



The Making of An Echo Chamber: A Critical Discourse Analysis on Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) Educational Policies Across Public Schools in Greater Toronto Area, Ontario

(Title)

by

Rachel Pui Ching Tam

(Student Name)

a practice-based research paper submitted to the School of Social Work of York University in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of **Master of Social Work**

©2024

(Year)

The author reserves publication rights, and neither the paper nor extensive extracts from it may be printed or otherwise reproduced without the author's written permission.

**The Making of An Echo Chamber: A Critical Discourse Analysis on Equity,
Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) Educational Policies Across Public Schools in Greater
Toronto Area, Ontario**

by

Rachel Pui Ching Tam

A Practice-Based Research Paper Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

for the Degree of

Masters of Social Work

School of Social Work

York University

Toronto, Ontario, Canada

GS/SOWK 5450 3.0 Section C: Practice-Based Research Paper Seminar

Dr. Soma Chatterjee

April 2024

Abstract

Under the legislation of Ontario Ministry of Education's PPM 119: Developing and Implementing Equity and Inclusive Education Policies in Ontario schools (2009), Equity, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) practices and policies has been widely promoted across public education institutions in Ontario over the past decade. These policies and practices can be situated in Canada's neoliberal and colonial context, where institutional antiracism work has been diluted as a celebration of diversity and multiculturalism, which has historically been a symbolic marker of Canada's nationhood and citizenship. These efforts led to the adoption of outcome-focused, individualized, performative policies. In wake of a recent tragic incident of a TDSB principal's suicide, its legal dispute linking the death to an antiracism training session in the workplace, as well as the consequent responses from media outlets and the public, this study presents a critical discourse analysis of the dominant institutional EDI culture and how it has led, or rather, impeded the development of antiracism across Ontario's public-school sector. Entering from a scan of the media responses reporting on the incident and its harshest critics about EDI programs, this study follows Fairclough's (1995) critical discourse analysis methodology in the efforts to trace back the lineage of today's institutional EDI programs from Canada's long-standing liberal multiculturalism agenda. Through analyzing documents of texts, images and videos detailing EDI policies and action plans, collected from the 4 largest public-school boards in the Greater Toronto Area, this study found an overwhelming echoing sentiment and neoliberal discourses with the state's liberal multiculturalism and antiracism rhetoric. Last, this study attempts to reimagine the trajectory of antiracism work with a focus from a decolonial lens.

Keywords: Equity, Diversity and Inclusion, policies, neoliberalism, colonialism, social justice, critical discourse analysis

Table of Content

Acknowledgement 5

Chapter 1: Introduction 7

 The Fight For and Against EDI Trainings in Public-Schools..... 7

 How I came into this Room 9

Chapter 2. Ethical Considerations..... 11

Chapter 3: Literature Review 12

 Multiculturalism in Canada..... 12

 Key Federal and Provincial Legislations 23

 A timeline of Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) policy in Ontario 28

Chapter 4: Methodology and Methods 36

Chapter 5: Data Collection, Organization and Coding Methods 43

Chapter 6: Research Findings 54

Chapter 7: Discussion 58

 i. The Echo Chamber 58

 ii. Shifting in Discourses: Equity as diluting racism and Happy Diversity 61

 a. Contextualizing the Shift in Discourses through Ontario’s Political Timeline..... 61

 b. Inclusivity and Equity: Diluting Racism..... 65

 c. Happy Diversity as an end to the Colonial Past..... 68

 iii. Neoliberal Dominance: Ideologies of Excellence, Citizenships and Wellbeing 70

 a. Equity and Diversity as a technology for Neoliberal Excellence 71

 b. Equity and Diversity in the Discourse of “Good Citizenship” 72

 c. Equity and Inclusion and the discourse of Well-being 73

 iv. Culture of Accountability and (non)-Performativity 74

 a. The Neoliberal Obsession with Numerics and Metrics..... 76

b. Non-performativity as “Doing the Document”	77
v. Commitment and Compliance	79
a. Commitment as “heart and mind”	80
b. Commitment as Compliance.....	83
vi. Racism as a Skills and Knowledge Deficit Syndrome	84
a. Toothless anti-oppressive pedagogy	85
b. Representation & Identity Politics	87
vii. “We want to hear from you”: The Illusion of Democratic Schools	89
a. The Illusory Democratic Schools.....	90
b. Deference Politics in Schools: Who is being Centered?.....	91
Chapter 8: On the Quest for Hope and Reimagination - Brief Thoughts about the Trajectory to Antiracism and Decolonization.....	94
Revisiting Freire: On Praxis and Solidarity	94
The Quest for Hope: the Combahee River Collective and Black Feminist Thoughts ..	96
Decolonize antiracism?.....	97
Chapter 9: Conclusion.....	101
References.....	103
Appendix.....	124

Acknowledgement

To say the past eight months have been a remarkable journey is an understatement. Emerging out of this project, I find myself landing in a completely different place from where I imagined I would be when this work started merely from scattered curiosities and late-night thoughts.

First, I cannot thank my family enough for all their support, love, and care. My beloved husband, partner, comrade - never can I ever imagine doing this without you. You have kept me sane and alive, day after day. To my father, mother and sister, thank you for all your love and support, whether it is a dim sum lunch or sharing a laugh over a funny video, each of those moments have helped me through this project. To the matriarchs of my life: Hoi Lan, Siu, and Joanne, your wisdoms and presence has sustained me throughout this journey. Thank you for being my strength and comfort.

I would also like to express my deep gratitude to my supervisor, Dr. Soma Chatterjee, your insights and guidance have been incredibly valuable. Thank you for generously sharing many timely teachings at times when I need them the most. I would also like to thank the many great teachers and mentors I have been so privileged to cross paths with; this work is a culmination of everything you have poured into me. Last, I want to thank my fellow colleagues and peers whom I have the pleasure to share this journey with, whether in commiseration together, or in exchange of insights and ideas, knowing that we are doing this together is invaluable.

A special note to acknowledge that this project was written at an arduous time when academic freedom and freedom of political expression is increasingly being suppressed and trampled in our very own university battlegrounds. As student activists all over the world rose up

demanding the cessation of war atrocities, genocide, illegal settler occupation and violence, it is my wish that this project can lend itself in expanding our collective armory in face of militaristic suppression and police incarcerations.

Chapter 1: Introduction

Under the legislation of Ontario Ministry of Education's (OME) PPM No. 119:

Developing and Implementing Equity and Inclusive Education Policies in Ontario Schools

(2013), Equity, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) practices and policies has been widely promoted across public education institutions in Ontario in the past decade, quickly entrenched in multiple facets including policy development, organizational practices, pedagogy and human resource processes. This proliferation of EDI culture can be situated in Canada's neoliberal and colonial context, where institutional antiracism work has been diluted as a celebration of diversity and multiculturalism, which has historically been a symbolic marker of Canada's nationhood and citizenship. In wake of a recent tragic incident of a TDSB principal's suicide, its legal dispute linking the death to an antiracism training session in the workplace, as well as the subsequent media responses, this study presents a critical discourse analysis of the dominant institutional EDI culture and how it has led, or rather, impeded the development of antiracism across Ontario's public-school sector. There are three research questions central to this study. First, how did the mainstream EDI culture come into prominence in the public-school sector in Ontario? Second, how does this dominant EDI culture in public schools and institutions co-opt in racial capitalism, neoliberalism, colonialism, and thus impede our development in antiracism efforts? Third, how can we reimagine the trajectory of antiracism work in Ontario's public schools?

The Fight For and Against EDI Trainings in Public Schools

In July 2023, news broke out about the tragic suicidal death of a TDSB principal, Mr. Richard Bilkszto. What sensationalized the reports at the same time, was the lawsuit that principal Bilkszto pursued in April 2023, for TDSB's "failure to defend him in an allegedly hostile DEI training session that took place in 2021, where it was insinuated that he was a white

supremacist” (Sarkonak, 2023). TDSB has then pursued legal actions against the KOJO Institute, the company that facilitated the training, asking for damages in the amount it will need to pay Bilkszto if he wins, though the lawsuit was later dropped. Various right-leaning media outlets including the National Post, Toronto Sun, and even Fox News, were quick to call for the dismantling of EDI programs, rushed to publish a flurry of sensationalized reports with headings such as *“Canadian Principal’s Suicide after alleged bullying for his ‘whiteness’ in Critical Race Theory training sparks investigation”* (Grossman, 2023) or *“Employee’s EDI experience a cautionary tale for companies on perils of wokeism: The experience of a Toronto school principal illustrates why EDI is finally encountering a massive backlash”* (Levitt, 2023). On the contrary, limited reporting was seen from numbered left-leaning media outlets, with a few opinion editorial pieces reiterating the deeply embedded racism in our public education systems, and thus defending the continued practice of antiracism trainings and EDI programs in public schools.

These media responses are situated in a larger trend “EDI clawback”, where global dominating media and information technology giants such as Google and Meta have been cutting and shutting down their EDI programs (Elias, 2023). In addition, increasingly public calls and legislations have been pursued by Conservative governments to eliminate or ban EDI in the US (Fairbank, 2024) and Canada (Johnson, 2022). A notable example would be the recent high-profile Supreme Court overturning of affirmative actions in U.S. universities, a historical decision that overruled race-based admissions as unconstitutional and has been largely cited as a victory among the right-wing’s most ferocious EDI critics and activists. Edward Blum and his right-wing activism group, “Student for Fair Admissions” has launched a multitude of litigation efforts against prominent academic sites such as public universities and research institutions

including the Smithsonian (2024). Most ironically, Blum's legal crusade has wittingly deployed legal tactics copied from the NAACP, the very civil rights group that pursued litigations in dismantling racial segregation in its most seminal case, *Brown v. Board of Education* in 1954 (Hayter, 2023). From these legislative reversals, corporate clawbacks, to our media and public discourses, we see our dearly held equity, diversity, and inclusion ideals crumble as our polarized political landscapes become increasingly frayed, with the upsurge of white-supremacist and fascist, populist ideologies entrenched in right-wing politics. While the tragic death of Mr. Bilkszto could be layered with a plethora of complex causes and circumstances, this study is not concerned with the speculations and ruling in this case. Rather, the focal point of this study lies in interrogating the rhetoric and discourses from the media and public discussions circumscribing this incident: How does this binary conceptualization of EDI programs impact society discourses about antiracism issues? As the political Left vehemently attempts to savage EDI programs and antiracism training in schools, have we also lost the battle of our efforts of progressing antiracism work? Why are we, as a society, so dutifully invested in EDI programs as the only pathway to racial justice and institutional equity? Are there other alternatives?

How I came into this Room

It would be naive to assume that the recent TDSB incident was the only entry point that led me to this opportunity and interest to conduct this study. Here, I borrow Táíwò's argument about what brings me and you to be "in this room", to engage in this discussion together on this paper, which has to be traced back to layers of history, politics, and geography that made it possible. I self-identify as a Han Chinese born in Canada, descended from my ancestral lineage in Canton, China. Fleeing the bloody massacres and famine due to imperial violences of the

colonial Japanese empire and the authoritarian Chinese government, my grandparents boarded a sampan boat and fled our ancestral village to settle in the former British colonial city of Hong Kong in the 1930s. I am a product of colonialism, growing up to only know and aspire to the ways of my colonizers, to eventually settling here as an uninvited guest under Treaty 13 in this land we collectively know as Canada. I situate our convergence on the privileges I enjoy today, which can be traced in the little blue book that defines my Canadian citizenship, the house I comfortably live in on stolen, Indigenous land, and my privileged, middle-class upbringing in an Eurocentric, anglo-Christian environment. These circumstances bring me to this page, connecting to you, where our social systems “determine which interactions happen and between whom, and thus, what social patterns people are in position to observe” (Táíwò, 2022, p. 76). I also recognize that these privileges did not come without a cost. I am also coming to interact with you, carrying the shadows of the continuing discriminations and state-sanctioned injustices directed at my ancestors’ and my own, yellow-colored skin. My existence today is also a manifestation of the pain and struggles of my mothers, my grandmothers, and all the matriarchs of my family, in birthing life in face of the ravages of colonialism, patriarchy, racial capitalism and all the other “isms” they encountered. Thus, I bring into this room not only representing the epistemology that I call mine, rather I also bear an aggregate of a historicized understanding of the world, and from the distant land and space where I call “home”.

Chapter 2. Ethical Considerations

While this research does not involve the participation of any human subjects and is not concerned with questions of informed consent, avoidance of harm and confidentiality, discussions of ethics are still pertinent and prominently centered throughout the research process. It has been widely indicated that engagement in critical discourse analysis should be grounded in the concrete understanding of the critiques' usability and practicality of actions, in and within communities, cultural activists, practicing educators, and social movements (Apple, 2019, 2019; Billingham, 2019; Ferman, 2017; Pickerden et al., 2015). As such, a central ethical consideration surrounds the interpretation of data, dissemination, and the future implementation of research findings in translation into meaningful social actions and collective movements. In addition, Burke (1996) has proposed a dramatic perspective to conceptualizing critical discourse analysis, where language is being theorized as "symbolic action", which involves a complex process of choice and decision-making. Such a view asserts that language as "something that people do to and with each other, and to the world more generally" (Graham, 2018, p. 188), while implicating the ethics and morals behind the use and interpretation of language. Burke's interpretation of language use as "action" represents a form of choice, which is shaped by morals and driven by our social orientations, epistemological tendencies, and habits of meaning-making. These views thus broadened the ethical considerations of this project as more than a simple analysis, rather as a process that is driven by ethical motives and subsequent moral choices and actions.

Chapter 3: Literature Review

The following section includes a scan of existing literature that includes sociopolitical analysis of Canada's Multiculturalism policy, how it came into existence in the Canadian political landscape and how it eventually came to dominate the mainstream political and social arena. Furthermore, there is an account of the timeline and development of Ontario's PPM No. 119: *Developing and Implementing Equity and Inclusive Education Policies in Ontario Schools* (2013) in context with the sociopolitical environment that shaped the policy uptake and implementation processes in Ontario's public-school boards.

Multiculturalism in Canada

The state multiculturalism policy in Canada has been a tenet of Canada's national identity, diplomatic ideology, and governance policy both domestically and on the global stage. Established in 1971, the multiculturalism policy has been Canada's official policy for the governance of diversity, while dominating all political and public discourses in hailing a "diversity-tolerant" mindset (Fleras, 2019; Lei & Guo, 2022). Proponents of multiculturalism maintained the argument that multiculturalism in Canada provides a link for immigrants to identify with and feel pride in Canada, which increases social cohesion and the establishment of a national identity, leading to decreased intolerance and xenophobia (Banting & Kymlicka, 2010). However, there has been mounting literature that questions the policy's effectiveness and legitimacy in its claim to advance social equality and inclusion. Numerous scholars have posited that the multiculturalism framework has been deployed as a mask to façade deeply entrenched racial inequities in Canada and historical processes of racial stratification and assimilations (Banerjee & Reitz, 2007; Flegel, 2002; Fleras, 2019; Goodhart, 2008; Guo & Guo, 2011; Jones,

2000; Kihika, 2022; Lei & Guo, 2022; Naidu, 1995; Peck & Sears, 2023). These critiques will inform my further analysis of the linkage of the EDI project with Canada's multicultural roots.

a. The Birth story of Canada's Multiculturalism Policy

The establishment of Canada's state multiculturalism policy can be traced back to the nation's historical roots of colonialism, imperialism, immigration, and settlement. In its inception, multiculturalism was used simply as a description of the social demographic composition in the country in 1867, referring to the inhabitants at the time of confederation: Indigenous peoples, French, and British (Lei & Guo, 2022). The realities, however, departed from this idealized portrayal of multiculturalism as peaceful co-existence. The French and British promoted ideologies of colonial expansion, rivalry, and cultural imperialism in the nineteenth century to justify the subjugation and exploitation of non-Western peoples by unilaterally defining them and their cultures as primitive or barbaric (Byrne, 2017). This led to centuries of land and resource seizing from Indigenous peoples, as well as the enactment of discriminatory and violent state policies and practices, notably the Indian Act (1876) that control all aspects of life among Indigenous peoples, resulting in a long history and ongoing abuse, such as the Residential School system, the creation of Indian reserves, and banning of all cultural and ceremonial practices among Indigenous peoples. The long-standing damage from colonialism is still palpable and continues to be exacerbated through broken treaties and rampant systemic racism against Indigenous peoples in Canada, which the United Nations has equated to genocide under international law (Stefanovich, 2019). In addition, legislation of the racist Immigration Acts of 1896 and 1952 promoted a White Canada nation-building agenda that prohibited and restricted racialized immigrants from immigrating to Canada. Additional exclusionary policies were enacted to target specific immigrants of color, including the Chinese Immigration Act

(1885) and the subsequent head tax on Chinese immigrants, the Chinese Exclusion Act (1923) that banned all Chinese immigrants until 1947, the ban on Black immigrants (1911), the denial of entry of Indian refugees, the internment of Japanese Canadians during World War II (Lei & Guo, 2022). These overtly racist immigration policies and governance models continued to dominate the political and social landscape preceding the Canadian discourse of “multiculturalism”.

By the end of World War II, due to an influx of immigrants fleeing war-torn Europe and mounting international pressure on countries to abandon overtly racist immigration policies, Canada shifted a governance model that focused on race-neutral inclusivity, leading to the official adoption of Multiculturalism as a public and state policy in 1971 (Dewing & Brosseau, 2009). The conception of multiculturalism in 1971 was largely prompted by the October crisis from the Quebecois secessionist movements in the 1960s (Blanding, 2020). In its efforts to quell the imminence of fracturing national division, the Pierre Trudeau government implemented a series of reforms to enhance the status of French Canadians, affirming English and French bilingualism and biculturalism to embolden the equality of British and French as the “founding nations” (Kymlicka, 2015), in a complete disregard of the Indigenous Peoples who inhabited this land way before settlers arrived. However, the establishment of such duality led to objections from other white, European ethnic groups such as the Italians, Poles, and Ukrainians, fearing that the biculturalism agenda would be achieved at their expense. It became quite apparent that multiculturalism was never created with non-white immigrants in mind, but rather was demanded by and for, European immigrant groups. In other words, racialized groups such as Blacks, Asians, Muslims, and Indigenous people were never regarded as stakeholders in the original impregnation of multiculturalism (Meister, 2021). As a result, out of reluctance and to appease mounting demands and pressure from the public, the official recognition of ethnic

diversity was birthed in Canada as its new governance model and a marker of contemporary Canadian identity. In this context, it is evident that the multiculturalism policy, despite its branding as tolerance and peace, emerged as a continuation of Canada's imperialistic, colonial, and racist rhetoric.

b. Evolution of Institutional Multiculturalism in Canada

In the past 52 years, the discourse and implementation of multiculturalism in Canada have evolved. A growing body of literature in conversation about issues related to Canadian multiculturalism and diversity culture has emanated from multiple disciplines, including, but not limited to sociology, political sciences, business, healthcare, education, and social work. Scholars and practitioners have engaged in various conceptual perspectives of multiculturalism policy and pedagogy, including conservative multiculturalism, liberal multiculturalism, critical culturalism, antiracist education, and anti-oppressive education perspectives (Naseem, 2011). It is noted that these perspectives do not represent the entire range of an ever-changing ideology, and these concepts are not monolithic and/or consensual across a field of intersecting interdisciplinary scholarship and research.

1960s-1980s: Multiculturalism as a Measure of Containment. Following recommendations from the Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism, Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau proclaimed that his government policy is “multiculturalism within a bilingual framework” on October 8, 1971 (Blanding, 2020). This marked the subsequent decades of the formative stage of multiculturalism, including allocated federal funding dedicated to ethnic heritage programs, language teaching, and cultural exchanges (Dewing & Brosseau, 2009). These policies were often critiqued as hollow and superficial, infamously known as the

Three S Approach (Sari, Samosas and Steelbands) which were derogatorily dubbed as “sing & dancing events” much to the chagrin of racialized communities who yearned for radical changes. These initiatives aligned with early theories of conservative and liberal multiculturalism, identifying cultural pluralism as a necessary feature of a liberal society with autonomous actors (Naseem, 2011), while striving for a common culture in which non-dominant groups are expected to merge into the host culture through the dominant language of English and French (Ravitch, 1990). Much of the emphasis was on encouraging and facilitating the ways for cultural minority groups to fully participate and integrate into Canadian society. “Ethnic minority groups”, despite their existence as a widely diverse diaspora with complex racial and ethnic dynamics, were being reduced to their most superficial, often stereotypical characteristics, and were then being placed in the Canadian racial hierarchy to reinforce the superiority of English and French speaking Canadians. In this view, the enactment of multiculturalism within a bilingual framework continued to center Canada’s colonial structural foundation rooted in white supremacy and subjugation of Indigenous communities.

