudes* that *individuals* may
have toward other individuals because of perceived commonalities or differences
between one another, such as those manifested in stereotypes and prejudices.
Instead, they insist that educators must look beneath or beyond such attitudes to
examine critically the *systemic*, *structural features* that organise life prospects of
individuals differentially, oppressing some while privileging others. This organisation
can be seen only when one adopts the third perspective on educational aims.

For example, as Roxana Ng (1995) notes about her own work,

> … I want to get away from the notion that sexism and racism are merely
> products of individuals' attitudes (of course they cannot be separated from
> people's attitudes) by emphasizing that they are systems of oppression
> giving rise to structural inequality over time (p. 133).

Here, Ng is implicitly appealing to a notion of a social group, in contrast to a focus
only on individuals, because "oppression" is a characteristic of *group relations*

(Young, 1990). Similarly, in criticising common approaches to multicultural edu-
cation for failing to deal adequately with racial inequality, Cameron McCarthy
(1995) advocates a move away from a focus on individual actors in terms of their
"values, attitudes, and human nature", towards a notion of groups embedded in
ongoing power relations:

> … The multicultural models of cultural understanding, cultural com-
> petence, and cultural emancipation do not provide adequate theories or
> solutions to the problem of racial inequality in schooling. Within these
> models, school reform and reform in race relations depend almost exclu-
> sively on the reversals of values, attitudes, and human nature of actors
> understood as "individuals." Schools, for example, are not conceptualized
> as sites of power or contestation in which differential resources and
> capacities determine maneuverability of competing racial groups and the
> possibility and pace of change (pp. 35–36).

Similarly, George Dei, author of *Anti-Racism Education: theory and practice*
(1996), identifies in positive terms the interlocking ideas that form the conception of
antiracism education with which others, such as Ng and McCarthy, are working:

> A critical anti-racism approach … seeks to develop an understanding of the
> nature of differential power relations through which institutionalized,
> racialized disenfranchisement or marginalization takes place and persists. It
> sees human differences as the direct consequences of unequal relation-
> ships, produced and maintained by differential power between dominant
> and subordinant groups (p. 52).

In short, for our purposes here, we are adopting a widely shared understanding
of antiracism education and highlighting an aspect that theorists point to as essen-
tial, as that which differentiates antiracism education from some other forms of
socio-moral educational concern. In particular, we interpret these theorists to be
emphasising the critical insight that certain forms of relationships among people—
such as racism and sexism—cannot be understood adequately from the point of view
of either individuals alone (as in what they need to learn in order to be successful in
contemporary society) or of individuals in interaction (as in what attitudes or values
might promote more harmonious living). Instead, these kinds of relationships must
also be analysed in terms of systemic, structural manifestations of inequality and
differential power that can *only* be seen from the point of view of how *groups* are
related to each other over time.

Views of Antiracism Education from Three Ethical Perspectives on Educa-
tional Aims

In this section, we explore the interaction of this conceptual requirement of an-
tiracism education and the three ethical perspectives on educational aims, using the
articulated beliefs of the teachers in our study for illustrative purposes.

Aims of Antiracism Education from the Individual Perspective: problems of occlusion

Teachers who focus their thinking about education almost exclusively on what is of benefit to *an individual* student (i.e. on concerns for the personal well-being of discrete individuals as the primary social unit) will find it impossible, we submit, to understand and promote the intended moral and political aims of antiracism programmes. This occlusion occurs in many ways, some of the more common of which follow.

One problematic pattern of this reductionistic focus (one that has been the target of strong critique on psychological grounds in William Damon's (1995) *Greater Expectations*) finds expression in a pervasive confidence in the value of self-esteem. For example, our Case 13 expresses the strong belief that the educational "be-all and end-all is making people feel good about themselves and showing them what opportunities lie there for them". Such a teacher draws a very tight causal connection between self-esteem and "success" and sees education almost exclusively as the handmaiden of this positive conjunction:

> Well, I believe if you feel good about yourself, no matter what your own strengths and weaknesses are and in what area you're dealing with, you will be successful in life. Whether you are a slow learner, but you feel good about yourself, you will succeed—or whether you are a gifted person, and you still feel good about yourself, you will succeed in life. And that's why we're here, you know, to succeed … And it is the job of the teacher to increase that self-esteem … Our job as teachers is to make people aware of what they're good at, what their weak points are, and how to strive toward the things that they're good at and be successful at.

