

Teaching to Difference?  
The Challenges and Opportunities  
of Diversity in the Classroom



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Edited by

Nicole E. Johnson and Stacey-Ann Wilson

**CAMBRIDGE  
SCHOLARS**

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P U B L I S H I N G

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Edited by Nicole E. Johnson and Stacey-Ann Wilson

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The inspiration for this book was based on conversations regarding our experiences teaching students whose backgrounds were different from our own. Recognizing that “difference” encompasses a range of experiences and perspectives, we grew interested in the perspectives of other educators and the cultural and pedagogical issues that structure the teaching experience. However, as we began this project we quickly realized that the voices of educators was largely nonexistent in terms of how teachers educate across the differences of race, ethnicity, geography, sexuality, language, and special needs. Our hope is that this volume contributes to the void in teacher perspectives on diversity and will encourage conversations, debates, and thoughtful reflection on difference in the classroom.

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**PART I:**  
**THINKING ABOUT “DIFFERENCE”**



# CHAPTER ONE

## TEACHING TO DIFFERENCE?

### STACEY-ANN WILSON

#### **Introduction: What is difference and who decides?**

Canadians embrace multiculturalism, human rights, and diversity as fundamental values. However, there are ongoing incidents of discrimination in our society that require our continuing attention. In fact, the Supreme Court of Canada in 2005 acknowledged that racial prejudice against visible minorities is so notorious and indisputable that its existence needs to be treated as a social fact (Ontario Ministry of Education 2009: 7).

The discourse on difference in education is primarily about diversity of race, ethnicity, culture and religion, but it is also about class, gender, sexual orientation and abilities. Research shows that White students are more racially isolated in private schools than they are in public schools (Ryan, 2010: 217-218). In public schools White students share their educational space with Blacks, Asians, Latinos and others and increasingly do not constitute the majority student population in many public schools across North America, especially in urban areas. This is why difference and diversity has become part of the education discourse.

While the majority of the chapters in this book are concerned with difference as defined by some aspect of race, ethnicity and culture, we have taken great care to include other examples of difference such as homosexuality amid an heterosexual mainstream, exceptionality within the discourse on special needs education, particularly among children of colour and defining difference in relation to language and religion. The combination of these differences highlights the complexity of the discourse on difference and the critical need for strategies for inclusive education for all.

The intent of this chapter is to reflect on my teaching experiences at the post-secondary level as a Canadian of Caribbean descent – teaching to difference, teaching from difference and teaching through difference. In so

doing, I provide a brief discussion of difference in education and a critical assessment of the ways in which difference is engaged at the school and system level, which has not had net positive results for those defined as different.

### **What is difference and who decides?**

*Religion* - It has long been acceptable to segregate students based on religion, that is private religious schools, have not been particularly contentious (at least Christian denomination schools have not been contentious). In recent times, Islamic private schools have been criticized as breeding grounds for militants. Christian fundamentalism is far more acceptable in North America and Europe; therefore Christian schools are generally not seen as having any negative social effects. However, religious critics argue that religious schools are elitist, foster intolerance of other religions and alienate their students from society by virtue of their specialized faith based education. On the other hand, supporters of religious schools argue that these schools are important to keep their religious and cultural teachings alive and it does not hinder students from integrating with society since they live and function within the wider community with religious and non-religious people alike.

*Homosexuality* – The political debates about the rights of homosexuals in society has also played out in the education system. Gay rights activists have argued that homosexuality should be included in sex education programs and not be regarded as deviant behaviour. In addition, it is argued that homosexual students should be allowed to form after-school clubs that not only represent them but also actively seek out initiatives that bring gay and straight students together (Janofsky 2005). The resistance to homosexuality in schools has been fierce with many critics arguing that it is not simply about information; homosexuals are trying to push their lifestyles on heterosexuals. Parent groups as well as individual schools, districts and state lawmakers have opposed moves to be more inclusive with regard to homosexuality, to the point of court action barring amendments to curriculum and access to reading materials containing “gay themes” (Janofsky 2005).

*Language* - According to the US Census, there are over 100 ethnic groupings and as many languages spoken by these ethnic groups in the United States. In Ontario, Canada alone some 200 languages are reported as mother tongue. It is estimated that over the last 20 years the population of non-English speaking students entering schools in North America has

doubled, which has greatly highlighted the underperformance of these students compared to their English, specifically White student counterparts.