The 1970s and 80s were characterized by an upsurge in civil rights movements and activism, which also spurred Canada’s multiculturalism policy to experience a growing institutionalization and shift in policy to combat racism and discrimination. By the end of 1970s, it was apparent that multiculturalism has failed to contain the discontent among racialized communities leading to the rise of multiple grassroots civil rights movements, sharing much of the political activism that started from south of the border. As the government realized celebratory multiculturalism and diversity was no longer effective, we saw an overhauling of government languages and discourses to rebrand Canada’s multicultural identity into one of a “human rights leader.” The enactment of the Canadian Multiculturalism Act (1988), the

Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms (1982), the Canadian Race Relations Foundation Act (1991), the *Abella Report* (1984), and the Employment Equity Act (1986, 1998) (Dewing & Brosseau, 2009) placed multiculturalism in the wider legal and constitutional framework of Canadian society. These reports and legislation texts often were aspirational in their tones, also quite self-congratulatory in boasting the progress that these institutions have made in moving beyond the earlier anachronistic diversity celebrations, which is found to be similarly reflected in school board policies as well. The Discussion section of this study will further dive into how this sentiment perpetuates the larger EDI project in the State.

The 1970s and 80s were characterized by an upsurge in civil rights movements and activism, which also spurred Canada's multiculturalism policy to experience a growing institutionalization and shift in policy to combat racism and discrimination. By the end of 1970s, it was apparent that multiculturalism has failed to contain the discontent among racialized communities leading to the rise of multiple grassroots civil rights movements, sharing much of the political activism that started from south of the border. As the government realized celebratory multiculturalism and diversity was no longer effective, we saw an overhauling of government languages and discourses to rebrand Canada's multicultural identity into one of a "human rights leader." The enactment of the Canadian Multiculturalism Act (1988), the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms (1982), the Canadian Race Relations Foundation Act (1991), the *Abella Report* (1984), and the Employment Equity Act (1986, 1998) (Dewing & Brosseau, 2009) placed multiculturalism in the wider legal and constitutional framework of Canadian society. These reports and legislation texts often were aspirational in their tones, also quite self-congratulatory in boasting the progress that these institutions have made in moving beyond the earlier anachronistic diversity celebrations, which is found to be similarly reflected in

school board policies as well. The Discussion section of this study will further dive into how this sentiment perpetuates the larger EDI project in the State.

1980s-1990s: Neoliberal Capture - The Business Case for Multiculturalism. Around the time of 1980s, multiculturalism continued being the crux of Canada's nation-making project, where the House of Commons Standing Committee declared that "the desire for harmonious race relations is paramount for all Canadians" (Abu-Laban et al., 2004). What is interesting, is that despite the highly politically charged and sensitive nature of discussions about ethno-racial tensions, multiculturalism continued to be endorsed and promoted by all political parties. A key thread to this consistent agenda across political fault lines is suggested to be tied to the marketization and commodification of a diverse, pluralistic multicultural Canada as a business strategy to bring economic benefits to the country. The hegemonic proliferation of neoliberalism in Canada, which is "a form of governance distinguished in its conjunction of particular practices and knowledge production that emphasize the market and the responsibilities of enterprising subject *alongside* the recognition of collective and socio-economic rights of "disadvantaged" groups" (Altamirano-Jimenez, 2013, as cited in Pasternak, 2014), is not accidental in Canada's colonial and multicultural governance trajectory. Neoliberal ideologies have long been contested as another iteration of settler-colonialism where it upholds the sedimentation of corporate power (Carroll, 2017), the dispossession of Indigenous nations from land and law (Pasternak, 2016; Willmott & Skillings, 2021), and the reiteration of private property rights as norms of whiteness in constraining indigenous forms of life and sovereignty (Pasternak, 2015). A market-driven multicultural governance quickly rose to prominence during this time as it appealed to the neoliberal agenda while concreting the ongoing Canadian settler-colonial project in disposition of Indigenous people and land.

Prime Minister Brian Mulroney's reign during 1985-1994 epitomized this neoliberal discourse in its full perpetuity, often referred to as his Progressive Conservative "Multiculturalism Means Business" agenda, in perpetuation of the ideology of market-driven multiculturalism. The neo-conservative economic doctrine flourished together with Mulroney's "Pro-Business" agendas including austere government cuts and pro-business investments, where minority groups were no longer viewed as "outsiders" that needed to be accepted into Canadian society, rather as "repositories of nascent market potentials" (Fielding, 2009, p. 93). In a 1986 conference in downtown Toronto, Prime Minister Mulroney was quoted saying:

"Our multicultural nature gives us an edge selling to the world. Canadians who have cultural links to other parts of the globe, who have business contacts elsewhere are of utmost importance to our trade and investment strategy for economic renewal"

(Mulroney, 1986, as cited in Abu-Laban, 2020, p. 11)

The economic approach shifted from a previous emphasis on a "culture for culture's sake" perspective during the introduction of multiculturalism by Pierre Trudeau for national harmony and consolidation, to a relentless agenda to promote a tolerant and inclusive Canada with valuable assets and branding potentials within the competitive global economy. The flora of cultures and languages of Canadian society was believed to lead to increased international trade and improve the comparative advantage of the country, as opposed to other unilingual and monocultural competitors (Liadakis & Satzewich, 2003). Under this hyper-capitalistic hegemonic structure, multiculturalism has effectively been recruited as a "consumerist diversity" (Scarritt, 2019), a marketing strategy that helps promote international free trade, business dealings and an increasingly globalized consumer base. Under a heightened consumerism model, multiculturalism gets sold and mass produced as a disposable product, where businesses can pick

and choose what feels good and attractive for business, and then readily dispose of them when it becomes too unpalatable or un-marketable. Scarritt (2019) has aptly described the emptiness of multiculturalism being fully morphed as a consumerist product, where we “see it everyone and in everyone, multiplying the variety of diversity into a meaningless multitude” (p. 189). Not surprisingly, this consumerist branding of multiculturalism and eventually, EDI culture can also be found in Ontario’s public school boards’ policies as our governance increasingly embraces neoliberalism and capital-driven agendas.

2000-2010: Obama Effect and the Rise in Identity Politics. Around the 2000s, we saw another paradigm shift in the race discourse, particularly with the election of the first Black American president, Barack Obama. Walcott (2021) pointed to how the inauguration of Obama taking office in 2009 had widespread cultural, social and political influence over the North American EDI landscape, where Obama has personified America’s new identity as a “diverse” nation, being a mixed-race, mixed-heritage president. This was widely seen as a path of pivotal change, deviating from the all-white America that has been established for more than 400 years. The visceral symbolism of Obama rising to power also led to a rise of representation and identity politics, where major institutions and business organizations started to hire and recruit racialized individuals as highly visible leaders and representatives of influential businesses and corporations. The coined phenomenon, “Obama Effect”, has been aptly circulated within social science circles in describing the symbolic effect Obama had on North American racial politics, and inadvertently also led to a wide spread ripple effects to many aspects of American society: from racial attitudes, GRE test scores, internet cultures, to the stock market (Eschmann et al., 2023; Marx et al., 2009; Ramiah et al., 2015; Stricker & Rock, 2015; Welch & Sigelman, 2011). Despite a widespread phenomenon however, research revealed little to mixed effects on the

reduction of racial biases and racism in the U.S. (Gonino, 2017; Thompson & Barker, 2016). In fact, Onwuachi-Willig and Barnes (2012) observed that the political ascendance of Obama has been used as a justification of why offending conducts towards racial minorities do not involve “racism”. The symbolic Obama effect can also be understood together with the rise of identity and representational politics, and under a dominant framework of neoliberalism, it led to widespread implementation of affirmative action policies around this time period, largely in public institutions such as universities and hospitals. The most notable example of institutional diversity policy was the Obama administration’s endorsement of the U.S. Supreme Court ruling in the *Fisher v. University of Texas at Austin*, sustaining the race-conscious admissions policy in the university as constitutional (Walsh, 2012). The culture of affirmative action policies was increasingly tied to the Liberal/ Democratic parties as their official stance on race issues, and has frequently been taken up by Conservative politicians on slamming them as a part of “woke culture”, evident in the earlier mentioned legal battles headed by Edward Blum and outright banning of EDI across schools and public institutions. A similar political divide between the Liberal and Conservative discourses on diversity and antiracism policies is also observed, evident in the media responses following the suicide of the TDSB principal, Mr. Bilkszto. These political and cultural shifts also had an immense impact on the Canadian social discourse on issues of race and racism.

2010s onwards: Psychologicalized Racism as Attitudes and Biases. From the 2010s onwards, liberal multiculturalism and its subsequent offspring, EDI, has concreted itself as the official brand of multiculturalism in Canada. In the past two decades, a significant body of scholarships have emerged in documenting the longstanding barriers and experiences of exclusion among historically disenfranchised populations, particularly individuals from

racialized groups. Focuses of these theories increasingly point to contentions and harms from “implicit bias,” “microaggressions,” and unconscious biases” (Guo & Jamal, 2007; Henry et al., 2017; Skinner & Cheadle, 2016; Sue, 2017). These ideologies continued to proliferate not only in academic circles, rather together with the increased awareness and contemplation about employment equity, these perspectives informed the emergence of promoting diversity-hiring and recruitment practices in public institutions, then subsequently in other workplaces and corporations across Canada.

As diversity made its comeback in identity politics, notions of equity and inclusion have held on and further reified together with increasing social upheavals, most notably the Black Lives Matter movement and the Idle No More movement in Canada which mobilized into a global racial justice movement with the facilitation of social media. Examples of the pivotal moments included the high-profile reports of police brutality and the horrific murders of Black citizens around this period, such as the killing of Trayvon Martin in 2012, Michael Brown in 2014, Breonna Taylor in 2020, George Floyd in 2020 and many more. These brutal killings and the subsequent unjust acquisitions of the white perpetrators have further spurred an uproar against racial injustices and a heightened culture in holding public institutions accountable. More recently in 2021, the finding of the body remains of the 215 Indigenous children on the grounds of the former Kamloops Indian Residential School prompted the Canadian government and public institutions to rush through legislations in recognizing the National Day of Truth and Reconciliation as a provincial and federal holiday, as well as a flurry of educational awareness-raising activities in commemorating Orange Shirt Day and the traumatic legacy of Canada’s Residential Schools. As such, some universities in Canada have increasingly placed the emphasis on expanding EDI’s perimeter to also include a “decolonizing pedagogy” as another element of

their practice, leading to the rise of a variation of DEDI (Decolonization, Equity, Diversity, Inclusion). While Canadian universities were some of the first sites to adopt policies and initiatives to reflect the new priorities in EDI, other public institutions such as schools, hospitals and government agencies also followed suit to prioritize institutional diversity and antiracism initiatives through policy and programming in response to the increasingly vocal voices for racial equality and an awakening of political and social movements among Black, Indigenous, and racialized communities.

Key Federal and Provincial Legislations

Even though the education portfolio lies fully under provincial purview, federal laws and agendas are seen to be fully entrenched in provincial governance and impose stretching influences over the development of Ontario's education strategies. Despite the focus of this study on the development of racial equity in Canada, discussions about the lineage of Canadian equity progression are not complete without the discussion of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms (1982), Royal Commission on Equality in Employment (1984), and the subsequent enactment of the Employment Equity Act (1986, 1998).

a. Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms (1982)

As the 1970s was characterized by large-scale civil rights activism for feminists, racialized groups, people with disabilities, and Indigenous peoples, Canada had to contend with its lacking response to the looming calls for equity and social justice. Despite the establishment of the Constitution Act (1867) and the Canadian Bill of Rights (1960), it was not until the passing of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms (1982) by Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau that established Canada's own constitution with jurisdiction over all federal and

provincial laws in Canada and signified an end to Britain's parliamentary control over Canada's constitutional and legal power. After a lengthy process of heated debates between provinces, political parties, and televised consultation hearings with members of the public, the Charter was largely written in emulation of the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) (Paradis & Karbani, 2017). Most prominent to the Charter would be Section 15, which promotes the rights for all Canadians to be free from discrimination based on race, national or ethnic origin, religion, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, marital status, family status, genetic characteristics, disability, and conviction for an offense (Government of Canada, 1999). The Charter further laid the critical groundwork for future equity projects and human rights development in Canada.

b. Royal Commission on Equality in Employment (1984) and Canada's Employment Equity Act (1986)

By the mid-1980s, after nearly two decades of experience with human rights processes across Canada's courts, there had been increasing expressions to establish workers' rights and clarify employers' responsibilities for discriminatory acts in the workplace. While the Charter permitted employers to assume voluntary affirmative actions, the burden of change was still largely laid on individuals who experienced discrimination (Agocs, 2014). The Pierre Trudeau government responded to demands for a mandatory and structural approach to addressing workplace inequality with the announcement of the Royal Commission on Equality in Employment (1983), also known as The Abella Commission, with the appointment of Judge Rosalie Abella.

Abella reviewed the employment practices of eleven Crown corporations and released the landmark report. It recognized the structural roots of inequality in employment and the need for systemic remedies, as well as the evidence of discriminatory barriers built into cultures, and everyday practices in workplaces which mounts into historical patterns of structural practices (Agocs, 2014). *The Abella Report* (1984) prided itself on transforming views on anti-discrimination practices that primarily placed the onus on individuals and developing policies that do not seek to assimilate differences, rather to change the culture and structure of workplaces to create fairness for all and remove a bias in favor of white males (Abella, 1984, p. 10). The Employment Equity Act (will be referred as The Act hereafter) set out to remediate the systemic inequities found in all Canadian workplaces, and its enactment was one of the first efforts of the Government of Canada to recognize “the impacts of systemic or institutionalized employment discrimination on women, racialized (“visible”) minorities, persons of Aboriginal ancestry, and persons with disabilities” (Agocs, 2007, p. 187). Section 2 of The Act describes its goal:

“to achieve equality in the workplace so that no person shall be denied employment opportunities or benefits for reasons unrelated to ability and, in the fulfillment of that goal, to correct the conditions of disadvantage in employment experienced by women, Aboriginal peoples, persons with disabilities and members of visible minorities by giving effect to the principle that employment equity means more than treating persons in the same way but also requires special measures and the accommodation of differences” (Government of Canada, 1995).

The Act was often celebrated as a proactive and mandatory response to systemic discrimination and racial inequities in employment and has been considered a prototype by other

jurisdictions to develop similar policies in remediating systemic discrimination in an increasingly globalized workforce. While *The Abella Report* was often seen as an impetus to progressive equity practices in employment and women's rights, the aspirational and liberal undertones of the report set Canada onto its future course in fitting equity under neoliberalism (Agocs, 2007; Goldberg, 2007). Teresa Rees (1998) critiqued the implications of this "mainstreaming" equity into public institutions, that despite the efforts to designate a certain social group as "different", and thus require "special treatment, it is not enough to challenge organizational norms. Carol Bacchi and Joan Eveline further argued that despite the declared commitment to cultural changes, "most versions of mainstreaming are shaped by the neoliberal agenda driving globalized economies" (Bacchi & Eveline, 2003, p. 107), further perpetuating a hegemonic, capitalistic, colonial project in land and resource exploitation from Indigenous communities. This trend of mainstreaming equity under the wider pretense of neoliberalism since then has taken off to influence a number of other Canadian equity legislations, most noticeably in the *Report of the Advisor on Race Relations to the Premier of Ontario* (Lewis, 1992), which laid the fundamental pillars to Ontario's Equity and Inclusive educational policies.

c. The Pervasive Discourse of Canadian Mosaic and Multiculturalism

As McLaren (1999) and Blanding (2020) suggested, central to the multiculturalism strategy was the idea of cultural pluralism, and a fabrication of the myth of the "mosaic Canada", which are the linchpin of Canada's national identity and citizenship construction project. In the attempt to demarcate itself as different from the United States, the "mosaic Canada" ideology was a pervasive myth that juxtaposed Canada's immigration policy with the "melting pot" approach in the US (Skerrett, 2008). A term popularized by John Murray Gibbon's book (1938) and a folk music radio program on CBC, the metaphor of a Canadian mosaic quickly caught on

in popular culture and public media, before being deployed by government officials during World War II in efforts to ensure national unity (Meister, 2021). This synthesis of a mosaic Canadian national identity was rooted in a belief that Canadians would not form one distinct “race” or ethnic group, rather was the idea of Canadians collectively deciding what their national identity would be, even though it was rather clear that it would be a blend of British, French, and other white European traditions.

It is important to note that in its original inception, the term “mosaic Canada” has always been used to only capture white European groups such as the Germans, Danes, Polish, Russians, and Jews while excluding any racialized, non-white, and Indigenous groups. In fact, Gibbon did not shy away from his racist rhetoric against Indigenous peoples, where he articulated his imagination of the “race of the future” as beautiful tesserae mosaic tiles, composed of a diverse group of European racial groups with vibrant to be “superimposed on the original native Indian races” (Gibbon, 1938). Despite its blatant racist undertone, this metaphor of mosaic Canada persisted through history and has still been a pervasive thread in contemporary Canadian discourses and popular media. A quick search on the Government of Canada’s website would yield more than 1200 related documents that discuss the Government’s long-standing promotion of a mosaic multicultural Canadian identity. This has unveiled how Canada’s celebrated national multicultural identity has been steeped in the ubiquity of racism and colonial violence.

With education being a crucial tool for disseminating and reproducing the sentiments of cultural pluralism as superior over the assimilationist preference of the United States, Ontario’s education policy was thus deeply tied to the federal multiculturalism project and the promotion of a mosaic Canada national identity (Skerrett, 2008). For example, Ontario’s Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy made several references to multiculturalism as the core Canadian

values. For example, it is stated that “Canadians embrace multiculturalism, human rights, and diversity as fundamental values” (OME, 2019, p. 1). It is evident that Canada’s federal multiculturalism policy, ideology of cultural pluralism, and the mosaic metaphor have been pivotal to Ontario’s education equity policy formation and have “served as fertile soil for both multiculturalism and antiracist education” (Skerrett, 2008, p. 269).

A timeline of Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) policy in Ontario

Amidst a rapidly changing sociocultural and political climate, Ontario’s EDI education has been an increasingly contentious field as there is mounting pressure for public institutions to respond to incidents of racial violence and discrimination in a global context (Dali et al., 2021). The following section will be a historical analysis of equity education policies development in Ontario in 5 different periods (see Table 1): first, the establishment of the Antiracism and Ethnocultural Equity Policy (1993) under the New Democratic Party (NDP). Second, the ‘Common Sense Revolution’ from 1995 to 2003 under the Progressive Conservatives (PC) and Liberal governance. Third, the re-release of the equity policy in 2009. Fourth, the renewed vision of education equity under the liberals, and lastly, the conception of Ontario’s Education Equity Action Plan initiated by the Liberals up to the current governance under the Conservatives.

Table 1

Table Showing Timeline of Ontario’s Political Party Changes and Major EDI- related Legislations from 1943 - present

Time period	Political Party	Ontario Premier	Major Equity / Education policy Enacted (P= provincial, F= federal)
-------------	-----------------	-----------------	---

1943-1948	Progressive Conservative	George Drew	-
1948-1949	Progressive Conservative	Thomas Kennedy	-
1949-1961	Progressive Conservative	Leslie Frost	Ontario Human Rights Code (1962) (P)
1961-1971	Progressive Conservative	John Robarts	Closing of Ontario's last racially segregated school (1965) (P) Announcement of Multiculturalism Policy (1971) (F)
1971-1985	Progressive Conservative	Bill Davis	Abella Report (1984) (F) and The Employment Equity Act (1986) (F) The Canadian Human Rights Act (1977) (F) The Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms (1982) (F)
1985	Progressive Conservative	Frank Miller	-
1985-1990	Liberal	David Peterson	Multiculturalism Act (1988) (F)
1990-1995	New Democratic Party	Bob Rae	The Lewis Report (1992) (P) Anti-Racism and Ethnocultural Equity in School Boards (1993) (P)
1995-2002	Progressive Conservative	Mike Harris	Common Sense Revolution (P), \$1B dollars cut from educational funding, repeal Ontario Equity Act & cancel anti- racism secretariat

2002-2003	Progressive Conservative	Ernie Eves	-
2003-2013	Liberal	Dalton McGuinty	Implemented Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy (2009) (P)
2013-2018	Liberal	Kathleen Wynne	-
2018- present	Progressive Conservative	Doug Ford	\$47 Million funding cut to education (2023), rescinded funding to EDI organizations (P)

a. NDP’s Antiracism and Ethnocultural Equity Policy: 1993

In 1993, Under the NDP government led by Bob Rae, Ontario’s Ministry of Education released Policy/Program Memorandum (PPM) No. 119: Development and Implementation of School Board Policies on Antiracism and Ethnocultural Equity (1993). The policy mandated all Ontario public school boards to develop and implement antiracism and ethnocultural equity policies. There has been a deliberate departure of PPM No. 119 from the well-celebrated notions of multiculturalism, as the government explicitly claimed the policy would go “beyond a broad focus on multiculturalism and race relations” (OME, 2013), with its aim to create equity in the larger systemic educational structures including curriculum, learning materials, student assessments and placements, hiring and staffing, race relations, and community relations (S. E. Anderson & Ben Jaafar, 2003).