This pervasive tendency to view everything from the perspective of a concern for the discrete individual and his/her self-realisation can lead to an aversion to any serious consideration of moral education—taking "moral" to mean here the claims that individuals might make *on each other* in terms of welfare or interests and/or the constraints that the welfare of society as a whole might place on individual "success". Case 13 goes on to express this aversion quite explicitly:

> I don't think I really want to [talk about moral education] … you know, moral issues is one of my least favourite things to talk about … It's something you learn not by being told, but you learn by what's around you. And I don't think it's something you should tell somebody … Who am I to tell somebody else what's right and wrong or what's good and evil? I mean, my perception of what those things are may be different from somebody else's.

Indeed, the consistency of this expression of the individual perspective can go so far as not only to avoid any moral aims of education because of the dangers of encroachment on the sacrosanct space of moral "opinions", but also to assimilate the teachers's personally *accepted* secondary aim of promoting "interpersonal

understanding" into the instrumental role of serving the individual's well-being. As Case 13 sees it:

> I think if you teach people how to communicate with others and participate with others and understand other people, then by understanding other people you understand about yourself too. And then you are more accept-ing and what-not—and, by being more accepting, then I think indirectly it affects your self-esteem, because you say to yourself, "I have these things that I am weak in, but this other person is weak in other things," and, etc., etc. … so maybe I'm not so bad after all. Maybe I'm a good person; maybe I do have the ability to do things. So that's why I say by doing this, by doing interpersonal understandings, you are working on self-realisation.

When education is understood by a teacher from this highly reductionistic individual perspective, antiracism education, in the sense interpreted above, can find little room for acceptance as a legitimate aim. Because it is interpreted as personal "prejudices", just another set of moral "opinions", antiracism education is actively *resisted*. Case 13 expresses this resistance quite clearly:

> I tend to think that this idea of anti-racism in school is going a bit too far, in that there's antiracism groups in every school and they're pushing for us to consider every race equal. I think that a lot of whether you are prejudiced against another group of people … yes we can educate kids at school about that, but a lot of that can also be created in the family situation. And I also think that a person's strong beliefs about how they feel about other people, other races, is done at home … So that's why I tend to think that things are going a little bit too far in that category … As somebody that's just gone through the Faculty [of Education], I thought that—"Anti-racism and gender issues, OK, enough … we've had enough of it!"

That there might be some kinds of educational aims that focus on the quality of *interaction of individuals* and still others that seek to address the harm located in *intergroup* relations perpetuated through systemic oppression simply finds no room for practical expression from the individual perspective exemplified by our Case 13. The likelihood that antiracism educational programmes (or, for that matter, moral education) could receive little support from teachers with this viewpoint is equally clear.

In our experience, explicit resistance to antiracism initiatives, as exemplified by Case 13, however, is neither the only, nor perhaps the most common, practical position which teachers assume by focusing their attention primarily on the individ-ual and his/her personal well-being. Another position framed by this perspective consists more of an apparent *acceptance* of antiracist educational aims as legitimate, but only through linking them to multicultural educational aims and interpreting both in terms of the different kinds of things an individual needs to learn for his/her personal benefit. For example, Case 12 clearly shares with Case 13 a firm belief that the ethically appropriate starting point for any consideration of educational

intentions must be the discrete individual and his/her unique needs for self-esteem and successful survival:

> I'm starting with the individual, helping the individual feel comfortable and know themselves, and then coping in the world … I won't have just one [educational goal] because there will be some students that critical and independent thinking won't mean peanuts to them because they haven't eaten and their parents are physically abusing them. They need other nurturing from me, so I'd like to say that it's going to be student-dependent. I almost view each student with the hierarchy of needs. I need to make sure that before I progress up the ladder, I make sure that each step is covered off.

Convinced that "life is a discovery and … that discovery starts inside yourself", Case 12 elaborates how this starting point frames all kinds of educational content:

> … Education is a way of helping people to develop tangible skills that will help them cope and live effectively in our society—so it's a skill development process. I think education ideally is also a process which will help people develop their own particular strengths to lead to a richer and fuller life, because of the kinds of things that they'll be able to achieve. I also think that an important aim of education, given the society that we live in, is to give people an opportunity to develop self-esteem, to be encouraged that they are very capable; so it's personal growth issues, not just tangible skills, but personal growth issues. Also, a sense of belonging, being at school with other people, learning how to work with other people.