Compared to Canada's very vibrant bilingualism, in the United States there is strong resistance to foreign language learning, with a tendency to view non-English speakers as inferior. There is a persistent English only affinity, which is reflected in the education system and the inflexibility of which continues to fail English language learners (Garcia, 2011: 48-9). As part of Canada's bilingualism, there has long been a strong focus on French immersion schools outside of Quebec, particularly in Ontario. These schools are very popular and their students do well on standardized tests in both English and French, however, there is criticism that these schools discriminate against special needs students, as it does not readily accept or accommodate students with learning difficulties.

*Abilities* - While much of the attention of special needs is focused on either English language learners or students with learning and/or behavioural difficulties, there is a group of special needs students who are often overlooked and discriminated against. Intellectually gifted students often lack the necessary education policy or school environment to aid in the development of their full potential. Because giftedness is considered special needs, it falls under the same regulations, as those intended for below average learners and this many parents of gifted children have argued is discrimination. How to accommodate this very small part of the student population is a very difficult undertaking for many schools that may only have 1 or 2 such students enrolled.

*Race, ethnicity, and culture* - Much of the discourse on diversity and difference is about trying to understand those different people, with their different ways of life and knowledge systems. The discourse on diversity sets up an us versus them dichotomy, which requires us to constantly put ourselves at odds with others and then try to put ourselves in their shoes so as to pervert our personal, social and institutional biases and prejudices against "them." The discourse on diversity in developed countries is built in large part around the idea of informing and sensitizing Europeans about non-White people from developing countries. It very rarely starts with problematising Whiteness versus a perceived other or having a critical examination of cultures and difference within European contexts that might readily lend itself to cross cultural engagements and effective communication and learning.

Increased diversity has been met by increased acts of overt racism and xenophobia. There is a sense within multicultural education policy that White people must be convinced to share space with the different others, to tolerate their exotic ways as best they can because in so doing our

society will be richer. They must be convinced to give up some of their dominance, they must be convinced to really “see” the others and see just how human they are. There is a sense that it’s a psychological-interpersonal transformation from being dominant to being diverse. But this often happens without any substantive institutional or systemic changes. In other words, the celebration of multiculturalism has not in effect changed the power imbalance in society.

Learning about other cultures is fantastic, but multiculturalism as it relates to inclusiveness and social justice is pointless if it does not address White supremacy and White privilege. The increased acts of overt racism we’ve seen in recent times are resistance to our diverse realities. The situation we are battling with is how does a group that has maintained their dominance by any means necessary, adjust to a changing demographic situation and accept a more “balanced” role in society? Likewise, how do groups that have been historically marginalized take an active role in society not based on subservience, disengagement or anti-social behaviours?

## **Diversity amid White Supremacy**

Many racialised (non-White) students experience discrimination in schools and in society more broadly. They generally have fewer teachers and community role models in which to seek assistance in dealing with the hostility of their school environments. It is a social fact that schools with high dropout rates tend to be schools with higher rates of racialised groups and students from low socio-economic households. These dropout rates can effectively be called “push out” rates, as schools make very little attempt to accommodate the learning of racialised students or students from poor families. What attempts are made, fail because they rarely (if ever) address the intractable social barriers that is associated with poverty and racial discrimination. Furthermore, I’ve observed that teachers and school leaders often have negative views of parents whose children are underperformers, racialised and poor. What this means is that schools do not create the necessary partnership with parents and communities to ensure that students do not dropout or pushed out of school.

Furthermore, the situation is exacerbated by powers given to school principals to assess student “threat to safety” and therefore assess their capacity to learn in a “normal” school environment. This has been criticized intensely by minority communities because they have witnessed how this power has been used to exclude their children from the school



system. In Ontario, the Toronto District School Board of Trustees “reported that at least 80% of students being expelled are from racialised groups – mostly commonly Black students” (Fact sheet 3, 2007, [www.colourofpoverty.ca](http://www.colourofpoverty.ca))

Criminalisation of student behaviours for things like truancy, cell phone use in class, talking back, and smoking have led to record rates of arrests, suspension and expulsion of students in an environment of zero-tolerance. Heather Ann Thompson argues that this type of environment and the resulting underachievement of children of colour is a result of “being treated day in and day out as the worst of the worst in society and being forced to learn ... what rules of conduct might land them in jail” (Thompson, 2011: 27). In light of these occurrences concerned parents and community activist have advocated for an alternative model of schooling for racialised students in order to give them better support and more culturally appropriate education.

