

Special Issue 2019, Article 5 from Series of 5

Collaborative Unity and Existential Responsibility

BLACK ACADEMIC SCHOLARSHIP FUND (BASF) AND EDUCATION - GAINING EQUITY IN EDUCATION AND EMPOWERING BLACK LEARNERS

Sylvia E. A. Piggott*

President, BASF, Montreal

seapiggott@gmail.com

* Corresponding author

ABSTRACT

Aim/Purpose: This article explains the movement for Africentric public schools in Canada, particularly in Montreal, and the controversy it has generated. It is also argued that Black youth would gain significantly from community based educational programs that root their learning more closely in the life, experiences and needs of their community.

Background: The Black Academic Scholarship Fund (BASF) is a non-profit organization that has been active in the community since 1981. Its main goal is to provide scholarships to visible minority students who are actively pursuing a course of study in an accredited institution. The objective is to enhance the economic status of the Black community and provide more opportunities for students to achieve their educational goals. The organization received its letters Patent in March 1996 with the registered Charity No. 89440 6396. This has facilitated its fundraising initiatives. The motivation for this presentation derives from the commitment of the Black Academic Scholarship Fund (BASF) to responsible social action and hence to the principles of “collaborative unity and existential responsibility” espoused by the Black Community Forum of Montreal of which it is a member. The paper presents BASF’s actions and focus on “gaining equity in education and empowering black learners” wherever they are in the system.

Findings and Community Impact: The experiences of the work of BASF and other organizations such as the QBBE and the BSC are that Black learners, in Montreal, benefit from community-based education centered on the experiences of African Canadians. These programs are intended and are resourced essentially by the community. In turn they use this capacity to empower Black youth and their families, and better equip them to navigate public school systems and organize in their communities.

Keywords: Black learners, equity, education, non-profit organization

Accepting Editor: Clarence S. Bayne | Received: February 14, 2019 | Revised: August 25, 2019 | Accepted: November 19, 2019

Cite as: Piggott, S. E.A. (2019). Black Academic Scholarship Fund (BASF) and Education - Gaining Equity In Education And Empowering Black Learners. *International Journal of Community Development & Management Studies*, 3 (sup 1), 97-101, Retrieved from: <http://ijcdms.org/Volume03/v3sup1p97-101Piggott6072.pdf>

(CC BY-NC 4.0) This article is licensed to you under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/). When you copy and redistribute this paper in full or in part, you need to provide proper attribution to it to ensure that others can later locate this work (and to ensure that others do not accuse you of plagiarism). You may (and we encourage you to) adapt, remix, transform, and build upon the material for any non-commercial purposes. This license does not permit you to use this material for commercial purposes.

BACKGROUND

The Black Academic Scholarship Fund (BASF) is a non-profit organization that has been active in the community since 1981. Its main goal is to provide scholarships to visible minority students who are actively pursuing a course of study in an accredited institution. The objective is to enhance the economic status of the Black community and provide more opportunities for students to achieve their educational goals. The organization received its letters Patent in March 1996 with the registered Charity No. 89440 6396. This facilitates the provision of tax receipts to contributors to the funds. Research done by Rosalind Hampton (Hampton, 2010), "*Black learners in Canada*", is an important reference which describes some of the key aspects of how Black education is articulated in Canada as a whole and with specific reference to Afrocentric movement in Montreal in the nineties. Using Rosalind Hampton's work as background information, BASF chose to focus on two aspects of education in Canada, namely, "*Gaining equity in education and empowering black learners*". As a small organization we decided to focus on those areas where we think we can make a difference. So we have put aside all the negatives, stereotyping, blame, cultural differences and ideological arguments that separate us into different linguistic school spaces and focus our energy into supporting our students at all levels and places in continuing their education, because BASF believes that "*Education is the key to success*".

Thus the motivation for this presentation derives from the commitment of the Black Academic Scholarship Fund (BASF) responsible social action and hence to the principles of "collaborative unity and existential responsibility" espoused by the Black Community Forum of Montreal of which it is a member. The BASF has been specializing in Education and development since 1981. It evolved out of the activism of a group of Montreal Black business persons and professionals. As a member of the Black Community Forum we were invited to present a report on our activities pursuant to the following purposes: the provision of assistance and scholarships to visible minority students who are actively pursuing a course of study in an accredited institution; and the organization's long-term community objective. Part of that is to enhance the economic status of the Black community by providing more opportunities for students to achieve their educational goals, and helping to sustain the vitality of the Black Community of Quebec. This article is intended to provide information in support of the central proposition for this conference series of IJCDMS that Black educators in the Black Community of Montreal acted effectively to reduce the gaps they observed in the education of Black youth; that they engaged in identifying the causes of these gaps and took action to remedy the problem.