From this perspective, again, what comes into view primarily and what dominates the landscape of what teachers should be aiming at is self-esteem and self-realisation. Case 12 exemplifies a common expression of this focus that does not result so much in an *aversion* to even considering moral aims (as in Case 13) but more in a subtle *assimilation* of what might appear to be moral aims into aspects of the fuller development of an individual and his/her potential. Thus, a "sense of belonging" is something *an individual* needs *because* it is instrumental for "learning how to better work with other people":

> You need to feel good about yourself so that you can contribute. And particularly today as life is so busy for families, and single parent families, that aspect of self-esteem and sense of belonging is really critical so that you can move forward and contribute to society.

What matters, then, is not seen in terms of moral dimensions of the *interaction* of individuals *per se*, or even a moral concern for some conception of the welfare of society, but rather, a concern for a student's future *effectiveness* within society. For example, in explaining his/her choice of "interpersonal understandings" as a very important goal of education, Case 12 exemplifies this twist as follows:

> We're social beings, and we're here with many other people on this planet. And I think it's extremely important that we deal effectively with people we

call our neighbours, that we work effectively, we play effectively with other people. And sometimes that can be learned, a lot of that can be learned, and I think that should be a goal of education.

In our interpretation, this is an expression of a perspective *about* the social, but not from *within* the social; rather, it views the social from the point of view of *an* individual. When this perspective is used to interpret the aims of multicultural and antiracism education, what can be seen can be severely constrained, even if accepted in principle as legitimate educational concerns. Case 12 then exemplifies this limitation:

Well, I understand the distinguishing point between anti-racist and multi-cultural education is that anti-racist education has the education compo-nent in terms of educating people about some of the racist issues going on today, so educating them in terms of jargon that's unacceptable, in terms of behaviour that's unacceptable, and action that's unacceptable … versus multicultural education is just a teaching of culture, but not all the interrelational issues that go along with it … I see both of them as part [of education]. You need to first learn about cultures to understand an expression is unacceptable, so you need just a general understanding of a culture, but then you need to appreciate where the difficulties arise … People need to understand what is appropriate and acceptable, versus inappropriate and hurtful.

At best, for a teacher who adopts this "individual perspective", antiracism education is reduced to individual students' need to learn a code of behaviour concerning those rough spots where different cultures rub up against each other, given some vague notion of an effective society.

Aims of Antiracism Education from the Interpersonal Perspective: problems of reduction

As described earlier, a second ethical perspective for justifying beliefs about educa-tional aims focuses more on a concern for the quality of *interaction* of individuals than on the welfare of individuals considered independently. At first glance, such a perspective would seem to provide a more accommodating conceptual lens for antiracism education: it enables the viewing of some educational aims as inherently *within* the socio-moral arena—and racism surely *is* within this arena. However, by limiting what can be seen in this arena to what goes on between or among individuals, to a *particular conception* of "moral education", this perspective, more subtly than the first perspective (and perhaps more insidiously), constrains what can be achieved in antiracism education. The more structural, political aspects become conceptually co-opted into something that sounds good (perhaps even better to many ears) but is, in fact, only part of the normative landscape of racism. Several of the beginning teachers we interviewed provide good examples of how the "interpersonal perspective" can be articulated and how this restriction works.

For example, Case 5 focuses first and foremost on the importance of "social interaction" in considering educational aims:

> I would say that social interaction would be the most important thing … I think it's the social interaction of the individuals within the school context, so that they learn how to … make friends and to develop these friendships so, hopefully, they have some lifelong friendships. Also how to cooperate and get along with each other. How to cooperate and work towards a common goal … One of my goals of education, I guess, is to develop social skills with the individuals … so that they get along with other people and learn to respect their opinions and help them out if they need to … And I just think, you know, if everyone was taught to cooperate and get along with each other we'd have a lot safer society and everybody would maybe appreciate our quality of living a lot more, rather than being so selfish, like "me, me, me, first".