In 2008, the Toronto District School Board approved and in 2009 opened, an Africentric elementary school in Toronto. In 2011, the board approved the establishment of an Africentric high school. Even though parents have espoused the virtues of the elementary school and their children are reportedly performing better on standardized tests, the issue is still contentious as it is viewed as segregation not support.

The school was envisioned as a way to tackle the problem that black students are among the most likely... to live in poverty, with as many as 40 per cent dropping out.

To help engage black students more in the classroom, the Africentric school developed a fresh take on the Ontario curriculum – one that curbed the European biases in classes such as history and English, and used culturally relevant props in math (Hammer 2011).

The Africentric school choice and those like it is a direct blow to the virtues of Canadian multiculturalism. Even though it is quite clear the racism that exists within the education system, it is assumed that the problem can be fixed within the mainstream education frame. Even though the mainstream response has been to exclude through expulsion, suspension and zero tolerance policies the very students now seeking an alternative education. The debate on culture-based schools is positioned as ethnic cheerleading, as segregation versus multiculturalism without any critical assessment of the ways in which White privilege and White supremacy in mainstream education works against the educational attainment of racialised students.

Zeus Leonardo argues that the study of White privilege while necessary and important does little to move the discussion along without critical attention to the mechanisms of White racial domination since White supremacy makes White privilege possible. “In order for white racial hegemony to saturate everyday life, it has to be secured by a process of domination, or those acts, decisions, and policies that white subjects perpetrate on people of colour” (Leonardo, 2004: 137). Furthermore, Leonardo argues that Whites invest in the processes and practices that maintain their privileged position and obscures the racial underpinnings. Therefore “the blind-blind discourse” he argues “is one that they fully endorse” (Leonardo, 2004: 144).

[W]hites enjoy privileges largely because they have created a system of domination under which they can thrive as a group. The volumes of writing on the issue of domination testify that the process is complex and multi-causal. But the enactment is quite simple: set up a system that benefits the group, mystify the system, remove the agents of actions from discourse, and when interrogated about it, stifle the discussion with inane comments about the ‘reality’ of the charges being made (Leonardo, 2004: 148).

In the United Kingdom, David Gillborn has argued that the racial inequality evident in education policy is not accidental and can in fact be considered “tacit intentionality” on the part of White power brokers in maintaining White racial advantage and structured inequality for non-Whites. In this sense he argues, education policy is an act of White supremacy rather than a by-product and is therefore far more dangerous because it goes almost unnoticed in the political mainstream (Gillborn, 2005: 485-505).

## **Reflections on difference in the classroom**

It is in this context of White privilege and education as an act of White supremacy that students as well as teachers enter the classroom at both the K-12 and post-secondary level. My teaching experience at the post-secondary level in the United States and Australia highlight the currency and importance assigned to difference and how such difference can create opportunities for inclusive education and interpersonal reconciliation.

## Teaching to Difference

My first teaching experience was at a historically Black university in the United States. As a Black person teaching Black students, there would presumably be no relevant difference to speak of. However, I was similar (Black) but different, in that I am not American and therefore did not readily relate to Black American slang, socio-cultural attachments and some of their historiography. And I wasn't African, as it seemed students had particular ways of adjusting to African professors, so this made me decidedly different. The difference for me wasn't simply that I was a foreign Black, but that I'm a non-American Black who believes in the Garvey school of thought of self-reliance and the upliftment of people of African descent in specifically non-European forms.

What most surprised me in this Black university is that despite the level of racism and discrimination experienced by Black Americans at the hands of White America, they were still in general committed to the American way of life, committed to the American dream; even though that dream (capitalist style accumulation) is dependent on social inequality and the maintenance of White privilege and White supremacy. The students seemed to have bought into and believed in the dominance of America and carried in their speech the same level of arrogance (and ignorance) that critics attach to the American persona. They saw themselves as superior to other people of African descent in other countries, particularly Africa and the Caribbean. It is in this context that I viewed my students as different. The personal challenge became how to teach to this kind of difference without breeding resentment.