A REVIEW OF THE EXPERIENCES AND PERCEPTIONS OF BLACK LEARNERS

For the purposes of this presentation we use a review of case studies to capture the sense of alienation felt by Black learners in the system and to underscore the attitudes that informs the perceptions and expectations held in the education system about Black learners. In the literature review that follows we drew heavily on a qualitative case study done by Professor Rosalind Hampton "*Black learners in Canada*" (Hampton, 2010). The study examines the movement and reasons for Afrocentric public schools in Canada, particularly in Montreal. She argues that Black youth would gain significantly from community based educational programs that root their learning more closely in the life, experiences and needs of their community. Below are some quotes from Hampton's study that will help the reader to understand the mind set of individuals and institutions as they contemplate Black learners in Montreal and across Canada:

REVIEW OF SOURCES FROM AND THE BLACK LEARNERS ARTICLE

Hampton survey of studies conducted by Professor George Dei of OISE, the research and recommendations of the African Canadian Working Group in 1992, the Royal Commission on Learning in 1994 and the drug abuse prevention program of the Department of Public Health (1993) revealed three primary concerns expressed in the students' narratives: differential treatment because of their race, the lack of Black and African-Canadian history and culture in the curriculum, and the absence of Black teachers. "African-Canadian secondary school students were dropping out of the system because they felt a sense of racial and cultural alienation and marginalization". Hampton states that,

"Reports by Black students of feelings of alienation and of a lack of support were underscored by the fact that most teachers interviewed by George Dei of OISE of Toronto University and his colleagues failed to recognize any problems in the educational system and, instead, identified factors within the students' characters, the characters of the students' families or the students' earlier educational experiences. A prominent feature of the teachers' responses was the construction of drop-outs as socially and academically deficient in their families, their values and their attitudes towards education".

"The Canadian Association for Free Expression (CAFE), CAFE, a 'non-profit educational organization that was incorporated in the Province of Ontario in 1981, and later in Alberta', accused the TDSB of being 'punch drunk on minorities and suggested that the cause of 'serious Negro underachievement in Toronto schools' is the 'demonstrably lower Negro IQ'".

The impact of systemic discrimination and racist perceptions of the nature and intellectual capability of Black are reflected in the economic status of blacks. The Census data and demographic studies of Black in Montreal show that:

"Even Black families who have been in Québec for multiple generations face an unemployment rate and a proportion of low-income households more than double those of the general population. Nearly half of Québec's Black youth drop out of high school. A 2004 study by professor Marie Mc Andrew et al study demonstrated that a group of Black students in Québec who started high school between 1994 and 1996 had a 51.8 per cent graduation rate, compared to 69 per cent for the population as a whole.⁴ The Steering Committee for an Afrocentric School in Montreal was formed early in 2008 by concerned members of the Black community. In this tradition, community-based education is the practice of eliciting human potential and agency, engaging learners on a personal level, and promoting their overall intellectual and social development."

Hampton concludes that for Black learners, particularly in Montreal, community-based education centered on the experiences of African Canadians can empower Black youth and their families, and better equip them to navigate public school systems and organize in their communities. While this review focused mainly on the work covered in the Hampton study for the period following 1990, it should be noted that in the seventies similar concerns about the failure rate of Blacks in the education system, alienation of the Black Youth in the school system, the value of a community-based education were expressed by the Quebec Board of Black Educators. They raised these issues aggressively with the Educators in the English speaking school Boards and CEGEPS demanding change. Their activism became the basis for reforms in the PSBGM that engaged the communities they served directly: the PSBGM Multicultural/ Multiracial policy (Code:CS-13. Community Services Department, Resolution #01-09-25-8.4) and new working relationships with the QBBE, other community educators and organizations, and parents (Bayne and Edina, 1995). In 2009, a research study was conducted by the Black Studies Center in collaboration with the City of Montreal and MEES to evaluate the tutorial and family programs of the QBE in collaboration with EMSB to consider expanded municipal and Provincial funding (Bayne and Williams, 2009).

BASF CONTRIBUTION TO EDUCATION IN THE MONTREAL COMMUNITY

As mentioned before, the BASF objective is focused on “Gaining equity in education and empowering black learners” wherever they are in the system. To accomplish this, the BASF collaborates with other organizations using a networking process. It provides career advice, and offer career counseling services to its clients when needed. The Jackie Robinson International Golf Tournament is one of the major activities hosted by BASF annually to raise funds for the BASF scholarship programs. In addition, there is some sponsorship from members of our community and agencies such as the Black Studies Center. On the average, BASF awards between 8-10 scholarships each September to deserving students for CEGEP, undergraduate, and graduate programs, to accredited institutions. Since the creation of BASF, we have awarded over 250 scholarships, with some outstanding results.