Similarly, Case 16 emphasises that:

> For instance, one of the things that I feel that schools teach kids is good citizenship, you know—how to live within a society, how to work with others, collaborate with others, respect each other … I would think that it's most important to be a good functioning member of society, and that deals with your interaction with people, before it comes down to what you actually do in society *vis-à-vis* a job. So I think the most important skills are social skills—values and attitudes that you have towards others … The fact that [for example] we're not churning out the best biochemists might not have such a detrimental effect on our society, as does people who cannot get along.

The fact that this focus on interactional concerns is crucial to understanding how these two teachers think about educational practice is suggested very strongly by their interpretation of the relation between self-esteem and getting along with others. Whereas Case 13, quoted earlier as exemplifying the "individual perspective", sees interpersonal understanding as instrumental to promoting self-esteem and self-realisation, both these exemplars of the "interpersonal perspective" see the connection between these aims not only in terms of the good of a discrete individual but also, and more importantly, the quality of relationships between/among individuals. Case 5 expresses the relationship this way:

> I guess [another goal] is self-realization. A healthy concept, high self-esteem … if you have that, you're going to develop the other two goals as being able to get along with others, and you're going also to have a stable emotional well-being and you're going to have a good physical outlook on life.

Case 16 sees it this way:

> Knowing yourself, I think, plays … a very important role in your social skills, how you get along with others. It's through your relationships with

others that you learn about yourself first of all … It's through your interaction that you learn about yourself. Decision making skills—those I find are somewhat more targeted or geared towards how you as an individual get along in society, *not* in a relationship scenario with others. They're important, but I still think how to co-operate and value others for what and who they are should come first.

When teachers such as these, apparently solidly within the moral education fold, focus on the interaction of individuals, with a positive emphasis on "getting along with others", and apply this perspective to education in the context of cultural and racial difference, they tend to limit their aims to the need for students to avoid *negative attitudes* toward each other, despite their differences. From this perspective, social "groups" can be acknowledged, but *only* in the sense of a set of like-individuals about whom students might not know enough to avoid misunderstandings when interaction occurs. Antiracism education is thereby limited to the "negative side" of what multicultural education is trying to achieve. Thus, for example, Case 5 expresses his/her understanding of multicultural education and antiracist education in the following way:

Anti-racist [education], I guess, is not … having the students adopt a negative attitude towards any groups, whether it's a racial group, or a group of individuals … a gender group, or whatever … I think with multicultural it'd be a lot better to have, like, multicultural weeks within each classroom … and learn about everybody's little heritage. And that way we get a better understanding of, possibly, the Muslim faith, why they behave like that and some peculiarities of the religion. And I think, you know, that would help kind of solve some, maybe, some of the misunderstandings we have with these different cultures. As far as racism … I don't think anybody should hold a grudge against any person … regardless of, you know, say, the racial beliefs or the racial culture of a person, or the gender of that person … I don't think there's any room for that in education.

Case 4 articulates a similar perspective that brings the interaction of individuals and the welfare of society into view, as balancing the need to be concerned with individuals' development. In considering the purposes of schooling he/she says:

I was debating between [the "progressive" and the "liberal" choices for the "purposes of schooling"]—in the sense that schools should … concentrate on children as individuals, helping them to develop their interests and abilities to their full potential. I think that definitely should be one of the purposes and aims of the schools. But, at the same time, these individuals are living within society … so I think improving society for the better and to understand societal concerns and human conditions and social purposes—that should be one of the main focuses or one of the main purposes. Because, once again, I mean, they're living in society, they're living with

skills, how you get along with others. It's through your relationships with others, they're living within the community ... It's fine if you can under-stand your full potential and stuff, but if you've got no sense of the outer environment or ... other members within that society, you know, how good is that, how is that potential going to help you as a person?

Noting that "diversity is also a good", Case 4 interprets this living with others as requiring some adaptability across cultural differences as an important educational aim (at least for minorities):

Living in a multicultural society, we've been able to hold on to part of our heritage and part of our ethnic background. But, at the same time, a person should be able to almost, like, cross the boundaries between heritages—I mean, their own ethnic background and the mainstream as well.

When this perspective is taken in interpreting multicultural education and antiracism education, Case 4 elaborates a practical orientation (like Case 5 above) that leans toward promoting positive attitudes of individuals toward each through better understanding of each other:

Multicultural education is more of an awareness of the different cultures and understanding and appreciation of it. Anti-racism [education]—you're looking more at an attitude, a change of attitude and behaviour ... [They should be a part of education] just so that the same kind of atrocities that happened in the past don't happen again, first of all. Second of all, so that we can all live well with one another, and respect one another, understand one another.