To situate it in a political and social context, the shift to focus on race and antiracism ideologies was implemented as responses to several racial justice uprisings against police brutality against Black citizens, notably the 1992 Los Angeles riot, and the Toronto Yonge Street

riot in protest to the heavily broadcasted violent beating of Rodney King in LA, the subsequent acquittal of LAPD officers, as well as the killing of Raymond Lawrence in Toronto by the Toronto Police (Rezai-Rashti et al., 2017). The vivid visualization and broadcast of these violences unfolded what Michael Arlen (1969) coined the Living Room War, and the roaring dissent forced the government to take action towards the long-ignored issue of racial inequity. Premier Bob Rae then commended a flurry of reforms that were “needed in the education and justice systems to make them more sensitive to the needs of racial groups” (Maychak, 1992, p. 7). Shortly after, the NDP government commissioned the *Report of the Advisor on Race Relations (1992)*, also known as *The Lewis Report (1992)*, and instituted recommendations primarily constructed on antiracist education with a focus on removing educational barriers for racial and ethnocultural minorities. One could draw immense similarities between *The Lewis Report (1992)* with the aforementioned *The Abella Report (1984)*, both of which echo the aspirational tones while sprinkling it with self-congratulatory remarks of the “job well done” already in the system. An example would be the Commissioner’s characterization of the Toronto school board, recorded as below: “I know that the Toronto Board, of all the Boards, has made a herculean effort to get the schools to be responsive to the startling multiracial and multicultural changes in the community” (Lewis, 1992, p. 20). While many Ontario school boards already had policies in place related to diversity, equity, and multiculturalism, little attention was paid to systemic inequities within the education structure before 1993 (Joshee, 2007). The Ministry has then established an Equity Unit to support the antiracism initiatives in school boards and to hold school boards accountable for their work on equity issues (Government of Ontario Archives, 1993; Rezai-Rashti, 2009).

b. Progressive Conservative’s (PC) Common Sense Revolution: 1995-2009

Despite the efforts, the NDP government was not able to fully implement the antiracism and ethnocultural equity policy as the 1995 election overturned the NDP government and brought the PC government to power in Ontario. With the inauguration of Premier Mike Harris, what followed was a period of bleak, market-driven policies of tax cuts, decreased funding to education and social welfare, scrapping of the Ontario Employment Equity Act (1993), as well as the reversal of the antiracism and racial equity reforms introduced by the NDP, all of which were adamantly denounced by Harris during his election campaign, known as the “Common Sense Revolution” (Morgan, 2018). During this period, while PPM. 119 was not repealed, it was also not enforced or developed. The Harris government also shut down the anti-racism secretariat in the Ministry of Education, abandoned policies dedicated to increasing gender equity in administrative posts in education, and deleted references to any pro-equity goals from future curriculum policy documents (Anderson & Ben Jaafar, 2003, p. 14). With no accountability from the Ministry, Ontario’s implementation of antiracism policies suffered dire consequences. This trend continued even with the election of the Liberal government in 2003. Under Premier Dalton McGuinty’s leadership, the Liberal government continued to focus on student achievements and standardized testing, resulting in a continued dominance of neoliberal values and practices in Ontario’s education system (Rezai-Rashti et al., 2017). It would not be until 2009, 16 years after the initial introduction of PPM No. 119 that Ontario re-engaged with its equity policy.

c. Relaunch of Equity and Inclusive Education policy: 2009-2014

Self-proclaimed as the “education premier”, Premier McGuinty launched Ontario’s new Equity and Inclusive Education (EIE) strategy in a 2009 press release titled “Helping More Students Succeed” (OME, 2009b). Segeren and Kutsyuruba (2016) suggested that an important catalyst to this policy was a result of avid advocacy from the then Minister of Education,

Kathleen Wynne. The newly released strategy replaced the 1993 Antiracism and Ethnocultural Equity policy and stated that “the strategy will help schools better address barriers related to sexism, racism, homophobia and other forms of discrimination, which may have an impact on student achievement” (OME, 2009). This province-wide policy mandated all Ontario’s school boards to develop and implement an equity and inclusive education policy, and to adopt system-wide approaches to identifying and removing discriminatory biases (Rezai-Rashti et al., 2022).

The EIE policy under McGuinty’s leadership was framed as instrumental for reducing gaps in student achievements, with a focus on accountability dependent on neoliberal indicators using performance metrics and standardized testing on EDI goals. Segeren and Kutsyuruba (2016), Grimaldi (2012), and Alexander (2022) have outlined neoliberal modes of education governance with prominent features such as performative accountability, individualism, standardizations, measurements and metrics, and facticity. Several scholars have further denoted the negative consequences on racialized students from such market-driven forms of neoliberal accountability in education policies (Connell, 2013; Martino & Rezai-Rashti, 2013; Savage et al., 2013). Equity and inclusion conceptualized under this neoliberal framework were dedicated to create “self-responsibilizing, self-capitalizing individuals” (Lingard, 2009, p. 184), and an equitable school environment was conceptualized under individual choices and freedoms, rather than an institutional responsibility (Rezai-Rashti et al., 2022).

d. Achieving Excellence: Renewed Vision for Education in Ontario: 2014-2017

Following the first published EIE strategy in 2009, The Ministry subsequently released *Achieving Excellence: Renewed Visions for Education* in 2014 and 2017, further building on the system’s previous priorities of achieving excellence, with an increased emphasis on promoting

well-being and enhancing public confidence among students. In its equity goals, the highlight was placed on supporting “Aboriginal students, children and youth in care, children and students with special education needs, recent immigrants and children from families experiencing poverty” (OME, 2014, p. 8). Kempt (2018) noted a change of tone in the Achieving Excellence Policy (OME, 2014) that articulated a systemic responsibility of the Ministry on students’ collective well-being and argued that this signified the start of a paradigm shift, where the province deviated from discourses of individual pathologies and echoing sentiments from *The Abella Report* (1984), to recognize the need for larger structures and broader systems that support these individuals and groups. However, critics of the policy argued that despite the change in languages, the policy approach continued to be largely symbolic but lacked a coherent strategy to amount to substantive change in reality (Segeren & Kutsyuruba, 2016; Shewchuk & Cooper, 2018).

e. Ontario’s Education Equity Action Plan: 2017 - present

The Liberals continued their leadership until 2017, with their ongoing efforts to better achieve equity through the release of the *Education Equity Action Plan* (OME, 2017). While this Action Plan was filled with self-congratulatory notes of the progress of equity in Ontario’s education system, it also showed a gesturing towards systemic languages, mentioning the plan’s purpose in “identifying and eliminating discriminatory practices, systemic barriers and bias from schools and classrooms” (OME, 2017, p. 4). The Action Plan was also conceptualized in a human rights paradigm in four key areas: 1) School and classroom practices; 2) Leadership, governance, and human resource practices; 3) Data collection; and 4) Organizational culture. While these policies had seemingly promised sweeping structural changes in school boards, critics have highlighted the lack of inclusive processes in the creation of these provincial

strategies (Segeren & Kutsyuruba, 2016), and decoupling from goals related to incentives or sanctions, raising questions about the Province's seriousness in making any substantial changes (Nicholls, 2020). Shah et al (2022)'s research findings further scrutinized the problematic politics of race evasion, illusory equity, and identity representations from a scoping analysis of Ontario School Boards' EDI practices and policies. Similar themes are also found to be largely present in school board equity policies as well.

In 2018, the Progressive Conservative Premier Doug Ford overtook the provincial government and once again brought back an agenda focused on austerity. Under further neo-liberal retrenchment and funding cuts, the Equity Action Plan has essentially been archived, and numerous equity-related initiatives have been canceled or paused (Rezai-Rashti et al., 2022). Since his assumption in office, the Ford government canceled curriculum writing sessions around Indigenous education and reconciliation, as well as rescinded funding for community organizations that implement educational equity programs in public schools (CBC, 2019). The drastic cut-back and download of responsibilities are signature traits of neoliberal and market-driven policies that continue to permeate through Ontario's education policies today.

Chapter 4: Methodology and Methods

In the efforts to understand the intersections of racism, neoliberalism, colonialism and publicly funded schools in Ontario, several theories on the social and political reproduction of race, class and education are integral to this paper's exploration.

Freire's Critical Pedagogy and Praxis

One of the key underlying theoretical frameworks underlying this study is a Freirian-based ideology on education and critical pedagogy, introduced in his most seminal book, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1973). His most influential idea was his political take on education, where he critiqued the dominant banking system of education, and envisioned education as the practice of freedom and the instrument to liberation. Freire, an educator inspired by the Frankfurt school of thoughts on critical theory, promoted practices of critical dialogues and the development of critical consciousness, or as Freire referred to as, "Conscientização", which is the "learning to perceive social, political, and economic contradictions, and to take action against the oppressive elements of reality" (Freire, 1993, p. 35). According to Freire, critical consciousness or "Conscientização" is the crucial element to developing praxis as the link between knowledge and power through self-directed action (Aronwitz, 1992, p. 12). Similar to Habermas' theory on emancipation from communicative actions (1981), Freire's critical pedagogy theory extrapolated the critical theory to education settings, especially within postcolonial societies that continued to be dominated by colonial power of capitalism. Many Freirian-based scholars have made clear connections with the political functioning of education in nation-making projects, including liberal democracy, neoliberalism, capitalism, and multiculturalism (Apple, 2018; Kincheloe, 2011; McLaren & Farahmandpur, 1999). This study

is thus also making deep links to such interpretation of the political functioning of education in Canada's neoliberal environment in the past decade.

On Critical Theory, Poststructuralism, Postmodernism

In addition to the critical interpretation on education that Freire has offered, another key influence in this study is the poststructuralist and postmodernist approaches in deconstructing discursive meanings and truths behind texts and institutional messages. Before diving further into the relevance of poststructuralist and postmodernist approaches in this study, however, it is apt to recognize the theoretical conflicts that arose between the two schools of thought presented. While the Frankfurt School of philosophy in Critical Theory, including Freire's critical pedagogy, emphasized a critique of material and political domination, which was the "combination of external exploitation and the internal self-disciplining that allows external exploitation to go unchecked" (Agger, 1991, p. 108), poststructuralism and postmodernism rejected the stable, totalizing perspectives on history and society, including what Lyotard characterized as "grand narratives" like Marxism that attempt to explain the world in terms of patterned categories such as "bourgeois", "capitalists", and the "oppressed". The poststructuralist philosophy of intertextuality and deconstruction as Derrida has suggested, can never be established with stable, fixed meanings, rather is relentlessly being redefined and re-clarified in every turn, with no fixed point of destination in sight. On another hand, Freire has specifically rebuked the tendency of poststructuralism "to translate diverse forms of class, race, and gender-based oppression to the discursive space of subject positions" (Macedo, 2000, p. 14), lamenting the lack of material considerations in poststructuralism and postmodernism. Such philosophical contradictions bring the two major schools of thoughts at odds with each other on how to grapple with our social reality, what "social issues" require our attention, and thus how to address them.

Critical Discourse Analysis

Although poststructuralist and postmodernist thoughts have often been seen as contradictory to The Frankfurt School of Critical Theory, Agger (1991) has suggested the blending of poststructuralism and critical theory, particularly leaning into Derrida's model of textual analysis as a possibility. In contemplating Freire's critical pedagogy, I find it equally important to consider the significance of uncovering the hidden meanings, truths and connections between our use of language, discursive texts and the exercise of power (Sue, 2017). This pursuit has driven me to engage with Fairclough's methodology of Critical Discourse Analysis, especially in the post-structural approaches to intertextual, discursive and genealogical interpretations of policy texts and cultural materials.

The rationale for engaging with Fairclough's (1997) framework of Critical Discourse Analysis are threefolds. First, in Fairclough's account, critical discourse analysis entails a "transdisciplinary approach to create dialogue in addressing contemporary processes of social change" (1997, p. 357). The transdisciplinary approach through dialogue is apt as this study will draw from an intersection of knowledge and theories from various social disciplines, particularly in education, politics, policy analysis, sociology, and social work. The fluid process of "dialogue" is a key feature here, where it is not a static, rigid procedure to be applied when reading textual materials, rather it is a process of "becoming" and "developing", while being informed through ongoing engagement and dialogue with, between and within these disciplines. Second, critical discourse analysis is an effective tool to help analyze social issues that are mediated by mainstream ideology and power relations, which are further perpetuated by written texts and spoken words that create and maintain our social order (McGregor, 2018). In undertaking a critical discourse analysis of the policy texts and materials created by public

school boards, this study can reveal the everyday context of power, dominance, inequality and bias surrounding our institutional practices of EDI in public education. Through the efforts of tracing EDI's historic roots and contextualizing today's institutional EDI culture in Canada's political agendas, critical discourse analysis can effectively describe, interpret, analyze and critique how sources of power is initiated, maintained, reproduced and shaped within the specific social, economic, political and historical contexts in Ontario (Van Dijk, 1993). Third, Fairclough (1997) has asserted that the overriding objective of critical discourse analysis is to give accounts on how social change happens, which often can be tracked in changes in our discourses. While this study aims to scrutinize how our discourses about antiracism, multiculturalism, and EDI have changed through time and politics, it is also another objective to explore possible pathways of change for reimagining the trajectory of EDI and antiracism work in the future.

Poststructuralist Thoughts on Power and Language

Throughout this analytical inquiry, I also lean heavily on the works of poststructuralist and critical race scholars such as Sara Ahmed and Olúfẹ́mi O. Táíwò. Both Ahmed (2012) and Táíwò (2022) ascertained the political and philosophical power of language, which is essential to the work of combing through the complex nature of our social interactions and how we build the “common grounds” as the base of our worlds. The poststructural examination of language is important, as it provides an in-depth critique of how language shapes and (re)produces power by uncovering explicit and implied ideologies in the contexts in which a discourse is situated (Brown et al., 2022). As Táíwò (2022) has pointed out, we have to share to communicate. We are all recruited in this kind of joint action, and each individual is playing a part, a role to participate in a collective social consciousness together (p. 40). Philosophers have likened this type of “common beliefs” that we co-create together to a shared resource, which dictates how we move

through the world. As our collective responses and perspectives to new events change, we continue to create and expand these common grounds over and over again. This commonly shared public resource however, was never neutral. Scholars and philosophers have been contending the political power of language, which reproduces as we treat these commonly held knowledge and public information we have co-created together, as if they were “true”, and they become the premise for our public actions.

Critical Multiculturalism and Antiracist Education

There have been waves of counter-discourse to the mainstream multiculturalism culture, which gave rise to emerging theories of critical multiculturalism, antiracist education, and anti-oppressive education in the late 1990s and early 2000s. McLaren (1999), Bannerji (1996, 2000), Giroux (1997), May and May (1998), and Duarte and Smith (2000) were some of the prominent contributors to the critical multiculturalism discourse in education, who lamented the apolitical nature of liberal multiculturalism pedagogy and scholarship. Giroux (1997) and McLaren (1999) have particularly contextualized multiculturalism in a Canadian schooling context, where they argued existing institutions have not been able to deal with issues of diversity in a just and equitable way and criticized a lack of accounting for the unequal power relations in under Western liberalism. Critical multiculturalism, also known as “insurgent multiculturalism” (Giroux, 1997), mostly operated from a Freirean base, as well as a Foucauldian post-structuralist framework, which challenged the hegemonic, white, bourgeois worldview of cultural pluralist ideologies. These scholars also aimed to deploy critical multiculturalism to develop the school as a site to deconstruct and undermine the assimilationist knowledge constructions and pedagogical practices (Naseem, 2011).

Antiracist education arose in Britain, Canada, and the United States in the late 1980s as a protest to what its proponents argued as an anti-confrontational approach in multicultural education to challenge racism, and an emphasis on “cultural appreciation” (Skerrett, 2008). Antiracist education scholarships centered on discussions about race and the intersections of social differences including class, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, and questioned power relations in schools and the larger society (Dei & James, 2002). Antiracist pedagogy shared the neo-Marxist orientation and the critical theoretical epistemic base of critical multiculturalism and purports to politicize education as a site rooted in social, economic, and structural inequality (Dei & Karumanchery, 1999; Naseem, 2011; Shah et al., 2022). In addition, there is also a demarcation between a “liberal antiracism” and a “radical antiracism” (Kundnani, 2023). While the liberal tradition sees racism as “a matter of irrational beliefs and attitudes” and it is the liberal establishment’s job to persuade the masses that racist opinions have no legitimate basis, the radical tradition on the other hand emphasized the structural nature of racism that impacted how economic resources are distributed differently across racial groups. Key influential scholars such as CLR James and Frantz Fanon have pointed to military and economic oppression as the mechanism of racist beliefs, and systematic oppression can continue even if a majority of citizens do not hold “racist biases”. As such, the politics of antiracist education and resistance have been central to notions of reforms and political movements, highlighting myths, contradictions, as well as inconsistencies within critical equity discourses and policies (Joshee, 2007; Shah et al., 2022), symbolic enactment of equity policies (Cherubini et al., 2010; George et al., 2020), as well as the invisibility and erasure of race, anti-Indigeneity, anti-Black racism, and other forms of racism in discourses of equity and social justice (Cherubini et al., 2010; Reza-Rashti et al., 2017). In addition, debates about Afrocentrism and race essentialism led to calls for

educating culture and cultural competency, as well as the commercialization of antiracist trainings and diversity management courses in the United States and Canada (Carrington & Bonnett, 1997).

Building upon the theoretical tools of critical multiculturalism and antiracist education, the anti-oppressive education framework argues that traditional education systems are key sites that perpetuate societal oppression, which often masks the inequities that need to be challenged (Kokozos, 2023; Kumashiro, 2000). The conception of oppression under the anti-oppressive education umbrella could be multi-faceted, including the notion of oppression as cultural hegemony, oppression as capitalist accumulation, and oppression as discursive effect (De Lissovoy, 2008). Proponents of anti-oppressive education asserted a shift in how we engage with education, from curricula, pedagogy, to school culture, activities, as well as institutional structures and policies (Kumashiro, 2000). Central to the anti-oppressive education argument is also the idea of intersectionality and interlocking oppressions, where multiple forms of oppression intersect to create a matrix of oppression and power dynamics, such as racism, classism, sexism, heterosexism, ableism, colonialism, and other “isms” (Cowan & Berg, 2023; Naseem, 2011). While some of these pedagogical concepts have started to appear in Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) curricula in Ontario, the educational practices and policies have yet to reflect the political and radical values embedded in antiracist and anti-oppressive education frameworks.

Chapter 5: Data Collection, Organization and Coding Methods

Data Collection and Selection Criteria

All data used in this study were collected from the public domain databases, official websites and social media portals set up by the respective school boards. Ontario school boards consist of four types in total: 31 English public boards, 29 English Catholic school boards, 4 French public-school boards, and 8 French Catholic school boards. Due to the scope of this study, data collection from the English catholic boards, French school boards, as well as other public separate (such as protestant) school boards were excluded from this study as their language and religious orientations would add an additional layer of influence on the institutional culture and policy development processes. Across the 31 English public-school boards in Ontario, I have limited the sampling of relevant data from the 4 largest school boards in Ontario around the Greater Toronto Area, which are Durham District School Board (DDSB), Peel Region District School Board (PDSB), Toronto District School Board (TDSB), and the York Region District School Board (YRDSB) for in-depth textual, imagery and video/audio analysis. While the Greater Toronto Area represents a highly diverse and varying socio-demographic composition, these school districts represent the top four of the largest public-school boards in Ontario. TDSB is the largest, representing 584 schools and approximately 246,000 students (TDSB, 2024), followed by PDSB which has 259 schools and more than 155,000 students (PDSB, 2024), then YRDSB with 213 schools and a student count of over 130,000 students (YRDSB, 2023), and lastly, DDSB that has 135 schools and more than 79,000 students (DDSB, 2023). Combined, these four districts serve over 610,000 students and families in Ontario, representing almost half of the 1.3 million students enrolled in the English Public school system across the province of Ontario (Financial Accountability Office of Ontario, 2023).

To develop a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon and to enrich the data finding, a triangulation of data sources was used in this study (Carter et al., 2014). The data collected for this study comprises 3 types: official policy texts, action plans or strategic plan documents, and supplementary promotional videos. Though all the data collected were pertaining to policies and implementation of Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI), these documents and materials all present varying functions, intended audience and narratives. For example, the action plans and videos are often designed to be “consumer-friendly” using accessible languages and colorful visuals to convey a particular message to parents, students, and stakeholders. School policies on the other hand, are found to be written in dense, legislative languages, while mirroring state messages that might serve a legal or administrative function. See table 2 for a detailed list of school board data collected.

