



THE WHITWORTH AWARD

2016 CEA Whitworth Award Co-Winner: Dr. George Sefa Dei recognized for his profound impact on the development of equitable and inclusive schooling in Canada

Professor George Dei is an outstanding educator, researcher, community leader and writer, one of Canada's foremost scholars on race and anti-racism studies and a leader in advancing Canadian human rights in education. His extensive body of work has been devoted to constructive change in education within and beyond the classroom to advance equity and diversity. Building on pioneering anti-racism educators such as Enid Lee and Barbara Thomas, he has challenged discriminatory barriers faced by marginalized youth, and has influenced educational policy on anti-racism, equity and inclusivity in Canadian schooling. He has been a major proponent and pioneering voice in the establishment of Black-focused/African-centred schools.

An internationally-renowned scholar, Dei has a remarkable record of accomplishments, including 29 books, 18 scholarly reports, and over 115 refereed journal articles. According to Google Scholar, his top 10 publications total over 2,300 citations, a significant number for his field. He has been principal or co-investigator of more than 15 large-scale grants. Dei's many honours include prestigious Carnegie African Diaspora Fellowships in 2015 and 2016; *Professor Extraordinaire* at University of South Africa since 2012; the 2007 Canadian Alliance of Black Educators Award for "Excellence in Education and Community Development"; and the 2006 Planet Africa Renaissance Award for achievements in African education, anti-racism and youth. His photo has featured in "Black History Month" posters celebrating Black/African-Canadians who have made lasting impact on Canadian communities. In 2015, the African Educators Network named an academic award in his honour. He has received a pioneer award from Skills for Change, a Toronto organization supporting leadership among new immigrants.

Dei's work has focused on anti-racism and minority education in Canada, exemplary practices for inclusive schooling, Indigenous philosophies and critical anti-colonial education. He has made significant contributions to the understanding of social justice education in Canada in four critical areas: a) anti-racism and the conceptual distinction of the Black-White paradigm (Dei 1996, 2008, 2016); b) a critical approach to inclusive schooling and education; (Dei et. als, 2000, 2001; Dei and Razack (1994); c) the reconceptualization of "anti-colonial education" building on theorizing by key scholars – Memmi, Fanon, Cesaire; (Dei 1999; Dei and Asgharzadeh 2001; Dei and Kempf , 2004; Dei and Lordan, 2016) and, d) a theorization of 'Indigenous' as an international category (Dei 2011; Dei, Hall and Goldin Rosenberg, 2000). His ideas are advanced through conceptual framings of "multicentricity" (Dei, 1996) – creating spaces for multiple centres of knowledge to co-exist; the relevance of "epistemic saliency" (Dei,

1999) – the power of subjective knowing of the oppressed voice in helping to understand their oppression; reframing “inclusion” (Dei, 2008) – the importance of positioning inclusion as beginning anew; and consequently, a need for counter-visioning Canadian education through Afrocentric principles (Asante 1990) and the Africentric school as a pilot case (Dei 1994, 1995, 1998, 2013).

Dei’s pioneering contributions in anti-racism education and inclusive schooling have been taken up across Canada and internationally. His research evidence and well-reasoned advocacy work shaped community activism leading to the establishment of the first Africentric School in Ontario by the Toronto District School Board in 2009. More generally, his work is cited by school boards and in policy documents across the country, and has been taken up in Ontario education circles particularly. For example, the 2013 Social Sciences and Humanities curriculum for grades 9-12 lists his work as a reference for teachers on equity and social justice and the Ontario Ministry of Education’s 2014 *Equity and Inclusive Education in Ontario Schools: Guidelines for Policy Development and Implementation* references his work to promote anti-racism. Dei was also involved in the influential 2007 webcast *All Children Can Achieve: A Focus on Equity of Outcome* by the Literacy and Numeracy Secretariat. Similarly, his work was referenced in the establishment of the Ontario Anti-Racism Secretariat. He has contributed to major research initiatives such as *Multiple Literacies Through Diversity: Kindergarten – Grade 6* and has contributed to 18 research reports for organizations such as the Ontario Royal Commission on Learning and the Work and Lifelong Learning Research Network.

Early in the 1990s, Dei’s pioneering study on Black youth and school dropout received significant public and media attention throughout Canada. The report highlighted Black/African-Canadian students’ concerns regarding issues of race, representation and identity. It made recommendations for the education of youth, shaping debates on Black and minority education in Canada (Dei et. al., 1995, 1997). In 2000, Dei’s text, *Removing the Margins* and the companion teacher’s guide, *Inclusive Schooling* operationalized seven main domains of an inclusive schooling approach that continue to form discussions on questions of inclusive schooling in Canada.

More recently, his work on African Indigenous philosophies focuses on working with student teachers and educators from Toronto elementary and secondary schools to produce resources for teaching African proverbs in Canadian schools. The learning objective is how Canadian students can embrace notions of community, social responsibility, reciprocity, discipline and respect, as social values to enhance collective social and educational success. He is an active contributor to anti-discrimination training at the University of Toronto, and has worked in collaboration with educators in Ontario, Nova Scotia, Alberta and British Columbia; as well as abroad (University of Education, Ghana; University of South Africa; Lagos State University, Nigeria; Embu University College, Kenya).