When expressing a preference for one or the other, Case 4 is clear that this aim of respect-through-understanding is the most desirable for guiding educational prac-tice:

I think "multiculturalism" [would be preferred] because you can indirectly deal with the antiracism through the awareness, the opening ... or the awareness that they would gain from learning about different cultures and respecting and understanding them. So in a sense you would be dealing with both within that one, more so than the other way around.

In summary, we understand these teachers to be adopting an "interpersonal perspective" on education that differs significantly from those illustrating the first perspective in the section immediately above, and that has correspondingly significant implications for how antiracism education is viewed. Although they also consider the needs of individuals as a necessary concern for any justifiable concep-tion of education, they do not limit themselves to this concern. Instead, this perspective brings into view the quality of the interaction of individuals as it contributes to the welfare of society and places it on a level at least equal in concern to the welfare of individuals. It then allows a much more social interpretation of the rationale for programmes of antiracism education, one that includes moral evalu-ation of the interaction of individuals who are differently situated in terms of culture

and race—in short, "moral education" as it has been predominantly theorised (Boyd, 1996). Attitudes of tolerance and respect, and behaviour guided by these attitudes, come to the forefront of attention and are understood to be something that can only be engaged in by people in relation. However, at the same time, we maintain that this attention can also serve to sugar-coat the absence of consideration of those aspects of racism that cannot be reduced to moral evaluation of the intentional behaviour of individuals in interaction, i.e. the more systemic, structural and group-based oppression. From this perspective, antiracism education begins to look like simply more forceful multicultural education.

Aims of Antiracism Education from the Political Perspective: examples of effective focus

When some teachers focus on socio-moral concerns within their conceptions of the aims of education, they do not see only the interaction of individuals and the need for education that directly or indirectly seeks to improve the quality of that interaction. Rather, they have a perspective that allows structural aspects of that interaction to be seen, including the embeddedness of individuals and their interaction in intergroup relations organised around aspects of differential social status and power. This perspective then enables them to see that some educational concerns, such as those of antiracism, cannot (and should not) be reduced to either the welfare of individuals (our first perspective) or the quality of their interaction (our second perspective), but must also include attention to the social–political construction and maintenance of generalised relations of inequality and oppression.

One of the ways in which this perspective has shown up in the thinking of some teachers we interviewed is in terms of an active *questioning* of the emphasis on the discrete individual and his/her action and responsibility:

> … There's a lot of studies … that talk about how people from disadvan-taged backgrounds also carry this disadvantage into their schooling, and have less support at home, compared to kids with parents who are more affluent. And I've certainly seen that in school where I've been, where 99% of kids go on to things that will open a lot more doors for them, in terms of careers and earning potential, and other kinds of privileges in our society. And kids from other schools didn't have any of those advantages … So, those would be the parts we don't anticipate, that we don't look at, and that are contrary to our egalitarian thing, and that should challenge our beliefs. And those are the points that we really don't program. We tend to focus on individual students and to believe that looking at the individual is the end product. We have a real hard time going back and looking at the community and therefore solving some of the problems, because we keep trying to reduce it to the individual—it's just your fault—it's based on individual responsibility, freedom and responsibility—and if you mess up, it's nobody's fault but your own.

Individuals and their welfare do come into view from the perspective of this teacher, but this is accomplished by seeing the individual in interaction with society as a

whole, as being constrained or enabled by systemic expectations that favour members of some groups over others. Case 8 is concerned about the "contradictions" between what happens in practice and our purported "egalitarian" aims:

> [Good education] involves reconfiguring society, to say, well, if we are really going to do what we say we are going to do, which is acknowledge different learners, accept different values … all right, the fact that not all these kids can write very well, or are never going to write a good essay, we're going to say "that's not important". That's very hard for a teacher to say. It's very hard for anyone in society to say, because they're centred on the individual, and they're saying, "my kid's got to know this to get a high status job". The fact is, there are all sorts of jobs in society, and, if we look at the whole thing, everyone has to have a different job for this to work, so why don't we value these people's experience … and design education to help them out in what they are going to be doing, rather than making it a membership for a particular group. Because right now it's very successful in excluding all these others, and that's what it's there for … and the kids know it.