A SIGNIFICANT PARTNERSHIP: BATSHAW YOUTH AND FAMILY CENTERS AND FOUNDATION

Batshaw Youth and Family Centers intervenes with children and families in situations of abuse, neglect, abandonment, and when youth have serious behavioral problems. They are an important community intervenor in the holistic cycle of the development of the child. Most children and youth are being helped in their own homes, while others are entrusted to extended family, placed in foster families or in residential care. Some are adopted. Batshaw Centers serves the English-speaking and Jewish communities on the island of Montreal. Residential care is available to English-speaking youth from other regions of Québec. The Batshaw Youth and Family Centres Foundation support and complement the work of Batshaw Youth and Family Centres. The Foundation’s goal is to provide “pillars” on which futures can be built for youth and families. The Pillar programs support:

- Access to tutoring, therapy, cultural and sports activities
- Activities that teach leadership skills and build confidence
- Skill development programs; material and financial support to help older adolescents with limited or no family assistance prepare for adulthood and independent living
- Scholarships for post-secondary education and job training
- A camp experience in a lakeside setting at Camp Weredale

COLLABORATION: THE BATSHAW -BASF EXCELLENCE AWARD FOR YOUTH

In 2011 Mrs. Sylvia Piggott, President of BASF, expressed the interest of BASF to make one of their scholarship funds of \$1000 available for Batshaw clients starting in 2012. It was agreed that this yearly BASF bursary would be given as an additional Excellence Award to a candidate / recipient of the Lois Daly Bursary award. This scholarship program, called the Lois Daly Scholarship Fund, is intended to promote and encourage continuing education. Funds are made available for youth who are receiving or have received services from Batshaw Youth and Family Centers (and predecessor agencies). In order to qualify for the BASF- Batshaw scholarship the youth would need to meet the following criteria:

- Be or have been a client of Batshaw
- Pursuing a post-secondary education program
- Be in good standing at an accredited educational institution
- Be a member of a visible minority and identify as a member of the Black Community.
- Be a recipient/ applicant for the Lois Daly Scholarship

COLLABORATION WITH THE BLACK STUDIES CENTER CHARITY SCHOLARSHIP FUND

The Black Studies Center Capital Fund has recently made a scholarship of \$2500 available to the BASF for a student who is committed to community development studies renewable on an annual basis. The award will be given for the first time in September of 2019.

RECOMMENDATION

The Black Community needs to be on the Agenda of the city and Provincial governments for adequate funding in order to help the Black students continue their education in institutions of higher learning. Census Data presented in this Conference Series points to the decline in vitality of the English speaking Black community. The research and reviews of Hampton on “Black Learners in Canada” provide some insights into the challenges faced by the Black Community in securing opportunities for the same quality and level of education that the White/European community enjoys. The BASF experience tells us that support of governments, community organizations and parents are the ingredients of a good recipe for success. The community and parent support are present but what is lacking is focused and strategic government support which ensures integration of the Black students into the education system. This also requires teachers with at least basic cultural understanding of the students for whom they are responsible while in the classroom so that no student is left behind. This is a win-win formula for the country, province and the city. The BASF research shows that there exist Community organizations that are qualified and prepared to work with the governments to achieve equity and good results for investments in Black education.

REFERENCE

- Anderson, S. (2009). Africentric schools. *University of Toronto Magazine*.
- Bayne, C. (2009). A Portrait of the Artist as a Deviant: Turn the Switch off on "No Snitching". *Kola*, 21(1), 222-225.
- Bayne, E. and Bayne, C. (1995- revised 2009) The Quebec Board of Black Educators – an Innovator: Etching Educational Success. *National Council of Black Educators of Canada and Multiculturalism and Citizenship Canada*. Available at: <https://bscportal.wordpress.com/the-quebec-board-of-black-educators-an-innovator/>
- Census (Statistics Canada 2001). See also: Bayne, C. S. (2019). Special Issue 2019, Article 1 from Series of 5: Community Education and Development: Perspectives on Employment, Employability and Development of English-Speaking Black Minority of Quebec. *International Journal of Community Development and Management Studies*, 3, 79-130.
- Hampton, R. (2010). Black learners in Canada. *Race & Class*, 52(1), 103-110.
- Jenkins, A. (2008, February 18). “Afrocentric+Algebra”(editorial cartoon). *Globe and Mail*, P22
- Mc Andrew, M., Garnett, B., Ledent, J., Ungerleider, C., Adumati-Trache, M., & Ait-Said, R. (2008). La réussite scolaire des élèves issus de l’immigration: une question de classe sociale, de langue ou de culture?. *Éducation et francophonie*, 36(1), 177-196.

SOME FURTHER READINGS

- Floch, W. (2003). Official languages and diversity in Canada. *Canadian and French Perspectives on Diversity*, 57.
- Floch, W., & Pocock, J. (2012). The Socio-economic status of English-speaking Quebec: Those who left and those who stayed. *Decline and prospects of the English-speaking communities of Quebec*, 129-173.
- Livingstone, A. M., & Weinfeld, M. (2017). Black students and high school completion in Quebec and Ontario: A multivariate analysis. *Canadian Review of Sociology/Revue canadienne de sociologie*, 54(2), 174-197.
- McAndrew, M., & Lamarre, P. (1996). The Integration of ethnic minority students fifteen years after Bill 101: some issues confronting Montreal's French Language Public Schools. *Canadian Ethnic Studies= Etudes Ethniques au Canada*, 28(2), 40.
- Solomon, R. P., Levine-Rasky, C., & Singer, J. (2003). *Teaching for equity and diversity*. University of Toronto Press.