Given the nature of his work, Dei has been involved in many local community group depositions and presentations to provincial bodies and school boards, such as the Ontario Royal Commission on Learning (1994) and the Toronto Board of Education (mid 1980s & 1990s),

pushing for practices to enhance Black youth educational success (e.g., Black Educators Working Group [BEWG], Canadian Alliance of Black Educators [CABE], Organization of Parents of Black Children [OPBC], Africentric Working Committee, Toronto District School Board, (TDSB), Africentric Learning Institute, Halifax).

Dei's influence can be seen in the over 300 keynote, public and invited lectures since 1994, spanning 11 of Canada's 13 provinces. He regularly engages with school boards, teacher organizations, community groups, government bodies. He has also had over 120 print media citations and 80 radio and television interviews on his research and its community, public and policy implications.

Professor Dei is a prolific scholar who has been voted "among the top influential Black scholars and community workers in Canada" (The Legacy, 1998). He has sharpened conceptual thinking, influenced policy and made a significant impact on educational research in the areas of anti-racist education, inclusive schooling, indigeneity and Afro-centric schooling.

His 1996 book *Anti-Racism Education in Theory and Practice* argued that race must be one of the axes of social justice education. He draws a conceptual distinction between a "Black-White binary" and a "Black-White paradigm". While the former may [sometimes unjustifiably] be read as oppositional and simplistic, the latter is a lens to understand the positioning of Blackness in relation to Whiteness. This understanding acknowledges the relative saliencies of different identities and the situational and contextual variations that make a difference. These positions have shaped critical dialogues in Canadian classrooms while promoting what Dei terms "integrative anti-racism" (Dei 1996).

Professor Dei has argued that anti-racism education must be part of a critical approach to inclusive schooling and education. In *Removing the Margins* (Dei et al., 2000), co-authored with his graduate students, he highlights exemplary practices of inclusive schooling, which have been engaged by educational practitioners to promote inclusivity in their schools. The book emerged in response to a critical interrogation of text on "school push outs" (Dei et al., 1995, 1997), which examined why Black youth leave schools prematurely. The use of the term "pushing out" Black students, as opposed to the youth themselves "dropping out", generated significant media interest and public commentary from wider Canadian society. This work influenced community advocacy for the establishment of the first Africentric School by the Toronto District School Board in 2009. Dei's writings influenced pilot projects, in other places, including Halifax. He has been invited to speak on the topic across Canada. His ideas on anti-racism education have been taken up across the country by educational practitioners and policy works, as evidenced in edited collections for the *Journal Canadian Race Relations Foundation* (2006), *Orbit Magazine* (2003) and *Canadian Review of Sociology and Anthropology* (1996). It is also important to note his work (with Dr. Agnes Calliste) in setting up the Anti-Racism Caucus within the Canadian Association of Sociology and Anthropology.

In recent years, Professor Dei has anchored his ideas within an anti-colonial framework for social justice education work (Dei, 2014). His goal is to affirm the different but connected

histories of various colonialisms and oppressions. In this work, he [re]conceptualizes the “anti-colonial”, examining the implications of imperial structures on the processes of knowledge production, interrogation, validation and dissemination.

Professor Dei has also explored a theorization of the Indigenous, taking Indigeneity as an international category for social justice work. This view connects questions of Land, colonization, and decolonization noting that there is not a singular “Indigenous” nor “Indigeneity”, but categories of Indigeneity (e.g., Aboriginal, African, Hawaiian, Australian, South American, Caribbean, etc.) (see Dei, 2011; Dei, 2016). He is asking that we guard against slipping into thinking which implies that only non- (authenticized) - Indigenous bodies need to decolonize (the Land). In this work he has brought a focus on African philosophies of education and Indigenous African Knowledge Systems into the discussion of Canadian schooling.

Professor Dei’s scholarship in anti-racism and anti-colonial theory has put questions of equity at the centre of educational research and policy. He asks about the role and place of Indigenous epistememes in the pursuit of socially transformative inclusive education. How can contemporary educators provide anti-colonial education to help develop a strong sense of identity, self and collective respect, agency, accountability, and individual/community empowerment? How do we re-envision schooling and education to reflect such values as social justice, equity, fairness, resistance and de-colonial responsibility? These questions are helping shape the Canadian educational landscape, promoting more holistic and inclusive schooling and affecting how we see the future of education in Canada.

In addition to his direct impact on policy and practice, as well as his influence on debates in Canadian education and schooling, Dei has trained and mentored 40 doctoral students, many of whom are now leading professors at Canadian and international universities. These scholars are themselves key theorists and practitioners on race, anti-racism, Indigeneity, and cultural politics of schooling. Furthermore, a number of his former graduate students are also leading educational practitioners in provincial school boards. They are working to shape their school/school board and other organizational policies on equity and anti-racism. This next generation of researchers, policy makers and practitioners will carry on the tremendous work and profound impact of Professor George Dei, one of the most influential Canadian scholars in social justice education of our time.