In some sense I went on a mission to "break" them. My initial thoughts were that if they really understood the American empire they were supporting there is no way they could buy into the American dream that was their nightmare. The students were pretty well aware of the some of the overt racism that is part and parcel of the American empire – slavery, segregation, police brutality, high rates of incarceration of Black Americans and Hispanics – but they believed in their ability to move beyond it, if not as a community, then certainly individually, after all they had role models – entertainers, actors, public figures - who seemed to have moved on from being racialised.

It soon became clear that "breaking" them was not a useful strategy because this Americana thing was stuck to their bones, it defined their very existence and without it they were really getting lost in a kind of mist. So I decided to teach to *their* difference. Instead of virtually attacking them for believing in the American empire, I began to embrace (although not internalize) their beliefs and worked instead on having the class

critique elements of the empire as it relates to Black Americans and other non-Europeans as the course progressed. In this way, instead of my forcing information onto them, they began to analyze their lives and their very existence within the empire based on the course materials, writing assignments and most importantly peer discussions in class. I had to actively take myself out of the equation and energize their pre-existing critical lens not in a way that left them helpless and feeling like victims, but in a way that emboldened them and inspired them to seek alternative ways of thinking, engaging and hopefully living. These students are limited by the processes of White supremacy and White privilege, it is not enough to know it intuitively and to think that you as an individual can “get over,” it must be interrogated and critiqued. Furthermore, I felt very strongly that my students needed not only to interrogate White privilege, they also needed to figure out ways to develop processes and mechanisms (beyond the Civil Rights Movement) that ensured balance in the system and/or create alternatives which allows the group to thrive and not beholden to favours and handouts from the empire. I have no delusions that all my students accepted this way of thinking, but I am sure that I managed to reach a few to help them think more critically about the roles they play in maintaining White privilege and the role they can play in subverting White Supremacy.

### **Teaching from Difference**

At my next teaching position at a small liberal arts college, I was the different other-other in that I was a foreigner of African descent teaching predominantly White students. The first day of the semester was the most entertaining as students would enter the classroom and give me the once over, some surprised to see me in the front of the classroom and a few brave ones manage to pass a comment or two under their breathe but in ear shot. I was given some leeway because despite being Black, I was foreign and despite Canada being on the border of the United States, Canada is still a little exotic, especially when you consider that most Americans don’t process that Canada has Black people too.

I was immediately confronted with how to teach from my difference a classroom of students socially invested in their own privilege and their group domination. In this college setting it was my difference that had to be accounted for. For most of the students they had never had a non-White teacher before so this was entirely new to their experience and to compound it, most had never personally interacted with a foreign adult as part of their educational experience. This made for an interesting

engagement because my courses were primarily in the area of comparative politics, which made my foreign status acceptable.

As part of that comparative experience and teaching from difference, the class was divided at the beginning of the semester into regions of the world and every week, every student would present news and current affairs from a country in their region. They were assigned to the particular region for the entire semester and must know not only the news but also some of the history, social and cultural contexts in order to make sense of the news. Importantly, they had to source the news items from the region, not from the United States. This turned out to be a great exercise semester after semester as students become invested in their regional (and sub-regional) identities and began to view countries outside of the US with more awareness and respect and less trepidation.

As an icebreaker towards the beginning of the semester I usually do a stereotype chart where all students participate in identifying characteristics assigned to racialised groups. This assignment is always met with some resistance as students claim that they do not stereotype people based on race. However, once the ball gets rolling, the stereotypes leap onto the board in record time. It's almost liberating because once the exercise is finished there is a sense of relief in the class because we've identified the elephant in the room. Towards the end of the semester the exercise is repeated and the characterizations generally become less offensive and more positive or benign. On more than one occasion, students came to my office after the initial exercise to apologize to me for their particular character description as it relates to people of African descent. It always sticks out more in their minds than it does in mine because it's probably the first time they have actually said such a thing *to* a person of colour. These students always take great care to tell me that I'm not who they're talking about when they describe Black people in a negative way; they mean "other" Blacks. I always find this distinction artificial and self-serving. In addition, what interested me most was how much they think my sense of identity is wrapped up in what they think of me – that is a power granted them by White privilege.