Table 2

Table Showing School Board Data Collected and Analyzed in the Study

Institution	Name of data	Last updated	Type of data
Durham District School Board (DDSB)	Equity and Inclusive Education Policy	2018	Policy
Durham District School Board (DDSB)	Equity and Diversity Strategic Plan	2018	Action Plan

Peel Region District School Board (PDSB)	Equity & Inclusive Education	2018	Policy
Peel Region District School Board (PDSB)	Directive 14 - Comprehensive Four- Year Equity Strategy and Action Plan	2023	Action Plan
Toronto District School Board (TDSB)	Integrated Equity Framework Action Plan	2016	Action Plan
Toronto District School Board (TDSB)	TDSB Enhancing Equity Task Force	2017	Communication/ Video
Toronto District School Board (TDSB)	Policy P037: Equity	2018	Policy
York Region District School Board (YRDSB)	Policy #261.0, Equity and Inclusivity	2022	Policy
York Region District School Board (YRDSB)	Equity Action Plan: A Vision for Transformation	2017	Action Plan

Special efforts have also been dedicated in ensuring the data collected are the latest and most current versions. All school board documents are in current circulation on each school’s website, and all of them were released and published within the past 10 years (after 2014). The process for searching for the data generally involved a visit to the school board’s official website, and searching for the keywords “equity”, “inclusion”, “equity and inclusion”, or “equitable education”. It is noted that each school board might title their policy with a slight variation of

names, such as Equity and Inclusive Education (EIE) Policy, Equity & Inclusivity (E&I) or Equity. For the purpose and scope of this study, only policies that specifically mention PPM No. 119 are included in the analysis. Some schools might also have additional policies that are pertinent to related themes such as antiracism, discrimination, and employment equity. These related policies might also be used as a supplementary source to further enrich the findings and discussions in this study. The action plans on the other hand, are not as readily available on school's websites, and are often nestled with other documentation such as the schools' overall multi-year plan goals. Regardless, as per PPM No.119's guidelines, all schools are mandated to develop a strategic/ action plan in conjunction with the equity and inclusion policy. While some schools' action plans could be easily accessed on the school website together with the policy, other action plans required dedicated search on public domains using a combination of keywords of the school board's name and words such as "equity", "action plans" or "strategic plans". It is difficult to verify whether the action plan is the current circulating version, but all collected documents could be traced back to the official websites of each school board, rendering these documents as official and legitimate.

Data Organizing and Coding Methods

After each piece of data was collected, the original data was organized in a folder, and made into another copy for the coding process. Each data had 2 copies, one consisted of the raw data, the other was a produced, copied document for coding. These data were organized on an excel spreadsheet that sorted the data under the columns of "Name of document", "Year of most recent modification", "School Board", "type of document", "Original data source", and "Coding copy". For school board policies, the textual data was copied and then pasted directly onto a word processing document. All relevant information including the heading, formatting, and

supplementary information were copied for coding as well. For the action plans, the text was copied along with the insertion of the graphics, photographs, and formatting information onto a separate word processing document. As for the videos, a transcript was produced in a separate word processing document with the descriptions of the visuals and timestamps of images, audio or emphasis being highlighted within the video. Any visual or photographs presented were also screenshotted and copied onto the coding copy as well.

After the creation of all data coding content copies, I proceeded to engage in the data analysis process. The data was analyzed in an iterative fashion, where the process helped “make sense of new data, information, or knowledge and in the creation of theory constantly refer back to the data to develop the analysis” (Reid et al., 2016, p. 240). There was also a conscious effort to critically engage in the data findings together with the literature review findings and cycle between inductive and deductive thinking to connect broadly with the epistemological issues and lived experiences. A thematic analysis approach was conducted in analyzing the qualitative data, in careful repeated readings of the content while looking for patterns across the data set and existing literature related to the topic of study. These identified themes thus became the basis of the results and findings of this study. This iterative process was also critically reflective and done in proximity to theoretical concepts and scholarly explanations repeatedly in building the themes and findings. See table 3 showing data code-theme interpretation of this study. Reid et al. (2016) made great emphasis on the requirement of a critical edge, which is the “examination of the social reality within which people exist and out of which they are functioning” (Finson, 1985, P. 117 as cited in Reid et al., 2016). In a critical engagement with the data and research question, I interrogated the underlying social assumptions and ideological positions that were embedded in

these documents, often espoused as “truth” claims, which exposes the underpinning power dynamics behind them.

Thick Description

When engaging with these texts of the policies, documents and video, I borrow Ponterotto’s (2006) concept of a “thick description”, that speaks to the context and meaning as well as interpreting intentions, desires and motivations behind social actions and practices. In the attempt to investigate the history, context, emotions and social functions of EDI practices in Ontario’s public schools, I engage in the task of both describing and interpreting observed social action within its particular context, by inserting history into experience, establishing the significance of an experience, and the sequence of events (Denzin, 2001). In applying Ponterotto’s effective tree metaphor, I conceptualize the roots as my efforts through the “thick description” of the historical, archeological events leading to the development of EDI policies in Ontario. These roots nourish and feed my “thick interpretation” of these policies and social actions which could be represented as the trunk of this tree. Through the trunk, the nourishment of “thick interpretation” fed the branches and leaves of the tree, which now proliferates as the “thick meaning”, which would be my findings and the interpretations in this study.

Who wrote the doc?

The Ontario public school board system involves a wide array of actors and groups who influence the policy-making process. Educational policies are not written in vacuum by a single individual, nor do institutional policies “stay” as merely a piece of writing in a singular time and space. They often have a past, a story that led to the culmination of such a document, as well as a future and trajectory of where it goes and how it moves around. As Ahmed (2012) has aptly discussed, EDI documents once written often “acquire lives of their own” (p. 6). As these

documents and policies get written, they circulate and interact with other social actors, systems, and ideologies, and in those processes, continue to morph and shape our actions and the “common grounds” we create. As such, it is a relevant task for us to identify the various actors and stakeholders who are involved in the public education system in Ontario, while delineating the power differential and influence between these actors.

Provincial Level Actors: Ministry of Education and Unions

At the provincial level, the Ministry of Education (MOE) is primarily responsible for developing curriculum guidelines, certifying teachers, providing mandates and legislative guidance for school board policies in specific areas, such as Equity and Inclusion, and allocating funding for education through a specific funding formula. Many of these provincial guidelines and resources are developed upon processes of consultation and contribution from what’s often called a “Roundtable”, which includes members such as politicians, school staff, academic researchers, nonprofit advocacy groups, and policy analysts. As Ontario increasingly adopted neoliberal ideologies as the dominant ideology for governance, public education have gradually shifted from the Keynesian welfarist and collectivist institution model to emphasis of efficiency, cost-cutting while simultaneously increasing educational standards to ensure outcomes and competitiveness in a globalized market (Taylor & Bedard, 2001). The appointment of quasi non-governmental agencies was as such a strategy deployed by the neoliberal government, where establishment of agencies such as the Education Quality and Accountability Office (EQAO), Ontario College of Teachers (OCT), Education Improvement Commission (EIC) and the Ontario Parent Council (OPC), function as monitoring and regulatory bodies to provide advice to the MOE and ensure accountability and efficiency in specialized areas among school boards (Basu, 2004). These agencies are set-up to regulate and monitor key actors in schools such as the

trustees, school administrators, teachers, and staff. As shown, a culture of accountability and regulation is evident in the public school system, which is also echoed within the school boards.

In addition to government appointed agencies and the Ministry, another key player that operates on a provincial scale is the teachers' unions and caretakers' unions that regulate relations between employees and employers through collective bargaining. Upon the establishment of the Ontario Teachers' Federation (OTF) after the passing of the *Teaching Profession Act* in 1944, several unions have also been set-up under the OTF umbrella, such as the Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario, Ontario Secondary School Teachers' Federation, Ontario School Board Council of Unions, and Association des enseignantes et des enseignants franco-ontariens. These unions represent education workers and teachers in lobbying, bargaining and political actions on key issues such as pay and workplace safety.

Board Level Actors: School Boards, Trustees, Administrators

In general, Ontario's school boards are responsible for deciding how to spend the funds they received from the province for the day-to-day operations of the schools such as staff and teachers hiring, building and maintaining schools, and purchasing school supplies. They also make key decisions such as deciding whether to close schools or build new schools, providing programs in schools including special education, newcomers support, and French Immersion, setting annual budgets, and developing local education policies. School boards are also instrumental to help the establishment of school councils and Parent Involvement Committee at each school (People for Education, 2024).

School Boards are made up of trustees, who are elected to the school board during municipal elections and act as the locally elected representatives of the public constituents, parents and the local community. Trustees serve only during their elected terms and receive an

annual honorarium ranging from \$6000 to \$26000. School policies are initiated, developed and approved by school board trustees, who are required to carry out their responsibilities and roles in accordance with the Education Act (1990). According to Ontario Municipal and School Board Elections, board trustees are responsible for establishing policy direction by developing and implementing policies that reflect the needs and priorities of their community, while ensuring decisions are made to result in practical educational opportunities for students. The Board trustees also ensure that the Director of Education carries out responsibilities for implementing the board's policies and entrust the day-to-day management of the board to its staff through the board's Director of Education (Ontario Municipal & School Board elections, 2022). They are often considered as the key actors in governing schools, often making key decisions to the day-to-day operation of the schools such as providing educational programs, approving operational budgets, hiring staff etc. In addition, these locally elected trustees are often considered to represent the interest of all voters in their ward. In contrast to federal and provincially elected politicians who are elected by Canadian citizens only, school board trustees are elected by all residents in the district, regardless of citizenship status (Basu, 2004). There is a heavy emphasis and significance placed on democratic election of public-school board trustees, which has been viewed as an indispensable part of public education, as it signifies a crucial systemic feature that is representative in Western liberal democracies. The importance of this democratic system is evident in this study's finding, where EDI policies among school boards make specific mentions and implementations to reify the perception of this democratic identity of public schools throughout its programs.

Other than the municipally elected trustees, many school boards also have teams of administrators and managers who overlook the overall coordination of services across the school

board. These include directors, service coordinators, superintendents, as well as legal advisors and counsels, who report directly to the school boards and are tasked with implementing board decisions over local schools. One important role is the Director of Education, who could be considered as the Chief Executive Officer for the school boards and is usually appointed by the trustees. Similar to a CEO of a business, these directors are responsible for overseeing the operations of the school board and managing business services of the schools. School superintendents are often considered to be “supervisors for schools”, who are responsible for groups of schools in each school board, and are often involved in suspension appeals, special education meetings, and are often assigned to oversee boardwide programs, including Equity and Inclusion education programs. Another key player that is actively involved at the board-level is the Parent Involvement Committees (PICs). These committees are made up of mostly parents, along with the Director of Education and one or more trustees. The establishment of PICs was mandated by Regulation 330/10 under the *Education Act (2010)*, where members of the committee are responsible for providing information and advice on parent engagement to the board, communicating with and supporting school councils, and organizing activities to help parents support their children’s learning at home and at school (O. Reg. 330/10: School Councils, 2010). These board-level committees and administrators work in tandem to coordinate wider board policy implementation and school operations, often making key decisions related to district-wide policies.

Local School Level Actors

Lastly, in the local school levels, individual schools are then tasked with carrying out the policies and directives mandated by the Board, primarily under the guidance of principals and vice-principals, which is then ultimately delivered by the collaborative efforts of teachers,

administrators, and support staff such as special education workers, social workers, psychologists, youth workers etc.

Each school also has a school council, which is once again mandated by the *Education Act* (2010). These school councils consist of parents, the principal, a teacher, a student (in high schools), a non-teaching staff member, and a community representative. The primary function of these school councils is to provide advice to the principals and school boards, share information with parents and the community, and seek input from the local community about council issues. As such, local public schools are considered to be a unique institution, since the purpose of public schools often stretch beyond being educational, rather can also be thought to be centers for civic renewal and public engagement, especially due to the fact that they are one of the few publicly funded community resources that are present in every neighborhood across the city and vary by the socio-demographic composition, history and culture of each local community (Basu, 2004). In this sense, stakeholders of the schools are not only represented primarily by parents and students, but also a myriad of interests from local businesses, grassroots organizations, activist groups of a variety of causes, and many more. Despite this general understanding of schools mimicking the democratic political structure in our liberal system, it is also apparent that a hierarchical relationship exists between the various levels of actors outlined in this previous section, where decision and policy making power is largely accumulated among those in the higher strata. Thus, when considering the question “who wrote the document?” in regards to school board policies, it is important to examine beyond the educational context of these texts, rather to scrutinize the larger political and social underpinnings and implications that these texts bring.

Chapter 6: Research Findings

Overall, the research produced consistent themes and observations that could be tied back to existing scholarly critiques of multiculturalism and political ideologies and paradigms throughout Canada's equity legislation history. The literature review also provided an enriched sociopolitical context to further thicken and connect the data to understand motivations and intent behind the culture of institutional EDI in public school boards. There were 7 key findings after a thorough thematic analysis conducted on the data. The 7 key themes of the findings are: 1. The identification of an echo chamber across all school board policies and materials, 2. The shift of EDI discourses across political and social timelines, 3. The entrenchment and dominance of neoliberal ideologies of excellence, citizenships and wellbeing, 4. An institutional culture of accountability and performativity, 5. Tensions between institutional commitment and legislative compliance, 6. The characterization of racism as a skills and knowledge deficit problem, and 7. EDI as a feedback facilitation process and the creation of an illusory democratic school system. Further dissemination of particular data finding will be discussed together in the discussion sections. Please refer to table 3 below that outlined identified codes and themes presented in the research findings.

Table 3

Table Showing Data Source-Code-Theme Interpretation of all Data Studied

Data Source (see legend)	Theme	Codes identified
1, 3, 4, 5, 6, 8, 9	Neoliberal pursuit of Excellence and Achievement	Improving achievement, successful outcomes, enhance service excellence, committed to student achievement, lead to excellence in schools and workplaces
2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 8, 9	Well-being of a neoliberal capital-generating labor	Fostering well-being and mental health, committed to student well-being, student's well-being is at the center of every decision made
1, 3, 5, 8	Evolution of Multicultural policies to today's EDI policy	Policy timeline shift: "Multiculturalism/ Race relations", "Anti-racism & Ethnocultural Equity", "Ontario's Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy"
1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9	Erasure of race and racism from equity policies	Utterances of "race", "racism", "racial"
2, 4, 7	Happy/ Colorful Diversity	Smiling faces, colorful titles and taglines, images of racialized students in cultural clothing, cheerful music
1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9	Numerics and Metrics to measure EDI	Accountability and transparency, data analysis, measurements, monitor, appraisals, audits, assessments, report cards, metrics, consistency, demonstrated leadership, outcomes, report, goals

1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9	EDI as a commitment	Commitment, we are committed to, reflect a commitment to, we want to, upholds the principles
1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 8, 9	EDI as legal compliance	In accordance to, criteria, legal duty, legal recognition, required by, requirements, full compliance, complies with, alignment with, legislative, PPM No. 119, Human Rights Code, Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, the Constitution Act (1982), Education Act
1, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9	Racism as skills and knowledge deficit	Anti-racism training, skills, knowledge, attitudes, behaviors, professional learning, biases, staff development, critical consciousness, building capacity, ongoing education
2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 8, 9	Expanding EDI to address systemic oppressions and power inequities	Power dynamic, systemic oppression, anti-oppressive, power and privilege, systemic barriers, colonialism, Eurocentrism
1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 8, 9	Identity and Representation politics	Representation, identity, reflect identities, equitable hiring, recruitment, mentoring, retention, promotion, employment practices, recognition, books, committees, human resource, demographic, curriculum, material
1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9	Democratic schools	Shared leadership, decision-making, advisory councils, responsive programming decisions, responsive to communities, reflective, surveys, feedback, consultation, partnerships, school community relationships

2, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9	Deference politics	Lived experiences, center student voices, draw from voices and realities of students, community voices, marginalized and underserved communities, listening to students' voice, we need to hear from you
---------------------	--------------------	--

Legend:

DDSB EIE Policy (1)

TDSB Equity Policy (5)

DDSB Equity and Diversity Strategic Plan (2)

TDSB Equity Framework Action Plan (6)

PDSB E&I Policy (3)

TDSB Enhancing Equity Task Force Video (7)

PDSB Four-year Equity Strategy and Action Plan

YRDSB Equity and Inclusivity policy (8)

(4)

YRDSB Equity Action Plan (9)

Chapter 7: Discussion

i. The Echo Chamber

The first finding from this analysis was the uncanny similarities that these documents shared with one another, despite being written by different people in different school boards. This was particularly evident in the school board policies and action plans, where the structure, format, language, and wording choices of these documents were almost identical across the various school boards studied. In considering why might these policies echo one another despite being written by different actors, I adopt Scheurich's (1994) concept of the grid of social regularities, which is described as "the field necessary to the constitution of the forms or practices or 'objects' of social life, and these forms, in turn, reproduce the social regularities" (pg. 306). Scheurich's conceptualization of policy archeology is particularly relevant here, as he focuses on the interrogation of how social problems were socially constructed, and how policy solutions are socially legitimized. The social construction of problems and solutions then also involves the identification of "the network of social regularities", where different actors are unconsciously using the same rule of formation (pg. 301), forming an interweaving social grid and echo chamber that actors unwittingly participate and closely imitate these rules.

In fact, we see a largely similar language employed in Equity and Inclusion (E&I) policies within school boards that echoes and espouses similar messages and sentiments that are also present in government messages. For example, all four school board's Equity and Inclusive Education policy framed their policies and actions plans in addressing the eight areas of focus on: (a) Board policies, programs, guidelines, and practices, (b) shared and committed Leadership, (c) school community relationships, (d) inclusive curriculum and assessment practices, (e) religious accommodations, (f) school and workplace climate and the prevention of

discrimination and harassment, (g) professional learning, and (h) accountability and transparency. When tracing back to the source of this commonality across the policies, it is clear that all of the policies followed a very distinct structure and format in accordance to the provincial government's E&I policy guideline, *Equity and Inclusive Education in Ontario Schools: Policy Development and Implementation* (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2014).

Another echoing sentiment is the use of aspirational languages in these documents, texts and videos. For example, in the rationale of these policies, all schools discuss their "commitments" or "the rights" or "entitlements" of students and employees to be in environments that value fairness, acceptance, safety, inclusiveness, respect, compassion etc. An additional similar finding points to the sharing of self-congratulatory boasting tones in these documents as almost a "pat on our own shoulder", evident in the TDSB's Integrated Equity Framework Action Plan, where they self-proclaimed to have "demonstrated consistent leadership in supporting equity with innovative programs, inclusive curriculum, professional learning and strategies" (p. 1). It is not surprising to find analogous languages and sentiment articulating these "core Canadian values" all abound in our official state policies and messages as well, as we have demonstrated earlier in *The Abella report (1984)*, *The Lewis Report (1992)*, and a long line of equity legislations in Canada's history. For example, in the Ministry's Equity and Inclusive Education guideline, we find a plethora of almost identical languages that bolsters the work of equity and inclusive education as "to ensure that our schools continue to provide caring, inclusive, safe, and accepting environments that support the achievement and well-being of every student" (OME, 2013). The official Government of Canada's website characterizes Canada's aspiration as being the "world's leader and champion of human rights", where "Canada will continue to champion diversity, acceptance and compassion on the world stage" (Government of Canada, 2022). As I have

pointed out previously, this rhetoric of a benevolent, justice-oriented Canada is essential to its parallel settler-colonial project of subjugating and justifying violences and exploitation of Indigenous people and land. Once again, the similar sentiments and state-mirroring expressions are also found to be peppered throughout these school documents, such as the schools' perceived duties to uphold, protect and promote human rights (TDSB, 2018; YRDSB, 2022), as well as the neoliberal ideology that inclusivity, diversity and equity as the instruments to student achievement and well-being (PDSB, 2018, 2023; TDSB, 2022; YRDSB, 2022). These regime-reflecting rhetorics and language will further be unpacked in the following sections.