In order to change this situation Case 8 advocates creating critical citizens who can see beyond their own self-interest:

> [We need to produce] questioners, somebody who knows more about their country and the situation … very much a citizenship model. I don't think we're creating very good citizens. We're creating people who are very centred on themselves, who really can't see beyond themselves, and who therefore, when a community question comes up, only have an individual solution … because it's been taught—it's your individual career, it's your individual mind, there's no sense in doing something else.

When the more positive side of this contrast is articulated, teachers with this perspective are able to move toward a more political, systemic interpretation of why an individual perspective is limited, one which relies on an understanding of individuals as, in part, "socially constructed". Case 8 articulates this understanding as follows:

> I think you can't know yourself without knowing others, because your definition of yourself is a construct and the only way to realize that is to look at the other … and as soon as you step into somebody else's shoes, that's critical thinking … It makes you question the social institutions, everything—because everything is a question mark—because you realize it's a social construct—because you've been forced to step outside of yourself again and again, evaluating yourself, and evaluating others.

When this understanding is brought to bear on educational concerns such as multicultural and antiracism education, it enables a teacher to see individuals as

embedded in, and a product of, this social construction. Case 8 discusses his/her understanding of these educational initiatives:

> Multicultural [education] is an awareness of other cultures, but doesn't necessarily lead you to action as much as anti-racism education, which seems to deal with more particular problems and solutions … And I think, again, looking at the other and looking at yourself, and finding out that a lot [of these] things are socially constructed, like the idea of race, and a lot [of these] things, unless you are formally shown them, are very hard to realize … I think anti-racism education is very necessary, in terms of developing, again, people who are full, active citizens—responsible citizens.

This teacher does not refer specifically to social groups and to antiracism education as addressing systemic relations of power and inequality. However, in so far as his/her thinking about educational aims includes the individual as embedded in socially constructed relationships such as race, we see it as *indicative* of an ethical perspective not reducible to individuals and/or their interactions. It is thus potentially able to more easily accommodate the aims of antiracism education.

Case 17 also illustrates a more "political perspective" on educational aims, at least in the context of his/her understanding of antiracism education. This teacher illustrates how a concern for the socio-moral aims of education can be emphasised without assimilating all aspects of antiracism education to this perspective. Thus he/she first expresses a very strong concern for socio-moral aims as a necessary "balance" to individualised academic aims:

> I see [education] personally as being a healthy balance between the academic and the social. And by that I mean that there is definitely a need (I'd argue, an increasing need) in our society to teach our students the essential basics as far as academics go. That's reading, writing, and arithmetic. But I think that … the goal more and more needs to be veered … to filter in there the social aspect. By that I mean interaction with people, social skills … I think it's … very, very essential that we stress the social aspect, how to interact with people … what does it mean to be a Canadian living in Toronto in 1995.

But then this teacher also clearly goes on to take a more "political perspective" when articulating his/her understanding of antiracism education:

> I really see racist education—it doesn't have to be … standing there pointing a finger at people and calling them names … But … if you're teaching a history lesson and you're not acknowledging a certain group, or if you're teaching a poetry lesson and … you're only looking at the white middle class perspective all the time, then I guess in that sense you're racist simply because you're being exclusionary … It's not just a black and white issue. It's so much more than that—it's deeper … when you are excluding groups of people.

This teacher's understanding illustrates, we submit, an ethical perspective on educational aims that *both* appreciates racism as a moral issue *and* accommodates the more

group-related systemic political concerns at the heart of contemporary critical approaches to antiracism education.

Implications for Moral Education

To this point we have suggested that more attention needs to be paid to how teachers think about educational aims and we have tried to support this suggestion by showing how teachers' perspectives on aims can intersect with concerns of moral education and antiracism education in problematic ways. We believe this work raises a number of questions, some of which have significant implications for moral education, questions that we can only point to here in the spirit of encouraging further work in the directions that they suggest.