There is another element of difference I found interesting in this predominantly White school. Every semester in a class of 30 or so students, at least 5 would be identified as special needs students who needed extra time for assignments and exams. My experience was that perhaps only one of the five identified needed special arrangements or extra time even though I made adjustments for all. I was so interested in the provision of this special needs arrangement for students who didn't seem to need it that I eventually asked a student who had taken several of

my courses and who was identified as having special needs. After having taken four of my courses, he was pretty comfortable with me and so we were able to have a frank discussion about these arrangements. He admitted that he didn't need any special arrangements because he could and in fact did complete his assignments and exams within the time allotted for all other students. He disclosed that he was diagnosed as having a learning disability in high school, more by his parents than any medical professional, in order to afford him more time when sitting his SATs. This doesn't really surprise me when you consider that his future supposedly rests on the score he receives on these standardized tests. But it did stand out to me the difference in being identified as special needs between Black and White students in the United States. For Black students diagnosed with special needs there is an implicit expectation that they will fail, while White students with special needs are expected to excel with the necessary support.

### **Teaching through Difference**

My teaching experience in Australia was different from the other two classroom experiences in that I was teaching non-traditional students, that is, mature students who were already in their careers full-time. The course I offered was geared towards professional development but was also used for university credit at the graduate level so there was a mix of students. In the Australian context I was Black, but a different of kind of Black than they were used to interacting with. Aborigines in Australia refer to themselves as 'Blackfellas' but they are not of African descent. The course I taught was catered to Aborigines and those working in Aborigine communities. My being different in this context – non-White, non-Aborigine and foreign - had it's advantages because I was a complete outsider to the contention and confrontation between Whites and Aboriginal Australians.

The advantage I had here was that I could teach through difference, through my own difference and my students' for a more inclusive educational experience. George J. Sefa Dei has argued that student disengagement and high drop-out rates could be "alleviated by the development of an inclusive curriculum that promotes alternative, non-hegemonic ways of knowing and understanding our world" (Dei, 1996: 170). This was most instructive because I was able to create a curriculum that looked at reported best practices from around the globe without assigning any importance to one over the other and encouraged students to critique and discuss sections that didn't make sense as well as fuse things

that did make sense for their contexts. In addition, as the instructor, my words were not golden, I was not the end all of information, I was merely the conversation starter and so students were encouraged to disagree with me and provide alternative viewpoints. Education is about exchange and teaching through difference allows for such exchanges to take place in a non-hegemonic environment.

Teaching through difference in this context also entailed some level of mediation and conflict resolution processes as the confrontation between Aborigines and White Australia, although not violent or necessarily aggressive (on the part of Aborigines) is ongoing in overt but sometime very subtle ways. Teaching through difference is perhaps the most involved but also the most rewarding process because it involves engaging at a level where difference in and of itself is not accorded any status – it is neither superior nor inferior, good nor bad, it just is. Additionally, difference isn't something to be avoided or disregarded, in fact difference is to be identified, named and included so that we all benefit from the information and the potential alternative ways of thinking and doing that it might entail. In this particular course, I asked students to do a survey of their communities and name all the assets and potential assets. While not intended by me, many of the students came back with lists that included those people that were “different” and were therefore a liability to the community in some way. As a follow up I asked them to identify what made them different and how they could be considered potential assets if re-oriented or approached differently. It was a difficult task for most because once they had formed their opinions about the person or the agencies; it was hard for them to think about how to approach this person or organization differently.

The reality of White privilege again was an issue because for Indigenous Australians, there was a sense that even if the White person or White organization in place is detrimental to the livelihood of Aboriginal people, no approach by a non-White person is going to change the way Whites operate within Aboriginal communities. Even though the rhetoric of inclusion is very much part of the discourse on Indigenous affairs in Australia, it is not yet reality for many Indigenous communities who struggle to be respected not only for who they are as First Australians but also for their alternative views and knowledge systems to exist alongside European knowledge systems without demotion. My course attempted to bridge this divide but we still have some way to go.

## Conclusion

We all know what it means to be visible and yet invisible. On one side of the coin, racialized populations are extraordinarily visible. ... On the other side, however, white supremacy has changed its strategies: the days of legalized racism are over. There is no castle to smash, no laws to fight against, no cry to rally around. Instead, we face an invisible system of power. As a system of power it is also a system of privilege, which means that we are unable to see it for what it is (Thompson and Thompson, 2008: 46).