These analogous choices of language and wordings are by no means a coincidence, rather it elucidates the clear delineation of the role of education in our nation-making, or more aptly put, the empire-making project of colonial Canada. Similar to our findings in the current literature and recent critiques of Ontario's education policies, we see the inextricably close link between state rhetorics, political ideologies and school board education policies (Alexander, 2022; Cherubini et al., 2010; Dei & James, 2002; Grimaldi, 2012; Rezai-Rashti et al., 2017; Segeren, 2016; Wang, 2015). This can be contextualized with Freire's critique of the "banking concept of education", where education is deployed as a tool to reinforce an unbalanced power hierarchy, and social actors such as teachers and administrators become a powerful apparatus for the state's agenda in imposing information that is deemed appropriate and beneficial. Peter McLaren and Tomaz Tadeu d Silva (1993) articulated the embedded political nature of the schooling system as part of the state's connected machinery, "as both an object of political struggle and a place for political struggle" (p. 42). It is important to note here that this highlight of the deep interweaving of schools in political rhetoric does not aim to revert to the positivist views of creating value-neutral schools that safeguard its participants from the political struggles

and social conflicts. Rather, in embracing the discursive underpinning and connections between knowledge, truths and power, we can envision a future where politicized education can lead towards societal transformation and liberation, an “achievement of freedom” that is material, economic, political and spiritual (Aronwitz, 1992). The following discussions will continue to critique how this constructed grid of discourse in equity, diversity and inclusion not only fails to advance social justice efforts in countering racism, rather is amplifying the echoes of injustices and co-opting in Canada's trajectory in perpetuation of neoliberalism, colonialism and white nationalism.

ii. Shifting in Discourses: Equity as diluting racism and Happy Diversity

a. Contextualizing the Shift in Discourses through Ontario's Political Timeline

The second major theme that emerged through the close reading of Equity & Inclusion educational policies and action plans was the shift in how school boards perceive and conceptualize antiracism. As discussed in the literature review, the concept of EDI has evolved through time and ideologies to morph and shape our political discourses and social actions. As we read through the policies, we can gain useful insights from not only the texts written, but also in its auxiliary framing and contexts of documents, such as the appendix, the format, and the spatial distribution of content. One of such contexts being studied was the timeline of when these school board policies were developed and revised, the proximity of these dates, and the political or social importance of the actions taken by these school boards. Documents, as we have explored before, travel in time and space. In other words, we ask the question: why did these school boards decide to develop these policies around the same time? As presented by Carol Bacchi's (2012) '*What's the Problem Represented to be?*' approach, what prompted the issue of educational inequity to the surface of the public's cognition, then to be represented as “the

problem” to major stakeholders of institutions and policy makers, and eventually requiring the implementation of an institutional “solution”? The following section will contextualize the presented timeline these school boards developed their EDI policies and the social implications of these actions, or inactions.

Though not all schools publish the full timeline of their EDI policy development, we are still able to extrapolate a congruent narrative about the school board’s actions in regards to their EDI institutionalization efforts. First, almost all school boards’ current Equity and Inclusion policy could be traced back to their initial conception around the early 1990s. DDSB’s policy was first effective in 1991 (DDSB, 2018b), PDSB’s policy was first approved in 1998 (PDSB, 2018), while TDSB adopted theirs in 1999. (TDSB, 2018). The first iteration of these policies showed up with titles of “Multiculturalism/ Race Relations”, which was mandated by the Liberal government to be implemented together with other equity legislations such as pay and gender equity (a result of the 1984 *Abella Report*) and the *Ontario Human Rights Code* in the 1980s. The early 90s was also an active time of civil rights movements and unrests, in particular the Rodney King Riots that broke out across major cities in the U.S., then the eruption of the 1992 Yonge Street Riot in Toronto, in response to the brutal killing of Raymond Lawrence by two officers of the Peel Regional Police. The notable Kanesatake Resistance/ Oka Crisis in 1990 was another pivotal moment that stirred major public discourses on Indigenous relations and land disputes in Canada. A 1990 report by the Ministry of Education (back then known as the Ontario Department of Education), have claimed that a shift in political and social climate in the 1980s provided the legislative base for equality, which led to “the impetus to develop strategies to achieve race and ethnocultural equity” with a “perspective of conflict and this perception has had a profound effect on policy makers at the school board level” (Mock & Masemann, 1990, p. 17).

Outlining this particular timeline and sentiment is important as it helps us to trace the immediate lineage of these school boards' current Equity and Inclusion policy discourse directly to Canada's reactive Multiculturalism policy and agenda.

The second timeline that is of prominence was the period after 1993, where we saw school boards revising their initial Multiculturalism and Race Relations policies in compliance with the new implementation of PPM No. 119 in 1993. In response to the rising antiracism sentiment and the unrest after the Yonge Street Riot, Ontario premier Bob Rae implemented the first strategic antiracism institutional policy in Ontario's legislation history, following the recommendations from *The Lewis report* (1992). The outlined recommendations specifically called for the immediate addressing of anti-Black racism in Ontario public institutions, especially for the prompt need to implement antiracism policies in School Boards. This report was paramount to a major policy shift in societal and institutional discourses from one of multiculturalism to one that calls for antiracism and equity. Following the *Lewis Report's* (1992) recommendations, premier Rae made the amendment to the Education Act in 1992, and subsequently mandated the *Development and Implementation of School Board Policies on Antiracism and Ethnocultural Equity* (1993). We then see a reflection of the revision timelines of these school boards' policies, including TDSB that revised their multicultural policy in 1999, and PDSB which enacted *Policy 54: Antiracism & Ethnocultural Equity* in 1995.

Another key timeframe that this analysis unveiled is the long period of inactivity between the revisions of school boards' equity and inclusion policies, particularly during the 2000s. According to TDSB's policy timeline, since its inception in 1999, the Equity policy was next revised in 2018. DDSB also followed a similar timeline, where the next Equity policy revision took place in 2006, 15 years after the initial establishment. This gap in equity policy efforts can

once again be situated in the political regime change in Ontario from 1995 to 2003, which ushered in Ontario's conservative premier, Mike Harris, who campaigned hard on his "Common Sense Revolution" and emphasized heavily on neoliberal reforms and massive funding cuts to public institutions. Shortly upon the election of Premier Harris, all of Ontario's public schools' educational equity development efforts were put to a halt, along with significant funding cuts to education budgets, and the amalgamation and reduction of school boards (Rezai-Rashti et al., 2017). Joshee (2007) described this period as "the bleakest period in recent history" (p. 164), where the Conservatives did not shy away from shutting down the Anti-Racism Secretariat created by the NDP government, and going as far as deleting references to pro-equity goals from future curriculum policy documents (S. E. Anderson & Ben Jaafar, 2003). This period signified a stunting of equity and antiracism policy development efforts in the schools, where despite the rising awareness and momentum among popular masses towards issues of racial justice, we saw very little development in the school's policy activities on promoting equity. It was eventually in 2009 that the Liberal premier Dalton McGuinty and the then Minister of Education, Kathleen Wynne, reopened the consultation for PPM No. 119, renaming it as *Ontario's equity and inclusive education strategy, 2019*. The subsequent years also saw an increase of governmental effort on further strengthening PPM No. 119's implementation as Kathleen Wynne became the premier of Ontario from 2013-2018. This timeline of policy enactment also exposes the paradigm shift of our public institutions departing from a welfare/ pastoral state towards a neoliberal state as Goldberg (2009) argued, whose primary role is now preoccupied with the movement of capital, public services, and information.

b. Inclusivity and Equity: Diluting Racism

Though the Ministry formally and legislatively re-released PPM No. 119 in 2009 which reopened policy developments and broader discussions about equity, many scholars have also critiqued the lukewarm effects the newly instituted PPM No. 119 had on remediating racial inequities in schools, primarily due to the continued neoliberal agendas of the Liberal government that did little to reverse the legacy of Mike Harris (Albanese, 2020; Alexander, 2022; Cherubini et al., 2010; Kipang & Zuberi, 2018; Rezai-Rashti et al., 2017, 2022; Segeren & Kutsyuruba, 2016; Shah et al., 2022; Shewchuk & Cooper, 2018). The new education equity policies highlighted another shift in neoliberal understanding of equity, diversity and inclusion that no longer only concerns ethnic relations and racism. PPM No. 119 (2009a) has broadened the scope of the 1993 policy to address additional identities such as “race, sexual orientation, physical or mental disability, gender, and class” (p.2), which has in effect led to a “diluting” or even “erasing” of race and racism in its discourse. This was also a major finding from this study, where explicit mentions about race and racism are minimal in the data set. For example, in 2 of the school boards’ action plans, there are no mentions of the words “racism” or “race” in any outlined steps or tasks (DDSB, 2018a; YRDSB, 2017). Similarly, TDSB’s action plan contained 3 occurrences of “racism”, all of which were made in references to “antiracism training” (TDSB, 2022). PDSB was the only school that included multiple in-depth discussions about race and racism and incorporated them in various stages of the action plan implementation. In addition to equity policies that minimize mentions of race and racism, only 2 of the studied school boards had antiracism policies in addition to their Equity and Inclusion policy (DDSB, 2024; PDSB, 2022), meaning that most schools decided to replace their antiracism policy following the 1993 mandate with the new E&I policies.

Martino, Segeren and Rezai-Rashti (2017) also echoed this finding in their scan on the Ministry of Education's equity policies, describing it as "a politics of deracination and racial invisibility" (p. 169). Their study found compelling strong evidence in the provincial government's reconstitution of equity through the erasure of racialized minority students and replacing it with the category of "recent immigrants", through the use of student achievement data to show concern for a particular social equity while masking other equity considerations (p. 168). Shah, Flessa and Cuglievan-Mindreau (2022) has also depicted a similar critique of how the Ontario government diminished the nuanced concept of equity to "efforts at 'gap-closing', identity often ignores race, racism and racialization, and antiracism has been diluted to include racial identity without attention to structural racism" (p. 45). The ways that the government and school boards silence race is a critical technology of neoliberal logic, which promotes a form of color blindness in its erasure of race and the cumulative effects of racial histories on visible minority populations in Canada.

In addition, this very apparatus of erasure as Tuck and Yang (2012) has pointed out, is inherent in Canada's settler colonial project. The desires to erase are "another kind of resolve to the colonial situation", signifying that colonialism is "over", that we have moved to a "new chapter" as our Prime Minister Justin Trudeau has remarked in his aspirational apology to Residential School survivors in Newfoundland and Labrador (2017). It is also observed that this dilution of racism is characterized by the references to "systemic discrimination", where 3 out of the 4 school boards have made references on their policies and action plans. This shift is by no means accidental, as Midzain-Gobin and Smith (2021) pointed to the same rhetoric deployed by Prime Minister Justin Trudeau in his response when being asked specifically about Canada's colonial connection to the British Monarchy:

“The answer is not to suddenly toss out all the institutions and start over. The answer is to look very carefully at those systems and listen to Canadians who face discrimination every single day, and whenever they interact with those institutions, to understand the barriers, the inequities and the inequalities that exist within our institutions that need to be addressed, that many of us don’t see because we don’t live them. That’s what fighting systemic discrimination is all about. Listening, learning and improving, and transforming our institutions.” (Trudeau, 2021, as cited in Midzain-Gobin and Smith, 2021)

As such, by identifying and highlighting the systemic racism that is deeply embedded in institutions (which is true), Trudeau cleverly moved away from discussing Canada's ongoing colonial reality, and reinforced this mythical notion that the Liberals are desperately trying to cultivate: that colonialism is history. This moving away from colonialism has multiple functions. First, it conflates a state-sanctioned project of colonialism with all other racial violences and inequities that are experienced by all “minority groups” in Canada, thereby evoking the ideology of an universal inequity, and thus the logical adoption of a liberal, universal inclusion as presented by the EDI projects. Second, it puts a timestamp on Canada's colonialism, and thereby denying the ongoing settler-colonial violence today enforced by his very own government. This “settler moves to innocence” as described by Tuck and Yang (2012), absolves the responsibility and complicity of settlers today in the active engagement of Indigenous dispossession and erasure. As such, from the evidence presented, school board equity policies function effectively as “rhetorical devices for adjudicating and certifying truth claims” (Rose, 1999, p. 9), particularly those espoused by the colonial, neoliberal state.

c. Happy Diversity as an end to the Colonial Past

This analysis also contemplates why the words “equity”, “diversity” and “inclusion” were more readily taken up by the state and school boards. Ahmed (2012) has discussed how we change our discourses to embrace lexicon and words that have a certain appeal as society moves in time. One of such appeals is the “newness” of these terms, and what the feelings that these terms evoke, or rather other feelings that it suppresses from view.

In describing the newness of the word diversity, Ahmed (2012) contended how using these newer words, or “buzzwords”, allows us to be aligned with the value system of the institution and mainstream culture. In using the buzzwords, it shows that we are acculturated to this new practice and new value of our time. “Newness” is highly profitable and desirable in our business-driven world. Think of the shiny veneer of a new building, the glossiness of a newly painted car. “Newness” has become the core value or a form of capital in our institutions, and the adoption of new words is vital to the branding and subject-making project of our institutions to be relevant, and adaptive. More importantly however, “newness” helps us to “forget” and “get over” with the old, the ancient, the historic. As demonstrated previously, the current EDI project descended from the direct lineage of the colonial multicultural project in Canada. In this view, the “newness” of EDI is a gesturing to a “move beyond” of Canada’s darkest history of slavery, genocide, and settler colonialism. It signifies that we are in a “better place”, the shiny appeal of a liberal future of reconciliation and racial harmony. In embracing this “newness”, school boards can happily boast about their “courage” and “demonstrated leadership” in social justice while forgetting that Ontario’s last racially segregated school just closed less than 60 years ago (Bradburn, 2018). In fact, this kind of rhetoric is evident in the “reconciliation lite” language that scholars have identified to be adopted by the Canadian government, particularly in promoting the

myth of Canada being a “non-colonial power”. Midzain-Gobin and Smith highlighted “reconciliation lite” as “to describe a narrative that recognizes the need to correct past harms, but sees this as a problem solved by multiculturalism or legal rights” (Smith & Midzain-Gobin, 2021). The “newness” of EDI thus miraculously absolves us from any complicity and responsibility, leading us into the new, happy, shiny tomorrow.

In addition, the buzz of these words could also cancel out other noises, including the “noise” of racism. Ahmed (2012) contemplates why the “old” terms such as racism and equality seem to fall out of favor in institutions, and there is a tiredness or sickness, even a reluctance with using these old terms. The institutional tiredness can be seen as a baggage of emotions that has been circulating in institutions, which is associated with a history of frustrations, politics of critique, complaints, even lawsuits. The words diversity, equity and inclusion becomes a “more inclusive language” because “it does not have a necessary relation to changing organizational values” (Ahmed, 2012, p. 65). The new terms thus replace other more “unacceptable” terms that are often too threatening or too polarizing to organizations. In detaching itself from the emotional baggage that came with contentious issues and politics, such as power and inequality, the language of EDI travels faster and further as it is “lighter”. On the contrary, it is also harder for the concept to do anything in its travels precisely because it is not associated with this baggage.

Ahmed also detailed what she coined as “the happy diversity/ inclusion” model, a particular branding exercise that allows institutions to promote itself, creating the illusion of happiness. A look back at the school boards’ promotion videos and action plans clearly illustrated this version of “happy diversity/ inclusion”, with colorful pictures of beaming smiles of racialized students donning cultural clothing and regalia, or participating in cultural songs and

dances (DDSB, 2018a; PDSB, 2023). This particular model of inclusion and diversity emulates the early days of the “Sari, Samosas and Steelbands” multiculturalism, a type of “feel good” politics that is centered on the cultural enrichment discourse of diversity. I appreciate the visceral analogy Ahmed (2012) described as recalling bell hooks’ “eating the other” characterization (hooks, 1992). She likened this brand of diversity and inclusion as the “Thai food stall” model, where race, ethnicity and culture can be celebrated, consumed, and eaten, which evokes the pleasures of consumption. Bodies of color, by adding color and spices, “liven up the dull dish that is mainstream white culture” (hooks, 1992, p. 308). In the creation of a new, colorful, spicy concoction, schools can embrace this new aesthetic and flavor as a way of rebranding, a “Benetton model of diversity” as coined by Ahmed (2012) in creating a consumer-friendly brand and public relations exercise that centers the “empty happiness” of the masses.

iii. Neoliberal Dominance: Ideologies of Excellence, Citizenships and Wellbeing

Another one of the major rhetoric that this study highlighted is the pervasiveness of neoliberal ideologies entrenched throughout the documents and video. After decades of neoliberal governance and political dominance in Canada and Ontario, neoliberal ideologies and practices are so readily accepted and endured throughout Ontario’s discourses and are maintained in the languages espoused in our policies, documents, bills, and many government forms. The EDI project is ripe for co-option in neoliberal ideologies which emphasizes the market and the responsibilities of enterprising subject simultaneously with pedaling of glossy notions of equity and advancement for the “disadvantaged”. The following subsection unearths the three major themes of the neoliberal emphasis of excellence, good citizenships and wellbeing that emerged in the data set.

Analysis of the four school board's equity and inclusion policies and action plans point to one overarching discourse of equity being seen as the means to the core function of education, which is being characterized as educational excellence and wellbeing. For example, in the Toronto District School Board's Equity Framework Action Plan document, the Board framed the purpose of the document as a roadmap to implementing equity "with the goal of improving achievement and well-being outcomes for all of our students" (TDSB, 2022). Indeed, this finding is ubiquitous in data found in all four school boards in this study. Once again, this language is found to be a mimicking of rationale and ideologies promoted by a liberal/ conservative provincial government, another signifier to the amplifying echo chamber. The evidence can be found in the Ministry of Education's Equity & Inclusive Education (EIE) guideline, where it has outlined the renewed goals of education as "(a) Achieving excellence: children and students of all ages will achieve high levels of academic performance, acquire valuable skills, and demonstrate good citizenship. Educators will be supported in learning continuously and will be recognized as among the best in the world; (b) Ensuring equity: all children and students will be inspired to reach their full potential, with access to rich learning experiences that begin at birth and continue into adulthood; (c) Promoting well-being: all children and students will develop enhanced mental and physical health, a positive sense of self and belonging, and the skills to make positive choices; and (d) Enhancing public confidence: Ontarians will continue to have confidence in a publicly funded education system that helps develop new generations of confident, capable, and caring citizens" (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2014, p. 6).

a. Equity and Diversity as a technology for Neoliberal Excellence

There are several note-worthy rhetoric that showed up in reading the policies together with the provincial's strategy. First, the disquisition of implementing equity under the premise of

pursuing excellence is often widely taken up by schools in their missions and commitments. In her analysis of university mission statements and diversity policies, Ahmed (2012) described how diversity becomes a means and technology recruited for the pursuit of an utmost important end of excellence. This similar finding is echoed in the school policies, where equity is being framed as the instrument to excellence and wellbeing. Under this homogenous market-driven culture, individuals are reduced to data sets and numbers that either fall in or out of the state's singularly narrow benchmark for measuring and defining "excellence and achievements". A relationship is thus denoted between excellence and equity, where equity only derives its value and presence from what is already valued, in this case, excellence. Equity and diversity as a result, is incorporated as an official value or project, "in so far as it is made consistent with the organization's goals" (Ahmed, 2012, p. 57). We can then deduce how EDI has been fully co-opted in becoming a tool of maintenance and disguise of the existing neoliberal values of our state and institutions, rather than transforming and resisting them.

b, Equity and Diversity in the Discourse of "Good Citizenship"

The second ideology is the discourse of "good citizenship" and its function in neoliberal and colonial governance. Further investigation into the notion of "good citizenship" quickly connects us to the ultimate goal of building a prosperous, market-driven society, and the state's ultimate goal to create productive, loyal, and individually capitalist labor of the future through public education. Several mentions in the Ministry of Education's policies and PPM No. 119 have clearly elucidated this point:

Our children, youth and adults will develop the skills and the knowledge that will lead them to become personally successful, economically productive and actively engaged citizens (OME, 2013)

This means working together with...leaders to bring the action plan to life and create a learning environment that inspires every child and student to reach their full potential and to become personally successful, economically productive and actively engaged citizens (OME, 2017, p. 4)

Such characterization of a “personally successful, economically productive and actively engaged citizen” is fully embodied in the school board’s EDI policies and action plans, where a desirable subject of the education system is created. It is no surprise that education has long been employed as a key apparatus in executing Canada’s colonial agenda, evident in the establishment of Residential Schools as a major mechanism in the colonial genocidal project, namely to “kill the Indian in the child”, but to also assimilate them with knowledge and skills into being a part of the “civilized labor” of industrial capitalism. School board policies thus inevitably are tightly aligned with the state’s overarching neoliberal colonial agenda in the relentless pursuit of capitalistic resources, one of which is productive labor. This lends a much more sinister view of the school boards’ commitment to racial justice and inequities, where all action plans or promises from the school and the state are solely enacted with the one and only purpose: to always produce and maximize the state’s capital. Racial justice and equity are only enacted and developed insofar citizens succumb to the hegemonic capitalist labor contract. Any other conceptualization of citizenship and humanhood is abolished in this view, and EDI is thus again, the technology to create “good, productive citizens”.

c. Equity and Inclusion and the discourse of Well-being

Third, this discourse of excellence is then also deeply tied to another desirable trait of “well-being”. Despite a laudable effort to convey messages of a government that cares, the emphasis on wellbeing together with the neoliberal conceptualization of achievement then takes

on a malevolent turn. A shift under neoliberal rule in the past decades linked individual survival to national survival, while binding both to the ultimate goal of society: the market (Alexander, 2022). As productive citizens of the state, we are then also laden with the responsibility to keep ourselves well and healthy enough to function and produce, in shouldering the helm of economic and national survival. As such, the ubiquitous mentions of well-being in these EDI policies are also a co-option of the neoliberal focus on the individual “who fulfills their obligation to the nation/ state by pursuing economic well-being for themselves and their family, for their employer, company, business or corporation” (Davies & Bansel, 2007, p. 8). Through this analysis, the healthy, well, individual, entrepreneurial self is created as a highly desirable subject under the state’s discourse, who are capable of sharing the state’s burden in economic activities and fulfill their obligations by contributing to capitalistic developments.