The first question—or set of related questions—is an empirical one: Are we correct in our worry that some change in teachers' fundamental beliefs about education may be needed? If so, what proportion of teachers can be so character- ised? Is this more or less of a problem for teachers who identify with the role of "moral educator"? And how sound is the evidence for this conclusion (or these conclusions)? These are all questions which we believe to be legitimated by our work reported in this paper, but which we have not addressed directly. Here we have described an exploratory study aimed at opening up these questions, but our use of data has been limited to *illustrating* the problems of intersection among teachers' beliefs, antiracism and moral education, not *demonstrating* them. Our sample was small and limited to beginning teachers; our methodology has not been developed to the point of entertaining reasonable confidence in reporting potentially replicable findings; and our entry point and framing of our questions were driven more by theoretical and educational concerns than empirical ones. Despite these qualifications, on the basis of our analysis of these data, together with our observa- tions from working with teachers both in graduate and preservice contexts, we have reached a firmly held conclusion that this set of empirical questions needs serious attention because the need for change is indeed pressing.

Assuming that this conclusion is sound, we must then raise the second question of what *kind* of change is being called for. Throughout this paper we have used language that hints at the direction we would take in answering this question, e.g. by eschewing a dependence on "attitudinal" interpretations of racism, by focusing attention on the role of ethical "perspectives" in teachers' justification of claims about educational aims, and by differentiating these perspectives in terms of their focus on different "units of social reality". All of these point to a kind of change that is not very well captured in the common parlance, used in our title, of "teachers' beliefs". The change that may be needed is not at the level of the content of what kind of "goods" teachers think should be the substance of educational efforts, but more at the level of what they focus on in justifying such beliefs. Thus we want to suggest, based on both our reading of these data and our experience in working with teachers grappling with these issues, that what is needed is something more on the order of a "conceptual gestalt switch". The usefulness of this metaphor may perhaps be most easily established in the context of moral education—just because, as we

have suggested above, it is easy for teachers of moral education to reduce all of the aims of antiracism education to interpersonal ones in such a way as to occlude the appreciation of more political, structural aims. Thus the primary change that is (may be) needed for moral educators is from exclusive use of the "interpersonal perspective" to being able to see the interaction of individuals as *embedded* in the relationships among *groups*, to utilize the "political perspective". This is, we suggest, analogous to the visual switch required to see the duck or the rabbit in the well-known visual puzzle. However, the switch that we are pointing to is at a very basic *conceptual* level: if one does not *have* the concept of a group (again, as defined) only part of the picture can, literally, be seen. However, whereas seeing only the rabbit or the duck really does not matter, *not* being able to see racism in terms of groups *does matter*.

Given our answers to the first two questions, a third naturally follows: how might teacher education programme facilitate the needed change in perspective, particularly for those teachers who see their role in terms, at least in part, of moral education? We believe this to be a very difficult, and relatively unexplored, question, one to which we do not have a satisfactory answer. Recognising this difficulty and some of its sources is at least a starting point, however. As Christine Sleeter (1995) has noted:

> Those who attempt to teach white teachers or preservice students about various forms of oppression encounter predictable defenses. For example, convinced that individual attitudes and stereotypes form the basis of racism and sexism, they try not to "see" colour (pp. 419–420).

Such a belief, with its resultant blindness to some of the deeper aspects of racism, takes what we have identified as the form of our "interpersonal perspective". This "wilful resistance" should not be seen solely as a fault of the individual, however. Rather, as Nieto (1995) points out, "It is important to recognize that this insistence on individual differences rather than on group membership is a fundamental characteristic of U.S. mainstream culture, based on the liberal philosophy of meritocracy and individual achievement" (p. 199). Not limited to the United States, this ideological obstacle to the "gestalt switch" we are advocating can itself be the object of educational critique, on the belief that its hiddenness is part of the difficulty, and on the anticipation that exposure itself can raise questions in teachers' minds about alternatives. Sleeter (1995) has written about her experience in attempting to effect what are we calling this gestalt switch in students of dominant groups (though she does not use our language). In brief, she has developed a number of educational strategies to respect the lived perspectives of white students while at the same time facilitating the development of their ability to interpret issues from "minority position" perspectives, to analyse actual empirical circumstances in their community in such a way that they can begin to see that "… the entire social order is structured around boundaries that define different sets of rules for different categories of people" (1995). In short, the gestalt switch to the perspective of social groups is facilitated through a combination of emotional "jolts" and structured

intellectual tasks of seeking explanations for concrete facts of social inequality from non-dominant perspectives.