The demographic changes of the last 20 years are such that we should be at that stage in the discourse on diversity and multiculturalism that we can name the elephant in the room – White supremacy. If education policy is an act of White supremacy as David Gillborn suggests then all the talk of diversity and multiculturalism in public education is pointless unless it includes a discussion on Whiteness – privilege and supremacy, rather than simply of those different others. Inclusive education doesn't mean that we superficially entertain differences while still maintaining a Euro-centric educational curriculum and treating non-European knowledge systems, content and values as subservient to mainstream European values. Until these issues are fundamentally dealt with, we will continue to experience educational reforms that have no positive effect on difference.

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## CHAPTER TWO

# THE EMERGENCE OF INDIVIDUAL INSTRUCTION AND RELEVANT EDUCATION IN SAN FRANCISCO

MEREDITH ELIASSEN

### **Teaching to different during the nineteenth century**

San Francisco historically held conversations reflecting attitudes towards teaching to different in which the dominant society's fear of poverty was projected onto minority groups. Beginning in the 1850s, public school teachers who were bilingual in English and Spanish earned more than English-only colleagues due to perceived values in assimilating *Californios* into American society. "Other" became a linguistic and social construct that supported American conquest over native-born residents who were often of mixed racial heritage. The vast majority of "gold seekers" were transient immigrant "others" from the East Coast motivated by the promise of quick riches – what they actually found was hardship, poverty, and scarcity. When California joined the Union as a "free" state, freeborn Americans of African ancestry, along with industrious Chinese, Jewish, German, and Italian immigrants were systematically marginalized because they posed formidable competition for scarce resources and each group respectively established benevolent societies and churches.

Cultural identity mattered as segregate was San Francisco's first educational policy in teaching to ethnic different. San Franciscans floated a \$100,000 education bond in 1854 to expand public education. Blacks discerned education to be the vector of affluence, and used their share of the funds to open segregated church-based public schools. At the end of the decade local activist J. Holland Townsend described the continuing efforts in the black community to secure public education: "Fugitive Slave Enactment, Supreme Court Decisions, together with refusals of the general government to allow us the right to pre-empt the Public lands, may be

imposed upon us, yet in the majesty of our manhood, we may by perseverance overcome them all (1859).”

San Francisco has historically been a “labour” town creating a dichotomy of sensibilities regarding identity and different in relation to belonging and the politics of belonging. San Francisco’s geographic isolation in its formative years placed labourers and craftsmen in the West Coast’s pioneering urban society in an advantageous position to turn “producer” rhetoric into powerful and enduring electoral platforms (Kazin, 1987). For the dominant majority, this created an egalitarian climate offering new opportunities than could be found on the East Coast, but for different (most notably those of Asian ethnicities) who were excluded from labour’s ranks, opportunity for advancement was hard to come by. A “Chinese School” was established in 1859 to serve children of Chinese ancestry barred from admittance to San Francisco public schools. Chinese parents hired private teachers or utilized church-based schools when City officials refused funds to educate this community. After the 1882 Chinese Exclusion law passed, the San Francisco school board established a segregated Chinese Primary School.

Historically, hunger creates *different* in children living in poverty. Kate Douglas Wiggin (1856-1923) helped to establish the first kindergarten west of the Rockies known as the Silver Street Kindergarten in 1878 to serve the children of union workers. In Wiggin’s first children’s book *The Story of Patsy* (1883), written to benefit the school; she attributed *different* to poverty and alcoholism but projected it upon working-class children (the character of Patsy had deforming bovine tuberculosis which was caused by drinking contaminated milk), “Some children are like little human scrawl books, blotted all over with the sins and mistakes of their ancestors (Wiggin, 1894). Health education activist Dr. Charlotte Brown (1846-1904) studied the health of immigrant and working-class schoolgirls 16 to 19 years of age in Oakland and San Francisco, and found that the adolescent girls were suffering from similar health complaints to professional women (teachers, typists, telegraph operators, and dressmakers), including dental, sinus, vision, and feelings of anxiety. Patterns found in immigrant populations from Sweden, Germany, and Ireland were similar to schoolgirls who had long hours of homework in addition to school and household chores, and found bad diet, sleep, and exercise habits correlated to irregular menstrual cycles (1896). Brown suggested some preventative measures including the erection of municipal-funded gymnasiums, health education programs, and creation of a community-based take-out low-cost food service.