iv. Culture of Accountability and (non)-Performativity

Another ubiquitous element in these school boards’ E&I policies is the weight placed on articulating “accountability and transparency”. Each school board might differ in the scope that they dedicate to the section, anywhere between a single paragraph (PDSB, 2018) to 5 full pages of coverage (TDSB, 2018; YRDSB, 2022), but each school board has included a specific section under its title. The ubiquity of accountability discourses in policy is once again closely tied to the Equity and Inclusive Education (EIE) Guideline (2014), which specifically mentioned that accountability and transparency “must be represented in a board’s equity and inclusive education policy” (p. 16), citing the rationale that “accountability is necessary to maintain and enhance public confidence in the education system” (p. 7). Other than the outright articulation of the school boards’ commitment to accountability in the policies, this emphasis on accountability is also exemplified in the action plans and promotional materials, which are developed for parents,

students and community stakeholders. For example, EDI action plans in this study greatly emphasized the use of metrics and data to measure the “success of equity”, including audits, enrollment, identity, performance (DDSB, 2023; TDSB, 2022; YRDSB, 2022). The PDSB (2023) has especially developed a directive called “Equity Accountability Report Card”, which measures various educational goals including student achievement, engagement and equity, even using quantitative metrics such as “percentages of historically underserved students who meet or exceed the provincial standard in Grades 3 and 6 EQAO reading and writing” (p. 6), “percentages of trustees who participate in human rights and equity professional development” (p. 9), or “number of suspensions and expulsions for historically underserved students in Grades 4–12” (p. 9). In addition, all of these documents and videos are filled with languages that are associated with business operations, such as “outcome”, “achievements”, “success”, “efficiency”. These references of marketized language shed insights on how our public education sector is being conceptualized and shaped in our current neoliberal discourses. From what is demonstrated in the data, school boards are expected to perform and be measured in quantitative forms on how “well” they “do equity”, as the name the “Equity Accountability Report Card” has suggested. It becomes clear that under a neoliberal regime, public educational institutions are pitted against one another through implementation of arbitrary metrics that conflate the nuanced work of combating racism and inequities with a superficial race to generate numbers and sheer performativity. The dominance of a metric-driven culture of accountability and performativity demonstrates the full entrenchment of neoliberal ideologies in our public education system.

a. The Neoliberal Obsession with Numerics and Metrics

While the ensuring of accountability has indeed been a valuable mechanism in our public institutions to promote progressive advances and social justice throughout the history of equalities legislations and policies, it is also important to critically consider how accountability could be mobilized for alternative ends other than the creation of a just society. Once again, the discourse of accountability can be traced back to the rise in neoliberal market reforms and its impact on education systems in Canada and across the globe. After World War II, as the world established a new order with a sole focus on the economy and capitalistic gains, our neoliberal governance systems have tethered tightly to ideals around ‘effective’ or ‘good governance’ out of a fantasized necessity to survive in an increasingly competitive and globalized economy. These ideologies are also frequently espoused together with practices that emphasize political transparency, devolution, performance indicators, high-stakes standardized testing regimes, accountability systems, international benchmarking, and public/private partnerships (Rezai-Rashti et al., 2017). Under these practices lies a key relationship between quantification and democracy. Rose (1991) has theorized this as a mutually constitutive relation between numbers and politics, where “the exercise of politics depends upon numbers; acts of social quantification are politicized; our images of political life are shaped by the realities that statistics appear to disclose” (p. 673). The power of numerics and calculation has become indispensable in our neoliberal civic discourse, as it has been ingrained in the political mechanisms that give effect and provide legitimacy to our governments in enabling authoritative judgements and policy implementations. A commonly held ideology of “numbers don’t lie” reveals the presumption of our society in upholding the power of numbers and metrics, which is a highly-effective approach that liberal democracies deploy to appeal to the “common sense” among the masses. As Rezai-

Rashti, Segeren and Martino (2017) articulated, “the policy as numbers lens makes it possible to document how and why equity is increasingly linked with academic excellence, eclipsing the intrinsic value of equity and relegating it as an instrument for student achievement” (p. 162).

Despite regime and party changes through the election cycles, we continue to see the reign of a heightened neoliberal dominance across the political fault lines that promotes the homogenous market-driven ideals. Conception of equity and antiracism has then largely shifted from its historically social democratic roots, and re-articulated into pro-business and economic terms that are only unilaterally concerned with outcomes, achievements, accountability, and efficiency.

b. Non-performativity as “Doing the Document”

Under the pervasive tenure of neoliberal accountability and efficiency, one might predict that despite its roots in a market-based ideology, there would still be a material advancement in ameliorating inequities within the educational system. However, Ahmed (2012) argues that instead of building a collective momentum towards creating equity and transformation in institutions, our preoccupation with performance culture has rather funneled public resources and energy away from the actual political work. Ahmed’s argument of “you end up doing the document rather than doing the doing” (Ahmed, 2012, p. 101) is particularly apt here, where equity/ diversity practitioners are being caught up in producing a multitude of documentations, such as drafting policies, writing reports, tallying statistics and metrics, creating action plans etc. Under the augmentation of neoliberal governance, the school’s contribution to the social system has been consigned to the performativity demonstrated through its documentations, such as the creation of dense policies or colorful leaflets of smiling faces that represent diversity and equity. Ahmed (2012) characterized the efforts of institutions in equating the notion of performing well to “generate the right kinds of appearances” (p. 85), which is a crucial technology in creating a

competent and stable institutional subject, in advancing towards the provincial government's goal of education as "enhancing public confidence in public education" (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2014, p. 6). This empty gesture of performativity is well-documented across Ontario's educational policies, where equity "becomes a non-performative policy value, articulated in glossy policy texts without the adequate resourcing or accountability in regard to localized contextualization and implementation that would impact systemic inequities across the education system" (Rezai-Rashti et al., 2022, p. 12).

In fact, the very act of "doing the documentations" has become the blockade to political actions, as it produces what Ahmed (2012) characterized as "a kind of marshmallow feeling" (p. 101), the perception that we have already done something about racism, or we are doing well enough. The production of these documents, materials, data collection, reports, are thus the "evidence" that we have "done it". Ahmed (2012) has also gone as far as to make the argument that in devising these "evidence" of equity, these documents become the "fabrications of the institution" that we are "doing well" in antiracism work. This realization then demystifies the question of why our governments, despite the polarized political ideologies and landscape, continue to invest and proliferate the EDI project in our mainstream institutions. It is thus of great value for the state to continue the performative EDI culture, where not only does it function to entertain the ongoing fantasy-making project of a benevolent, diverse, inclusive nation, it also conceals the looming institutional whiteness and injustices that is deeply embedded in our political and social systems, denying our colonial, racist past and ongoing perpetuation of inequities. To quote Patrick Wolfe's famous definition, "colonialism is a structure, not a one-time event" (1999). The settler-colonial and racist project then continues to thrive, clothed in the justice-loving innocence as the institutional EDI project. Most importantly, EDI ultimately

serves to thwart the capacity and resources for political assemblages and collective organizing among institutional equity practitioners, community activists and the masses, which threatens the stability and authority of a neoliberal democratic regime. In being preoccupied with “doing the documents” and reproducing the EDI project, antiracism activists and equity-advocates simply have no time or energy to spare for additional political engagements. EDI as we have unraveled, just like multiculturalism, is a cleverly devised colonial apparatus for the containment and control of bodies within an empire.

v. Commitment and Compliance

The fifth finding in this study highlighted a tension between discourses of commitment and compliance of the school boards. All school boards’ policies in this study made extensive statements and expressions about their commitment to the values of equity and social justice. For example, the PDSB Equity policy (2018) states that “The Board’s system goals reflect a commitment to providing equity of access and opportunity for all students and staff” (p.1). YRDSB’s Equity and Inclusivity policy (2022) is also filled with commitment statements such as these: “The York Region District School Board (“YRDSB” or the “Board”) is committed to student achievement and well-being, and staff diversity and inclusion by working to ensure equitable access and outcomes through accessible and inclusive learning and working environments” (p. 4). TDSB and DDSB also made similar aspirational commitment statements in their action plans, policies and videos. In tracing its etymological root, Ahmed (2012) illuminated the two functions of commitment. Commitment on one hand means to pledge and is meant to be sent out. On the other hand, commitment also refers to a state of being bound to a course of action. Commitment in this sense, is both meant to be “sent out” for an external audience, but also what binds an institution, and what an institution gets behind. While it is

laudable that many school boards are willing to show their commitment to these aspirations of social justice and societal values, we also can't help but wonder, what do these commitment statements actually do? What are they binding us to, and what kind of messages are they "sending out"?

a. Commitment as "heart and mind"

The discourse of commitment and aspiration has always been conspicuous among institutional and public documents. A quick glance back at major human rights and equity legislations in Canada such as *The Abella Report* (1984) and the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedom (1982) will demonstrate as such. We have illustrated how the flurry of aspirational human rights legislations have lined Canada's long history of colonial nation-making projects that aimed at cultivating a committed, charitable country externally, in order to gloss over its own racist and genocidal assimilation projects against Indigenous people and land. In examining the school boards' echoing of these similar sentiments, I revisited Ahmed's (2012) work in analyzing universities' mission statements, which provided insights into this "culture of commitment statement". This work in cultivating EDI among institutions has often been described as the work of "hearts and minds", where EDI is imagined to be "beyond" the superficial level of an institution, "beyond" the "check boxes". When reading these commitment statements, they often take the form of self-declaration of principles and values (e.g. anti-oppression, equity, inclusivity) that one might assume the institution already embodies. Such a declaration of commitment could even function as a form of institutional pride; it constitutes the subject of a principled, virtuous institution. One does not have to dig deep into the archives to find this aspirational tone repeatedly employed in the Canadian politics playbook. Take for example, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau's statement on National Indigenous History Month in

June 2021, just 2 days after the news broke out on finding the 215 Indigenous children remains at the Kamloops Residential School site. The statement read as below:

“This month is an opportunity for us to participate in virtual activities to engage with, and deepen our understanding of, Indigenous peoples’ distinct histories, customs, spiritualities, and languages. Doing so is essential to promoting a society based on mutual respect, understanding, and fairness. We all need to play a role in amplifying the voices of Indigenous peoples, dismantling systemic racism, inequalities, and discrimination, and walking the path of reconciliation together. The recent, distressing news of the remains of 215 children found near the former Kamloops Indian Residential School is a painful reminder that the impacts of residential schools are still felt today. Sadly, this heartbreaking discovery in Kamloops is not an exception or isolated incident. Over decades, thousands of Indigenous children were taken from their families and communities, and everything was stolen from them. We must all unreservedly acknowledge this truth and address these historical and ongoing wrongs, so we can build a better future.” (Government of Canada, 2021)

We can take note of the iteration of the proudly espoused values of “mutual respect”, “understanding” and “fairness”, as well as the gesture to move on and to “build a better future”, as if to signify Canada’s proud embodiment of these values as we have already overcome and moved on from the “distressing news” of the past. Learning about Canada’s colonial history and long-standing devastating impact of Residential Schools is now encompassed as the “hearts and minds” of Canadians, not a civic obligation and responsibility of citizens. It is also worth noting that nowhere in the statement has the Prime Minister offered an apology or acknowledgement of the Government’s direct involvement of genocidal crime in creating, orchestrating, and

maintaining an abusive system against Indigenous communities. Sentences in this statement were also deliberately crafted to evade responsibility and complicity. Indigenous children were “taken from families” by an ambiguous perpetrator, not abused by centuries of oppressive government legislation and policies designed to eliminate Indigeneity. Indigenous resources and land were “stolen from them” by an anonymous thief, not exploited and swindled by the blatant government fraud and betrayal of treaties and promises that continues today. “Hearts and minds” as we have demonstrated, has long been deployed as an effective colonial veneer for evasion and deception. Tuck and Yang (2012) has condemned this cycle of evasion as “settlers move to innocence”, where our society as a whole, from our political leaders, government agencies, public institutions, to well-intentioned professionals including social workers, have all been embroiled in a megaproject to problematically attempt to reconcile with settler guilt and complicity, in aims to center “settler futurity” and the white-supremacy project again.

In fact, such discourse of “heart and mind” is deeply connected with the discourse of desires, where an institution “desires” to do this work out of their passion and commitment. The discourse of desires is especially palpable in the TDSB Equity Enhancing Task Force video (2017), where the Board made numerous claims of their “wants”: “We really *wanted* [emphasis added] to look deeply at our commitments...”, “we *wanted* [emphasis added] to understand how we are using our resources”, “Everybody *wants* [emphasis added] it... the parents *want* [emphasis added] it, students *want* [emphasis added] it. People *want* [emphasis added] to know how to really pay attention to work on it together.” This discourse of desire and wants is incredibly powerful. Not only does it appeal to the “softness” of EDI as essential to our “hearts and minds”, it also analogizes an institutional system to a psychological subject, an individual, a human being. Ahmed (2012) discussed how such psychological language sinuates our perception

of institutions as one that “exhibit attitudes and behaviors which amount to discrimination through unwitting prejudice, ignorance, thoughtlessness and racist stereotyping” (p. 45). In such a view, if our institutions are recognized as racist or discriminating, they are only posited as an individual who “suffers” from prejudice and could be “treated” and “recovered” in their mistakes and weaknesses. This psychologization of institutions has thus been a powerful tool in concealing the systemic racism that has been deeply embedded in institutions.

b. Commitment as Compliance

This aspirational brand of commitment in equity and social justice value, is also bounded by a prevailing legislative and governance system. As much as school boards try to convince their stakeholders of their passion and pleas to “do this out of their own good heart”, one does not need to look far to understand the establishment of the school boards’ Equity and Inclusive education policy is out of compliance. All school board policies share another key common finding, is that they all begin by describing the legislative context of the policy. While most school boards directly refer to the OME mandate PPM No. 119 (DDSB, 2018b; PDSB, 2018; TDSB, 2018), some school boards also further list other related legislations that encloses their equity policy, such as the *Ontario Human Rights Code (1990)*, *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms (1982)*, and the *Education Act (1992)*. By citing the laws and rules that govern the documents, it points to the paradoxical tension between compliance and commitment. Institutional commitment in this sense, is only a commitment “insofar as we are required to do so” (Ahmed, 2012, p. 115). We are therefore committing to go beyond the checkbox by staying within the parameters of the checkbox. The passion and “hearts and minds” of a commitment to antiracism and equity is thus bound by the legal obligation and mandates of the law that tells us to “check the checkbox”.

vi. Racism as a Skills and Knowledge Deficit Syndrome

The sixth finding in this study highlights how school boards overwhelmingly adopt the neoliberal notion in viewing racism as a deficiency of skills, knowledge, and attitudes. Every action plan and policy analyzed rely on the delivery of EDI trainings and professional development opportunities as an effective antidote to racism. The TDSB Equity Framework Action Plan (2016) states their commitment to “ensure that every school has the critical skills, knowledge and leadership capacity on which the success of subsequent actions depend” (p. 6). Despite weak scholarly evidence that demonstrate the effectiveness and benefits of EDI trainings (Foster Curtis & Dreachslin, 2008; Kalinoski et al., 2012; Kulik et al., 2007; Paluck & Greene, 2009; Perry et al., 2009), school boards seem to continuously embrace and invest overwhelmingly in the notion of EDI training being the resolution to educational inequities. While professional learning and trainings are valuable opportunities to engage in much-needed conversations in deconstructing dense topics like racism and inequity, the school board’s monofixation to invest in EDI trainings point to our collective embrace in neoliberal logic, that the manifestation of racism is due to individuals lacking in knowledge and skills.

Sarah Ahmed (2012) has lamented how this neoliberal model of “individualization of racism” has persisted through institutional history to continually concrete the stronghold of whiteness and colonialism. This assumption of knowledge and skills can educate the racism out of an individual is following the familiar “bad apples” rhetoric. We have seen this rhetoric play out far too often, think about how the police were quick to characterize individual officers perpetuating racial violence as “bad apples”, and their rush to implement institutional EDI training whenever the public called for police reforms after state-sanctioned brutality on racialized individuals. The previously cited example of Justin Trudeau’s response to the

Kamloops Residential School bodies discovery in 2021 also illuminated the government's ease to adopt "engagement activities" to understand "Indigenous peoples' distinct histories, customs, customs, spiritualities, and languages" as the remedy to the racist systematic annihilation of Indigenous peoples. Ahmed (2012) critiqued this psychologizing of racism in EDI trainings that predominantly focuses on changing individual attitudes, behaviors, and skills such as implicit biases, personal effectiveness, and cognitive behavior. She further argued that by focusing racism as a manifestation of individuals with bad attitudes, it underestimates the magnitude in scope and scale of how racism and colonialism reproduce in systems of power and domination. In reducing racism to "an individual person who suffers from a false set of beliefs" (Ahmed, 2012, p. 150), it allows structural and institutional forms of racism to be obscured from view.

a. Toothless anti-oppressive pedagogy

Even as school boards are seemingly trying to move beyond the individualized racism rhetoric through including training opportunities that also address systemic oppression and power dynamics, the conceptualization of these interrogation are still limited in being another training opportunity that is reinforcing the same neoliberal ideology of knowledge and skills deficit among the racist masses. For example, TDSB (2016) listed their provision of "formal antiracism and anti-oppression training to better integrate our school improvement and equity commitments, as well as to help leaders engage their staff in discussing issues of power and privilege to confront bias and eliminate barriers" (p. 22) as one of their actions. PDSB also cites their commitment in providing learning opportunities for staff and students to "acquire the knowledge, skills, attitudes, and behaviors needed to identify and eliminate discriminatory biases, and oppressive systemic barriers" (p. 7). However, these discussions about power,

systemic oppressions and colonialism are effectively toothless as they only pertain to individual beliefs and perceptions, rather than being material or political.

Arun Kundnani (2023) further elaborated how this enthusiasm of EDI training performs in a particular ideology of liberal antiracism that benefits the elites. In his op-ed *There are two kinds of antiracism. Only one works, and it has nothing to do with 'diversity training'*, Kundnani (2023) pointed out how liberal antiracists see racism as “essentially a matter of irrational beliefs and attitudes”, especially among the poor and educated. This critique is especially apt in deciphering the dynamics that we have observed after TDSB principal Richard Bilszto’s suicide, particularly the right wing’s aggressive attacks on the “wokeness” of EDI trainings as “preachy, elitist and unneeded”, while the Left desperately tries to defend it with toothless arguments and meaningless vocabulary policing. Even as EDI training expands to include political concepts such as power and critical pedagogy, evolving into growing acronyms such as JEDI (Justice, Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion) or DEDI (Decolonization, Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion), it is simply another futile exercise that continuously throws more alphabets and theories into the “soup of EDI training”. As difficult as it is to swallow, “conservative attacks on the elitism of antiracists ring true” (Kundnani, 2023). The issue with EDI training is not only lying in the types of knowledge and theories being taught, rather is how we have constructed a reality that liberal elites are preoccupied thinking it’s their job to educate working-class people out of their irrational, immoral beliefs. Here, I apply Táíwò’s (2022) argument of elite capture once more, where he prompted us to step back from the focus on the “common grounds” we share, rather to interrogate the rules of social interaction that the ‘masters’ and elites set up in affecting the very architecture that makes up our public resources. To take a step back, Táíwò defines an elite as “a small group of people who have power over a larger group of which they are part, usually

without direct responsibility to that larger group, and often without their knowledge or consent” (p. 22). To apply Táíwò’s argument in our culture of EDI training, the issue is not necessarily about the curriculum of the EDI training, or what books are being recommended in the sessions. Rather, we question: who tends to capture the decision-making process of our organizations? How did the culture of EDI training trickle through the hierarchies of power in education systems?

b. Representation & Identity Politics

Another key critique Kundnani (2023) raised was how liberal antiracism has succeeded in reducing racial prejudices through transforming popular culture in the rise of representation and identity politics. Branding it as “Hollywood activism”, he described how movies and entertainment are now racing to include and feature people of color, often proudly shouting catchphrases such as “representation matters” along with a myriad of catchy social media hashtags as promotions and public relations exercises. To be fair, representation *does* matter. We can recall how “identity politics” emerged from The Combahee River Collective manifesto in 1977, created by a group of Black, queer feminist scholars and socialist activists, including the well-respected writer Audre Lorde. “This focusing upon our own oppression is embodied in the concept of identity politics. We believe that the most profound and potentially most radical politics come directly out of our own identity, as opposed to working to end somebody else's oppression,” the manifesto reads. The identity politics this group of Black feminists developed was to serve as an “entry point” for Black women to engage in politics, to create policy priorities, agendas, engineer solutions and actions based on the identity and experience of Black, queer females. Identity politics in the Combahee River Collective (1977), emerged out of necessity and resistance to elite capture by white women and black men in social justice activism

spaces throughout the 60s and 70s. The ultimate purpose, however, is not to create another elite rank of Black female elites. Rather, the liberation of black women is integral to the liberation of all. “If Black women were free, it would mean that everyone else would have to be free since our freedom would necessitate the destruction of all the systems of oppression” (p. 7). Identity politics then, is about collective liberation and solidarity coalitions.