However, Sleeter herself has raised questions about the stability of her successes in these educational efforts (in an "epilogue" to her 1995 reporting of the experience), and neither Sleeter nor Nieto are considering the particular role of the moral educator and the possible support that it provides, *per se*, for resisting the gestalt switch in perspective. As we have suggested above, when racism is viewed solely as a fault of the individual who has prejudicial attitudes toward others, "not seeing" the category (such as skin colour) that the discrimination is based on can itself be turned into a virtue. And when one's educational focus is itself within the field of moral education, it is only natural to try to cultivate this virtue in oneself. The resistance is, in this instance, supported ideologically at the level of professional identity, as well as in the culture in general. This, we submit, makes the education of moral educators doubly difficult. At this point in time the only suggestion we can make about an approach to this aspect of the problem might be characterised as an injunction for teacher-educators, such as ourselves, to avoid hypocrisy and try to do in our own professional lives what we are asking of our students. Or, as Nieto (1995) puts it quite succinctly, we should be:

> … engaging in *arrogance reduction*, that is, taking stock of our own arrogance, be it based on race, gender, class, or other categories that give advantage to some groups over others, and actively confronting it (p. 195).

As Boyd (1998) has argued elsewhere, to *not* pay attention to one's own social location in so far as it is one of privilege (such as being deemed "white") is to commit a *moral* error, not just a pedagogical one. Seeking to reduce the arrogance of our own academic neutrality is, at least, offering our teacher-students something positive to model in *their* own efforts to engage the gestalt switch.

Conclusion

One of our core assumptions underlying this paper is that, in general, teachers are not taken seriously enough as reflective agents of educational reform, that is, as having fundamental beliefs that shape and constrain what they do in their educational practice (Boyd, 1985). As a partial correction to this tendency, we have sought to make a case for paying more attention to how teachers understand the educational aims embedded in the educational programmes being implemented. In particular, because we believe it to be an area of educational reform sorely needed, we have supported this suggestion by exploring the potential problems of intersection between beginning teachers' beliefs, the aims of antiracism education and moral education.

Based on our analyses of teaching experiences and an exploratory, qualitative study of 20 recently certified teachers, we have identified a framework for differentiating three ethical perspectives that teachers often take in articulating and justifying their beliefs about the ideal aims of education. Then, based on our analysis of contemporary programmes of antiracism education, we have used illustrative

material from our study to identify points of disjuncture that can occur between the aims of such programmes and teachers' beliefs through which those aims are filtered. In particular, we have sought to illustrate how the essential political aims of antiracism education that focus on structural relationships between/among *social groups* can be, in the first instance, occluded by an ethical perspective that centres on the welfare of *discrete individuals* or, perhaps even more insidiously, reduced to a well-meaning and nice-sounding ethical perspective that focuses on the quality of *interaction between/among individuals*.

Of course, we do not mean to imply that either of the latter two perspectives is unimportant, even within the practice of antiracism education. Nor do we intend to suggest that utilising the needed "political perspective" that accommodates the notion of group relations will make that practice any easier. In some instances, having this perspective available as a tool for formulating educational aims may indeed make that practice more difficult, by enriching the choice for practical emphasis in balancing educational intentions between individuals, their dyadic interaction and the social groups in which they are embedded. However, we believe that this enrichment is *necessary* if education aiming at social change with regard to the problem of racism is to be more effective. In the work reported here, we intend to highlight the need to take teachers more seriously as agents of that change. By focusing attention on how teachers' conceptions of educational aims are an integral aspect of their agency, we are expressing our fundamental agreement with George Dei (1996):

> Anti-racism, as a practice of educational change, is concerned with what education ought to, and can, look like. The focus is on the vision of education that acknowledges that one cannot articulate and fight for social change without an understanding of the current social and political order. *How we name issues reflects our degree of comprehension of the problem* (p. 134, our emphases).

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NOTE

[1] We recognise that the term "antiracist" may sound more appropriate than "antiracism" to some readers of the JME. We have chosen to use "antiracism" for two reasons: (1) "Antiracism" is the term that is increasingly being used in the North American literature to which we refer. (2) More importantly, we believe that the underlying reason for the recent rhetorical change from "antiracist" to "antiracism" in this literature is a substantive one, with which we agree: "antiracism" makes it easier to focus attention on the systemic, structural aspects of racism, as opposed to the attitudinal, individualised aspects connoted by "antiracist".

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