## **Pioneering individual instruction at San Francisco State**

San Francisco State Normal School was created by an act of the California State Legislature on March 22, 1899. A normal school is a vocational school for future teachers. Its students reflected local demographics. During its formative years the entire student body was female. Many students were the first in their families to attend and graduate from a normal school. Under Burk's leadership, San Francisco State gained a reputation for offering rigorous curriculum in individual instruction methods. Burk was deeply interested in educational efficiency.

Burk's mentor was Dr. Granville Stanley Hall (1846-1924) who shaped the early child-study movement in the United States as founder of the American Psychological Association. Hall published articles by Burk and Caroline Frear for *The Pedagogical*. Burk wrote about teasing and bullying while Frear wrote about E.H. Russell's observations on how children imitate behavioural patterns. Hall continued conversations with the couple that shaped the early mission of San Francisco State Normal School. Caroline in particular addressed teaching to different: "The instinct of secretiveness may be turned into useful channels if through it the child can be encouraged to work things out independently by himself... independence and individuality are good qualities when not exaggerated (Burk, 1900a)."

The outward structure of the normal school was distinctly meagre and crude – Burk was far more concerned with what went on inside a school. Burk was keenly sensitive to the claims of individuality and fought against the lock-step system of teaching in K-12 classes that he felt led to higher dropout rates and the need for remedial education. Caroline continued to address different in relation to intellectual development in students when she asked: "What is the normal child? Is he the child who is not noticeable dull, who accomplishes the year's work in a year, and who falls, it is taken for granted, under the class of the majority of children (Burk, 1900b)."

Caroline concluded: "Even if we knew enough to form an ideal normal curriculum for the normal child, justice would not be accomplished by this alone for the majority, or at least for a large proportion, of children."

Burk implemented the most rigorous entrance requirements of all the California State Normal Schools. He sought to instil curriculum to create "dynamic energy" within future teachers. Once in the program, a student teacher attended classes on the teaching of grammar, mathematics, geography and reading, while she was charged with the task of teaching twenty-five children observed by a Normal School faculty supervisor. A student teacher in the program had to demonstrate that she possessed the

“teaching personality” while she gained experience in a controlled classroom laboratory environment.

The 1906 San Francisco earthquake and fire destroyed much of the city including the original San Francisco State Normal School campus. With over 300,000 San Francisco residents rendered homeless and scattered, Burk had San Francisco State Normal School back in session at the Grant School in Oakland within weeks. Burk lobbied Governor George C. Pardee to improve California state textbooks. He believed that no subject should be taught unless its educational relevance was proven. Burk implemented his “individual instruction method” during the 1910s.

In 1921, the Normal School expanded its liberal arts curriculum, and its name was changed to San Francisco State Teacher’s College. As a result of this transformation, and curriculum was introduced to increase male enrolment. Burk brought Anna Verona Dorris (1889-1975) to San Francisco State in 1922, and she played a definitive role in shaping early curriculum relevant to understanding *different*. Dorris, a geography professor, was a proponent of visual instruction during the early 1920s and established the Visual Education Department (today known as Academic Technology) a year after San Francisco State Teacher’s College received authorization to grant the Bachelor of Arts degree in 1923. As a leader in the national movement to broaden understanding of world affairs utilizing visual materials, she broadened individual instruction by encouraging students to take “excursions” by exploring the plethora of new media available; she also fostered pedagogical possibilities for using motion pictures in mass education even during the industry’s infancy. International relations courses were launched in 1927 that opened students to intellectual undercurrents of *different* as pioneering students of colour began to enrol to get teaching credentials.

San Francisco State graduate Alice Fong Yu (Class of 1926) became the first Chinese-English bilingual teacher to be hired in a San Francisco public school. San Francisco State’s earliest known African-American graduate Grace Hackett (class of 1929) went on to teach at Allensworth School in California’s only black township located in Tulare County during the 1930s. The college remained small and intimate as enrolment for students of colour slowly increased during the Great Depression. Identity matters when the sense of belonging (as compared to being different) becomes articulated and politicized when it is threatened. Students started clubs to bridge cultural differences. The International Relations Club (1929-present) was originally established to study internationalism and to “create a feeling of co-operations between students of various races at college and throughout life” (*Franciscan*, 1932). The Open Road Club