However, it is clear that the progression of our activism has strayed further and further away from the principles of the Combahee River Collective. Whether it be the hollow representation of race in Hollywood, or the crumbling “diversity hiring” practices among big tech companies such as Google and Meta, identity politics today is widely criticized as tokenistic and perfunctory. As we have previously pointed out, diversity and inclusion is increasingly commodified as it becomes “trendy consumer items” such as mugs, t-shirts, company retreats, and workplace training modules (Ahmed, 2012). In Ontario’s public school context, this particular identity and representation politics show up in EDI training, equitable hiring practices (TDSB, 2022; YRDSB, 2017), selection of books and materials represented in students’ curriculum (DDSB, 2018a), and appointment of racialized parent/ student committees (PDSB, 2023) etc. While these practices could be meaningful in increasing engagement and promoting equitable institutional practices, there is a lack of dismantling of the structural racism and colonialism that continues to exist in law, policy, and our broader economic and institutional cultures. Kundnani (2023) demonstrated this point with the example of the inhumane and cruel mass detention and deportation of Mexicans migrants from the US during the enactment of the racist immigration rule in 2021. It makes no difference that an immigration officer participated with their “good heart” in the diversity awareness training, nor does it matter that the employer developed a comprehensive EDI policy that mandates all officers to participate in “anti-

oppression” professional learning, as they are still implementing and continuing to profit from a militaristic, violent state of power and governance. It is thus in the structural level that racism reproduces itself through a hegemonic mobilization of neoliberalism particularly in the global north, as a continuation of the colonial rule and domination of Black, racialized people and the global south. “Racial capitalism” thus reinforces the differentiation, commodification and exploitation of racial identity in reproducing our relentless pursuit and retaining of capital and resources among the elites. From this view, a sole focus on affirmative actions and representation politics in racial activism becomes an effective facade to obfuscate the liberal elites out of the public’s view.

vii. “We want to hear from you”: The Illusion of Democratic Schools

The last key finding illuminates how these EDI policies and materials have been shaped as documents to facilitate a process of feedback and communications from stakeholders. This is particularly the case when studying the action plans and videos, which are materials dedicated to communicating specific messages to parents and school stakeholders, and would explicitly ask for their input to create avenues of feedback and information gathering. In the TDSB video, several pleas were made by the Director of Education for the audience to “provide your input” (Toronto District School Board, 2017). The YRDSB (2022) and PDSB (2018) Equity & Inclusion policies have explicitly stated that the role of students and families is to “respond to surveys” and “reflect to the schools about their input”. These requests for feedback and communications from the masses are gestures to the liberal democracy of the West, often emphasizing the significance of “community of voices” and the expectations that institutions would “hear and act” (Ahmed, 2012). How do these constructed structures of communication and interactions reproduce our neoliberal ideologies and obscure our co-option? Táíwò’s insights

about the myth of liberal democracy under elite capture and deference politics have been helpful in illuminating this argument.

a. The Illusory Democratic Schools

Táíwò (2022) broke down the myth of liberal democracy that we have so often prized on the pedestal. As believers in liberal democracy, we might believe that imbalances of power could be “fixed” by our democratic actions at the ballot box in electing our next local school board trustee, or by reflecting our inputs to the school boards like these policies suggested. To be fair, these democratic processes are indeed, important, and necessary to shaping our world and promoting meaningful changes. However, it is precisely elite capture that bandies with these hopeful ideals in perpetuation of the elite’s pursuit of their control of power and resources. Using the example of the World Bank, Táíwò demonstrated how elite capture is at play within institutions that we all have imagined to be under the pretense of “democratic accountability”. He described the set-up of the International Monetary Fund (IMF), later becoming the World Bank, as in essence a continuation of colonial control over the global south after waves of global decolonization and independence movements. Despite espousing glossy ideals of democracy and aspirational ideas of equality, social justice and poverty reduction, the World Bank and IMF still maintain power over post-colonial nations through high levels of predatorily securitized debt. The myth of democracy is quickly shattered here: since voting power is allocated by wealth rather than by population, the colonial stronghold in the West continues to dominate decisions made in these global institutions, despite only making up less than 15 percent of the world’s population (Táíwò, 2022). In the Canadian context, low rates of Indigenous people voter participation in federal electoral politics and the scarcity of Indigenous representatives in the Parliament and House of Commons (Hunter, 2020) also spells a similar tale, portraying the

extent of elite capture as a continuation of colonial exclusion and white supremacy. From this perspective, when considering the elections of our public-school board trustees, one might make a similar argument on how elite capture has already decided who will be or will not be on the ballot sheet in the first place. The cumulative advantage of socioeconomic realities is crucial here, where our neoliberal systems filter to deposit the handful of individuals with the economic power, education, status, social experience, and a myriad of other factors, with their names printed onto that little sheet of paper to be put in the ballot box. One simply has to ask: who are the individuals with the money, energy and resources to run a political campaign, assemble teams of volunteers and campaign staff, and conduct canvassing or other promotional activities for them to be elected? Liberal democracy still allows us the choice to fill out that ballot sheet, but our choices are pre-determined by a set of complex geo-sociopolitical parameters that made those choices for us way ahead. Continuing with the room analogy, Táíwò describes our preoccupation with EDI's notions of “shared leaderships” and our illusion of democratic schools as what was happening inside the room: what was being said, who was speaking inside the room. However, if we take a step back, we might start thinking: why were we put in rooms in the first place? Who built these rooms, and who decided who gets into what room? The revealing of the illusion of democracy might be shattering for some, but it speaks to why we seem to be having the same conversations over and over again.

b. Deference Politics in Schools: Who is being Centered?

While the enthusiasm with inviting stakeholders for feedback from parents and students is signature to our liberal democratic systems, it is also a gesture towards deferential politics that have been popularly adopted in public institutions in the past decade. Deference politics could be traced back to Standpoint Epistemology, a feminist theoretical perspective from the 70s that

embraced the ideology that “perspectives of subordinated social groups have an epistemic advantage regarding politically contested topics related to their subordination, relative to the perspectives of the groups that dominate them” (E. Anderson, 2020). All the analyzed school board documents exuberate this deferential politics of “pass the mic to the marginalized people”, or “center the voices of the oppressed”. We see it in every school policy, action plan and video studied, under elaborate titles such as “shared leadership” or “collaborative relationships”. Once again, this critique is not to undermine the value of lived experience and the knowledge that comes out of it. However, a default approach in deferential politics has shown us little progress towards the goals of social justice we have claimed to move towards under the assumption that deferential politics is the only effective mechanism to “center marginalized voices”. Táíwò has attested how deferential politics often work counter to marginalized groups’ interests:

“We are surrounded by a discourse that locates attentional injustices in the selection of spokespeople and book lists taken to represent the marginalized, rather than focusing on the actions of the corporations and algorithms that much more powerfully distribute attention. This discourse [...] directs what little attentional power we can control at symbolic sites of power rather than at the root of political issues that explain why everything is so fucked up” (Táíwò, 2022, p. 72).

The prominence placed here is how our personal subjectivity often is being conflated as a collective reality of the community. While standpoint epistemology does lend a powerful narrative in rendering empathy and awareness of perspectives, it is also indicative of the vast omission of the many experiences that we do not have. In further engaging in Táíwò’s analogy of the rooms, it is “the rooms we don’t enter, the experiences we don’t have (and the reasons we are able to avoid them) might have more to teach us about the world and our place in it than

anything said inside” (p. 80). He went as far as to assert that our defaulted deferential approach to “center lived experiences” and “marginalized people’s voices” actually prevents the very “centering” work we are trying to do, as it “focuses us on the interactions inside the rooms we occupy, rather than calling us to account for the interactions we needn’t and typically don’t have” (p. 80). In engaging in deference, it provides a social cover for the abdication of responsibilities, absolving us from doing the hardest work: engaging with those outside of the room, or even tearing down the rooms. In this view, despite a laudable effort to include and reflect the community’s voices, our EDI culture has been at best, employed as tokenistic representation of our community. At its worst, it is once again another shield of innocence that liberal elites could clothe themselves in avoidance of complicity or accountability.

Chapter 8: On the Quest for Hope and Reimagination - Brief Thoughts about the Trajectory to Antiracism and Decolonization

The past few sections might have been frustrating and demoralizing to see how our seeming progress in racial justice and societal equity has yet been another spiraling into the whirlpool of hegemonic neoliberalism and colonialism that absorbs everything in the way for its purpose. One might contemplate at this point: what is there left to do? Is there any other way to move out of this echo chamber? How can we reimagine antiracism work outside of neoliberal EDI frameworks? Is that even possible? The difficulty of imagining a future is too palpable. bell hooks once said, “we’ve not just been colonized in our minds, we’ve been colonized in our imaginations.” That is the power of colonialism, to take life away not just from life itself, but also in the possibility of life. I find myself losing hope and the capacity for reimagining a future of “liberation” that Freire had so staunchly advocated in 1968. In the following section, I will be briefly revisiting Freire’s theory of praxis, black lesbian feminists’ abolition ideologies, and musing on the decolonization frameworks proposed by Indigenous scholars.

Revisiting Freire: On Praxis and Solidarity

As we revisit Freire’s theory on our quest for freedom and liberation, we keep coming back to the theme of praxis, which is “the action and reflection of men and women upon the world in order to transform it” (Freire, 1993, p. 79). What is worth noting, is the emphasis on “and”, which denotes to the synchronicity and coalescence of both reflective, discursive knowledge pursuits and dialogues (as represented in the importance of conscientização characterized by Freire), *and* the material and tangible redistribution of social resources and power, together. Rooted in a similar view, Táíwò advocated for what he calls a “constructive politics”, which would “focus on outcome over process; the pursuit of specific goals or results,

rather than mere avoidance of “complicity” in injustice or promotion of purely moral or aesthetic principles” (p. 12, 2022). As Freire’s argument for conscientização is based on exploring the critical consciousness of political and social contradictions and the subsequent action, Táíwò’s discussions of constructive politics also point to the creation of new epistemological understandings and discursive knowledge of our worlds. Both arguments had a similar denominator, which is creativity. That brings us back again to bell hooks and why it is so difficult for us to engage in our imaginations. The critical spirit, as Freire explained, is always creative.

I ponder: how would conscientização and liberation look like in our public-school boards? As we scanned through the policies, it might seem that educators have been readily adopting the Freirian ideology in their inclusion of “anti-oppressive theories” and “critical power dynamics” training. This is, however, precisely what Macedo (2000) characterized as the “mechanization” of a radical, political and complex philosophy into mere regurgitations of vocabulary and cliché teaching methods that simply fills up a hierarchical classroom, in effect “reducing their pedagogy to form a middle-class narcissism”. On the other hand, Freire’s theory of praxis “cannot be purely intellectual but must involve action; nor can it be limited to mere activism, but must include serious reflection” (Freire, 1993, p. 65). The accounting for such complexity and coupling of political activism with critical knowledge and theory I would argue, is a key element to how we can re-envision racial equity in education. Each knowledge dissemination and critical dialogue about power, injustices and inequalities should always be framed together with discussions of political and radical actions, whether it be coalition building, organizing, petitioning, or tangible strategies of redistribution of power and resources. I ponder: can we expand our unions’ bargaining to leverage racial justice goals beyond wage and benefits?

Can we support those who might not have the political resources to make differences in a School Board by providing toolkits for political actions? Can we demand scrutiny of the atrocities and exploitation of corporations and governments that perpetuate colonial racial capitalism? Can we build movements and provide material support to grassroots organizations who are working to promote political education and collective actions? By equipping ourselves with the political consciousness, tools, and skills, we can organize towards actions. Freire clearly distinguished the differences between “systemic education” which can only be changed by political power, and “educational projects” which are often carried out with the oppressed in the process of organizing them. It is thus an important first step to politicize our very ideas about education and what it means to be a part of it.

The Quest for Hope: the Combahee River Collective and Black Feminist Thoughts

As we further contend with the power of building and creating, I also contemplate back on the Combahee River Collective. It explicitly outlines the very work of building a politic that will “change our lives and inevitably end our oppression” while simultaneously tying it to the “contemporary economic and political position of Black people”. Barbara Smith and members of the collective were realistic, but also hopeful. Facing immense difficulties in organizing, they did not have the racial, sexual, heterosexual and class privilege to rely on, nor did they have “access to resources and power that groups who possess any one of these types of privileges have”. The group had no choice but to build from the “very bottom of the American capitalistic economy”. I also envisage the possibility of an alternative trajectory with other Black feminist thoughts, especially those advocating for abolition and transformative justice, who have continued building on the work of the Combahee River Collective, to fight for the dismantling of our colonial structures that will not only liberate Black women, but everyone. Abolition as Ruth Wilson

Gilmore, Angela Davis and Mariame Kaba contended, “is as much about building the conditions for safety as it is about dismantling institutions of harm and captivity, and ending racial violence in all of its forms” (Maynard, 2020, p. 74) Abolition is then about presence, not about absence. In each act of calling for divestment or demolition, we are also calling for investment and creation of projects and institutions that are life nurturing, and hopeful. Angela Davis then also beckoned our continued belief and hope in a world that can be more just. “Sometimes the future that you imagined to be most dreadful turns out to be the future that compels you to reach down very deeply into your being to uncover reservoirs of strength and perseverance that you had no idea were there, and you probably would not have discovered but for the disastrous times” (Davis, (2017). Reimagination and creativity then, is birthed out of the loss of hope.

Decolonize antiracism?

In this discussion about collective activism, one must also contemplate on allyship and solidarity. As neoliberalism continues to fracture the common humanity into mere competitive individuals, to resist is to amass. Fellowship and solidarity after all, is vital to “the pursuit of full humanity” (Freire, 1993, p. 85). Before we rush into the happy place of solidarity however, we must also caution this act of “feel good” rushing as another whiteness project. Audre Lorde and bell hooks shared critical insights about how whiteness also shows up in the form of “feeling bad” about racism and white privilege, which recenters the white subject as the one whose feelings matter. This avoidance in “complicity” in injustices due to guilt and shame, is antithetical to constructive politics, as Táíwò suggested. On the contrary, as white subjects move beyond the “feeling bad”, the “feeling good” among progressive whites is also another iteration of the whiteness project. Kincheloe and Steinberg have also denounced the haste and necessity to create “a positive, proud, attractive antiracist white identity” (1998, p. 12). In this view, the hasty

and superficial “overcoming” of white guilt and shame, without a thoughtful grappling with the complexity of history and political contexts, has enabled a turn towards white pride, which is once again, engendering whiteness. As contradictory as it sounds, antiracism in this view then, can dangerously reproduce whiteness and become another attribute of whiteness.

Once again, this leads us back to revisiting Tuck and Yang (2012)’s concept of “settler moves to innocence”. As we have demonstrated, over rushing of solutions and proclaiming one to be “antiracist” can easily slip into the violence of a neoliberal colonial landslide, sweeping everything along the way. This “move to innocence” as Tuck and Yang (2012) denoted, is “hollow, they only serve the settler” (p. 10). In fact, Tuck and Yang have explicitly interrogated the solidarity Freire and abolition scholars have so earnestly called for. In the attempts to distinguish decolonization work from the liberal models of human rights or civil rights approaches, Tuck and Yang argued that solidarity should be “uneasy, reserved and unsettled matter that neither reconciles present grievances nor foreclosed future conflict” (p. 3). On discussing abolitionist pedagogies that contemplate the prison industrial complex and forms of slavery, Tuck and Yang pointed out the missing connection between the colonial removal of land and creation of black bodies as property among Abolitionist scholarships. Land ownership of Indian, “unsettled” land in the reparations program “40 acres and a mule” for the newly freed plantation slaves in 1865 (Nittle, 2024) was an apparent link of slavery being born out of this tight linkage of land and bodies. On critical pedagogies such as the Freirian-based ideology of critical multiculturalism and conscientização, Tuck and Yang (2012) asserted that there is a “lack of fluency in land and Indigenous sovereignty” (p. 30). In particular, they posited the abstract categorization of the “oppressor” and the “oppressed”, which inferred an innocent third category of an “enlightened human” as “those who suffer with the oppressed and fight at their side”

(Freire, as quoted in Tuck and Yang, 2012, p. 20). Solidarity in this sense, is stabilized by the innocent, educated man who engages in conscientização. What is removed from Freire's view then, is the account for settler colonialism. Freire's discussion is thus characterized as ahistorical, with no natives, no settlers. In Tuck and Yang's words, "Freire positions liberation as redemption, a freeing of both oppressor and oppressed through their humanity. Human becomes subjects who then proceed to work on the objects of the world (animals, earth, water), and indeed read the world (critical consciousness) in order to write the world (exploit nature)" (p. 20). The rush to embrace critical consciousness and liberation without accounts of the land and history is thus, once again, another centering of the whiteness project. To graft the words "decolonization" onto pre-existing frameworks is exactly another form of settler appropriation, even if those discourses are critical or antiracist. It is yet another gesture of adding the alphabet into the alphabet pool. As Tuck and Yang have articulated, decolonization is not commensurable with other forms of politics. It is not obliged to provide a solution to "move forward", or to point us into the "better future".

Indigenous scholars such as Tuck and Yang and Gaztambide-Fernández have urged our closer examination of solidarity, and how that has been largely conflated with vague emotions of empathy and compassion, lacking in theorizing of "what it entails, where it comes from, how it evolves, or how it matters" (Gaztambide-Fernández, 2012, p. 46). Instead of conceptualizing solidarity as a binary pathway of either you are "in" or "not in", I appreciate Bayertz's (1999) nuanced perception of the four contexts of solidarity in relationship to morality (human solidarity), society (social solidarity), liberation (political solidarity), and the welfare state (civic solidarity). Just like the many other sociopolitically entangled concepts we have discussed throughout this study, solidarity is also enmeshed within the labyrinth of tensions, power, and

geopolitical dynamics. Solidarity thus, is “an uneasy, reserved, and unsettled matter that neither reconciles present grievances nor forecloses future conflict” (Tuck & Yang, 2012, p.3).

Chapter 9: Conclusion

If the journey to coming to this conclusion is confusing and frustrating, I have then argued my point effectively. The work of antiracism, decolonization and the dismantling of many other “isms” of the world should not move with an easy, comfortable, linear trajectory. This work has proven to be incredibly difficult as we place this critique of EDI in an increasingly polarized political climate we share today, with the rise of fascist populism and right-wing white supremacy that relentlessly tear down every hard-won racial justice and civil rights we spent centuries fighting for, along with the quick disposal and clawback of EDI initiatives by big tech and multinational companies when it no longer serve their capitalistic purposes. This study has revealed how our current mainstream EDI project among public school boards originated from its colonial roots as a technology for exclusion, control, and domination. It has also delineated how the EDI project has been a futile exercise in advancing antiracism, rather has lent itself as a glossy cover deployed by the state for the reproduction and perpetuation of a hegemonic neoliberal agenda. While it is essential that we continue to support works on building critical conversations about true inclusion and equity among our discourses and public spaces, especially in face of white supremacist vicious attacks, we must also continue to unsettle the colonial roots and neoliberal implications these projects lend. How can we continue to interrogate our participation in neoliberal projects and explore alternative pathways to racial justice and equity? How do we critically engage and historicize our work without simply chasing and rushing to the shiny appeal of the “newness” of emergent ideas? How can we simultaneously promote a practice that moves us towards a focus on outcome, rather than a mere avoidance of complicity? As we engage in Táíwò’s constructive epistemology and the Freirian theory of action-oriented reflective praxis, we are also cautious of the creation of the “third category of enlightened man”

who “individualistically emerges from the dark cave of ignorance into the light of critical consciousness” (Tuck & Yang, 2012, p. 20). I ponder in the grand scheme of time and space, whether human civilizations could ever create a just world. I contemplate on the multiplicity of our reality where despite a strengthening of our political positions to be “anti” every single “isms” of the world (anti-racism, anti-oppression, anti-capitalism, and so on), it does not necessarily equate to justice and healing. The struggle will always be imminent and unresolved. Amid the pain of struggle, however, also lies the co-existence of love. The love that bell hooks characterized as profoundly personal and political. With what I call a “trepidatious hope”, I contend our future with a renewed, nuanced understanding of solidarity, but also a relentless practice of love towards true liberation.

References

- Abella, P. S. and P. C. (1984, October). *Report of the Commission on Equality in Employment / Judge Rosalie Silberman Abella, commissioner.:* MP43-157/1-1984E-PDF -.
Government of Canada Publications - Canada.Ca.
<https://publications.gc.ca/site/eng/471737/publication.html>
- Abu-Laban, Y. (2020). *Selling Diversity: Immigration Multiculturalism, Employment Equity, and Globalization* (2nd ed.). University of Toronto Press.
<https://doi.org/10.3138/9781442602274>
- Abu-Laban, Y., Gabriel, C., & Browne, S. A. (2004). SELLING DIVERSITY: Immigration, Multiculturalism, Employment Equity and Globalization. *Resources for Feminist Research*, 31(1/2), 35-.
- Agger, B. (1991). Critical Theory, Poststructuralism, Postmodernism: Their Sociological Relevance on JSTOR. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 17, 105–131.
- Agocs, C. (2007). Canada's Employment Equity Act: Perspectives on Policy and Implementation. In R. Joshee & L. Johnson, *Multicultural education policies in Canada and the United States* (pp. 167–187). Vancouver : UBC Press. <https://books-scholarsportal-info.ezproxy.library.yorku.ca/en/read?id=/ebooks/ebooks3/upress/2013-08-25/1/9780774855648#page=182>
- Agocs, C. (2014). *Employment equity in Canada: The legacy of the Abella report*. University of Toronto Press. <https://books-scholarsportal-info.ezproxy.library.yorku.ca/en/read?id=/ebooks/ebooks3/utpress/2014-09-29/1/9781442668515#page=15>
- Ahmed, S. (2012). *On Being Included: Racism and Diversity in Institutional Life on JSTOR*.

Duke University Press.

Albanese, C. (2020). *Sensemaking: How Is the Equitable and Inclusive Education Policy*

Understood, Explained, and Implemented by School Administrators in Ontario? [Ph.D.,

University of Toronto (Canada)].

<https://www.proquest.com/docview/2466298222/abstract/FC58E6980DDD48BFPQ/1>

Alexander, N. (2022). *Déjà Vu, Harris and Ford: Exploring the Neoliberal Project in Ontario's*

Education System Over Three Decades.

https://scholar.uwindsor.ca/etd/8719?utm_source=scholar.uwindsor.ca%2Fetd%2F8719

[&utm_medium=PDF&utm_campaign=PDFCoverPages](https://scholar.uwindsor.ca/etd/8719?utm_source=scholar.uwindsor.ca%2Fetd%2F8719&utm_medium=PDF&utm_campaign=PDFCoverPages)

Anderson, E. (2020). Feminist Epistemology and Philosophy of Science. In E. N. Zalta (Ed.),

The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Spring 2020). Metaphysics Research Lab,

Stanford University. [https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2020/entries/feminism-](https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2020/entries/feminism-epistemology/)

[epistemology/](https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2020/entries/feminism-epistemology/)

Anderson, S. E., & Ben Jaafar, S. (2003). *Policy trends in Ontario education, 1990-2003.*

International Centre for Educational Change.

Apple, M. W. (2018). *The Struggle for Democracy in Education: Lessons from Social Realities.*

Routledge. [https://www.routledge.com/The-Struggle-for-Democracy-in-Education-](https://www.routledge.com/The-Struggle-for-Democracy-in-Education-Lessons-from-Social-Realities/Apple/p/book/9781138721159)

[Lessons-from-Social-Realities/Apple/p/book/9781138721159](https://www.routledge.com/The-Struggle-for-Democracy-in-Education-Lessons-from-Social-Realities/Apple/p/book/9781138721159)

Apple, M. W. (2019). On Doing Critical Policy Analysis. *Educational Policy*, 33(1), 276–287.

<https://doi.org/10.1177/0895904818807307>

Arlen, M. J. (1969). *Living-room war.* Viking Press.

Aronwitz, S. (1992). Paulo Freire's Radical Democratic Humanism | 2 | Paulo Freire | Stanle. In

P. McLaren & P. Leonard, *Paulo Freire: A Critical Encounter* (pp. 8–23). Routledge.

- <https://www-taylorfrancis-com.ezproxy.library.yorku.ca/chapters/edit/10.4324/9780203420263-2/paulo-freire-radical-democratic-humanism-stanley-aronowitz?context=ubx&refId=f1b9ca41-e9ba-4317-91db-b301e1937fff>
- Bacchi, C. (2012). Introducing the ‘What’s the Problem Represented to be?’ approach. In A. Bletsas & C. Beasley (Eds.), *Engaging with Carol Bacchi: Strategic Interventions and Exchanges* (pp. 21–24). The University of Adelaide Press.
- <https://doi.org/10.1017/UPO9780987171856.003>
- Bacchi, C., & Eveline, J. (2003). Mainstreaming and Neoliberalism: A Contested Relationship. *Policy & Society*, 22(2), 98–118. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S1449-4035\(03\)70021-6](https://doi.org/10.1016/S1449-4035(03)70021-6)
- Banerjee, R., & Reitz. (2007, January 11). *Racial Inequality, Social Cohesion and Policy Issues in Canada*. IRPP. <https://irpp.org/research-studies/racial-inequality-social-cohesion-and-policy-issues-in-canada/>
- Bannerji, H. (1996). On the Dark Side of the Nation: Politics of Multiculturalism and the State of “Canada.” *Journal of Canadian Studies/Revue d’études Canadiennes*, 31(3), 103–128.
- Bannerji, H. (2000). *The dark side of the nation*. Canadian Scholars’ Press. https://books-scholarsportal-info.ezproxy.library.yorku.ca/en/read?id=/ebooks/ebooks0/gibson_crkn/2010-12-16/1/10191739
- Banting, K., & Kymlicka, W. (2010). Canadian Multiculturalism: Global Anxieties and Local Debates. *British Journal of Canadian Studies*, 23(1), 43–72.
- Basu, R. (2004). The rationalization of neoliberalism in Ontario’s public education system, 1995–2000. *Geoforum*, 35(5), 621–634. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.geoforum.2004.03.003>

- Billingham, C. M. (2019). The fight for America's schools: Grassroots organizing in education, edited by Barbara Ferman. *Journal of Urban Affairs*, 41(3), 417–419.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/07352166.2018.1507210>
- Blanding, L. (2020). “A Harmonious National Mosaic”? The Multiculturalism Debate of the 1950s and 1960s. *Canadian Issues*, 15–20.
- Bradburn. (2018). *The story of Ontario's last segregated Black school*. TVO Today.
<https://www.tvo.org/article/the-story-of-ontarios-last-segregated-black-school>
- Brown, A., Auguste, E., Omobhude, F., Bakana, N., & Sukhera, J. (2022). Symbolic Solidarity or Virtue Signaling? A Critical Discourse Analysis of the Public Statements Released by Academic Medical Organizations in the Wake of the Killing of George Floyd. *Academic Medicine*, 97(6), 867. <https://doi.org/10.1097/ACM.0000000000004597>
- Byrne, S. (2017). The Legacy of Colonialism Among Indigenous Peoples: Destructive Outcomes, Healing and Reconciliatory Potentials. *Peace Research*, 49(2), 5–13.
- Carrington, B., & Bonnett, A. (1997). The Other Canadian “Mosaic”-’race” equity education in Ontario and British Columbia. *Comparative Education*, 33(3), 411–431.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/03050069728442>
- Carroll, B. (2017). Canada's Carbon-Capital Elite: A Tangled Web of Corporate Power. *Canadian Journal of Sociology*, 42(3), 225–260. <https://doi.org/10.29173/cjs28258>
- Carter, N., Bryant-Lukosius, D., DiCenso, A., Blythe, J., & Neville, A. J. (2014). The use of triangulation in qualitative research. *Oncology Nursing Forum*, 41(5), 545–547.
<https://doi.org/10.1188/14.ONF.545-547>
- CBC, C. B. C. (2019, March 15). “It's a tragedy”: Provincial funding cut puts an end to school programming that combats racism | CBC News. CBC.

<https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/toronto/it-s-a-tragedy-provincial-funding-cut-puts-an-end-to-school-programming-that-combats-racism-1.5055731>

Cherubini, L., Hodson, J., Manley-Casimir, M., & Muir, C. (2010). “Closing the gap” at the peril of widening the void: Implications of the Ontario ministry of education’s policy for aboriginal education. *Canadian Journal of Education*, 33(2), 329–356.

Connell, R. (2013). The neoliberal cascade and education: An essay on the market agenda and its consequences. *Critical Studies in Education*, 54(2), 99–112.

<https://doi.org/10.1080/17508487.2013.776990>

Cowan, S. R., & Berg, S. (2023). Unlearning: First Steps Toward an Anti-oppressive Information Literacy. *Scholarship at UWindsor: Leddy Library Publications*.

<https://scholar.uwindsor.ca/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1060&context=leddylibrarypub>

Dali, K., Bell, N., & Valdes, Z. (2021). The Expectation and Learning Impact Framework (ELIF): Evaluating diversity, equity, and inclusion professional development events for academic librarians. *The Journal of Academic Librarianship*, 47(6).

<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.acalib.2021.102456>

Davies, B., & Bansel, P. (2007). Neoliberalism and education. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, 20(3), 247–259.

<https://doi.org/10.1080/09518390701281751>

DDSB. (2018a). *Equity & Diversity Strategic Plan 2018-2021*.

<https://www.ddsbc.ca/ddsbfiles/EquityFlipbook/4/#zoom=z>

DDSB. (2018b, November 20). *Durham District School Board Equity and Inclusive Education Policy*. <https://durhamschboard.service->

[now.com/sys_attachment.do?sys_id=cd7f0eb1db1933805f6be3a84b96195f&view=true](https://durhamschboard.service-now.com/sys_attachment.do?sys_id=cd7f0eb1db1933805f6be3a84b96195f&view=true)

- DDSB. (2023, September 27). *About DDSB*. <https://www.ddsb.ca/en/about-ddsb/about-ddsb.aspx>
- DDSB. (2024, February 23). *Human Rights, Anti-Discrimination and Anti-Racism Policy*. <https://www.ddsb.ca/en/about-ddsb/human-rights-anti-discrimination-and-anti-racism-policy.aspx>
- De Lissovoy, N. (2008). Conceptualizing Oppression in Educational Theory: Toward a Compound Standpoint. *Cultural Studies ↔ Critical Methodologies*, 8(1), 82–105. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1532708607310794>
- Dei, G. J., & James, I. M. (2002). Beyond the rhetoric: Moving from exclusion, reaching for inclusion in Canadian schools. *Alberta Journal of Educational Research*, 48(1), 61–87.
- Dei, G. J., & Karumanchery, L. L. (1999). School reforms in Ontario: The marketization of education and the resulting silence on equity. *Alberta Journal of Educational Research*, 45(2), 111–131.
- Denzin, N. K. (2001). *Interpretive interactionism* (2nd ed.). Sage Publications.
- Dewing, M., & Brosseau, L. (2009, September 15). *Canadian Multiculturalism (background paper)* [4]. https://lop.parl.ca/sites/PublicWebsite/default/en_CA/ResearchPublications/200920E
- Duarte, E. M., & Smith, S. (2000). *Foundational perspectives in multicultural education*. Longman.
- Eisenstein. (1977). *THE COMBAHEE RIVER COLLECTIVE: “The Combahee River Collective Statement,.”* https://americanstudies.yale.edu/sites/default/files/files/Keyword%20Coalition_Readings.pdf

- Elias, J. (2023, December 22). Tech companies like Google and Meta made cuts to DEI programs in 2023 after big promises in prior years. *CNBC*.
<https://www.cnn.com/2023/12/22/google-meta-other-tech-giants-cut-dei-programs-in-2023.html>
- Eschmann, R., Grundy, S., Harbaugh, A. G., Guo, L., Toraif, N., & Groshek, J. (2023). Digital Rage: Testing “the Obama Effect” on Internet-Based Expressions of Racism. *Social Media + Society*, 9(4). <https://doi.org/10.1177/20563051231205592>
- Fairbank, R. (2024, January 1). Psychologists persevere in EDI work despite growing backlash against racial equity efforts. *Https://Www.Apa.Org*.
<https://www.apa.org/monitor/2024/01/trends-anti-equity-diversity-inclusion-laws>
- Fairclough, N., Mulderrig, J., & Wodak, R. (1997). Critical Discourse Analysis. *Discourse Studies: A Multidisciplinary Introduction*, 2, 357–378.
<https://doi.org/10.4135/9781446289068.n17>
- Ferman, B. (2017). *The Fight for America’s Schools: Grassroots Organizing in Education*. In *Harvard Education Press*. Harvard Education Press.
- Fielding, S. (2009). Liberal Governance, Multiculturalism, and the Making of Ethnocultural Identities in Canada. *Humanitas: Journal of the Institute for the Humanities*.
<https://journals.sfu.ca/humanitas/index.php/humanities/article/view/9>
- Financial Accountability Office of Ontario. (2023, December). *Ontario School Boards: Enrolment, Finances and Student Outcomes*. Financial Accountability Office of Ontario (FAO). <https://www.fao-on.org/en/Blog/Publications/FA2207schoolboards>
- Flegel, P. F. (2002). Challenges to Canadian multiculturalism: The case of Black Montreal. *Canadian Issues*, 39–41.

- Fleras, A. (2019). 50 Years Of Canadian Multiculturalism: Accounting for its Durability, Theorizing the Crisis, Anticipating the Future 1. *Canadian Ethnic Studies*, 51(2), 19,50-59.
- Foster Curtis, E., & Dreachslin, J. L. (2008). Integrative Literature Review: Diversity Management Interventions and Organizational Performance:A Synthesis of Current Literature. *Human Resource Development Review*, 7(1), 107–134.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/1534484307311700>
- Freire, P. (1993). *Pedagogy of the oppressed* (New rev. 20th-Anniversary ed.). Continuum.
From Angela Davis, a call for both hope and collective action. (2017). Brown University.
<https://www.brown.edu/news/2017-02-12/davis>
- Gaztambide-Fernández, R. A. (2012). Decolonization and the pedagogy of solidarity. *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society*, 1(1), Article 1.
<https://jps.library.utoronto.ca/index.php/des/article/view/18633>
- George, R. C., Maier, R., & Robson, K. (2020). Ignoring race: A comparative analysis of education policy in British Columbia and Ontario. *Race Ethnicity and Education*, 23(2), 159–179. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13613324.2019.1679754>
- Gibbon, J. M. (1938). *Canadian mosaic ; the making of northern nation.*
- Giroux, H. A. (1997). Insurgent Multiculturalism and the Promise of Pedagogy. In *Pedagogy And The Politics Of Hope*. Routledge.
- Goldberg, M. (2007). Dialogue across Borders on Employment Equity/ Affirmative Action. In *Multicultural education policies in Canada and the United States*. Vancouver : UBC Press. <https://books-scholarsportal-info.ezproxy.library.yorku.ca/en/read?id=/ebooks/ebooks3/upress/2013-08->

25/1/9780774855648#page=219

Gonino, L. (2017). Blacks' and Whites' Attitudes toward Race-Based Policies: Is there an Obama Effect? *Michigan Sociological Review*, 31, 173–188.

Goodhart, D. (2008). Has multiculturalism had its day? A leading British critic finds Canada's approach outdated. *Literary Review of Canada*, 16(3), 3–5.

Government of Canada. (1982). *The Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms*.

<https://www.justice.gc.ca/eng/csj-sjc/rfc-dlc/ccrf-ccdl/>

Government of Canada. (1999, November 9). *Charterpedia—Section 15 – Equality rights*.

Department of Justice Canada. <https://www.justice.gc.ca/eng/csj-sjc/rfc-dlc/ccrf-ccdl/check/art15.html>

Government of Canada. (2017, November 24). *Remarks by Prime Minister Justin Trudeau to apologize on behalf of the Government of Canada to former students of the Newfoundland and Labrador residential schools*. Prime Minister of Canada.

<http://www.pm.gc.ca/en/news/speeches/2017/11/24/remarks-prime-minister-justin-trudeau-apologize-behalf-government-canada>

Government of Canada. (2021, June 1). *Statement by the Prime Minister on National Indigenous History Month*. Prime Minister of Canada.

<https://www.pm.gc.ca/en/news/statements/2021/06/01/statement-prime-minister-national-indigenous-history-month>

Government of Canada. (2022, September 14). *Inclusion and respect for diversity*. GAC.

https://www.international.gc.ca/world-monde/issues_developpement-enjeux_developpement/human_rights-droits_homme/inclusion_respect.aspx?lang=eng

Government of Ontario Archives. (1993). *Archives of Ontario: Ministry of Education and*

Training. Anti-racism and Ethnocultural Equity Team. Archives of Ontario.

https://aims.archives.gov.on.ca/scripts/mwimain.dll/144/ORGANIZATION_VAL/WEB_ORG_DET_OPAC?SESSIONSEARCH&exp=ORG_ID%2003289

Grimaldi. (2012). Neoliberalism and the marginalisation of social justice: The making of an education policy to combat social exclusion. *International Journal of Inclusive Education*, 16(11), 1131–1154. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13603116.2010.548105>

Grossman, H. (2023, July 31). *Canadian principal's suicide after alleged bullying for his "whiteness" in CRT training sparks investigation* | Fox News.

<https://www.foxnews.com/media/canadian-principals-suicide-alleged-bullying-whiteness-crt-training-sparks-investigation>

Guo, S., & Guo, Y. (2011). Multiculturalism, Ethnicity and Minority Rights: The Complexity and Paradox of Ethnic Organizations in Canada. *Canadian Ethnic Studies*, 43(1/2), 59–80. <https://doi.org/10.1353/ces.2011.0023>

Guo, S., & Jamal, Z. (2007). Nurturing Cultural Diversity in Higher Education: A Critical Review of Selected Models. *The Canadian Journal of Higher Education*, 37(3), 27–49.

Henry, F., Dua, E., James, C., Kobayashi, A., Li, P. S., Ramos, H., & Smith, M. S. (2017). *The equity myth: Racialization and indigeneity at Canadian universities* (1st ed.). UBC Press.

hooks. (1992). *Black Looks: Race and Representation* (2nd ed.). Routledge.

<https://www.routledge.com/Black-Looks-Race-and-Representation/hooks/p/book/9781138821552>

Hunter, A. (2020, March 4). *Exploring the Issues of Aboriginal Representation in Federal Elections*. Electoral Insight - Aboriginal Participation in Elections.

<https://www.elections.ca/content.aspx?section=res&dir=eim/issue9&document=p6&lang>

=e

Johnson, L. (2022, October 18). Ban on teaching anti-racism, diversity among UCP policy resolutions. *Edmonton Journal*. <https://edmontonjournal.com/news/politics/ban-on-teaching-anti-racism-diversity-included-in-alberta-ucp-policy-resolutions>

Jones, B. M. (2000). Multiculturalism and citizenship: The status of visible minorities in Canada. *Canadian Ethnic Studies*, 32(3), 111.

Joshee, R. (2007). Opportunities for Social Justice Work: The Ontario Diversity Policy Web. *EAF Journal: Journal of Educational Administration and Foundations*, 18(1/2), 171–199.

Kalinoski, Steele-Johnson, Peyton, Leas, Steinke, & Bowling. (2012). A meta-analytic evaluation of diversity training outcomes. *Journal of Organizational Behavior*. <https://doi-org.ezproxy.library.yorku.ca/10.1002/job.1839>

Kempf, A. (2018). *The Challenges of Measuring Wellbeing in Schools*. <https://www.otffeo.on.ca/en/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2018/02/The-challenges-of-measuring-wellbeing-in-schools-Winter-2017-web.pdf>

Kihika, M. (2022). ‘Good Intentions’ that ‘Do Harm’: Canada’s state multiculturalism policy in the case of Black Canadians. *Canadian Review of Sociology/Revue Canadienne de Sociologie*, 59(4), 436–450. <https://doi.org/10.1111/cars.12397>

Kincheloe, J. L. (2011). *Key Works in Critical Pedagogy*. Brill. <https://brill.com/display/title/37167>

Kipang, S., & Zuberi, D. (2018). Beyond Face Value: A Policy Analysis of Employment Equity Programs and Reporting in Ontario Public Colleges. *The Canadian Journal of Higher Education*, 48(2), 169–185.

Kokozos, M. (2023). Anti-Oppressive Education in “Elite” Schools: Promising Practices and Cautionary Tales From the Field. *Teachers College Record*, 125(7–8), 49–51.

<https://doi.org/10.1177/01614681231205644>

Kulik, C. T., Pepper, M. B., Roberson, L., & Parker, S. K. (2007). The rich get richer: Predicting participation in voluntary diversity training. *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, 28(6), 753–769. <https://doi.org/10.1002/job.444>

Kumashiro, K. K. (2000). *Toward a Theory of Anti-Oppressive Education*.

Kundnani. (2023). There are two kinds of antiracism. Only one works, and it has nothing to do with ‘diversity training’ | Arun Kundnani |. *The Guardian*.

<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2023/jun/29/antiracism-diversity-training-liberal-antiracists-vocabulary-direct-action>

Kymlicka, W. (2015). The Three Lives of Multiculturalism. In S. Guo & L. Wong, *Revisiting Multiculturalism in Canada: Theories, Policies and Debates* (p. p.17-35). Rotterdam: Sense Publishers.

Lei, L., & Guo, S. (2022). Beyond multiculturalism: Revisioning a model of pandemic anti-racism education in post-Covid-19 Canada. *International Journal of Anthropology and Ethnology*, 6(1), NA-NA. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s41257-021-00060-7>

Levitt, H. (2023, August 5). Employee’s DEI experience a cautionary tale for companies on perils of wokeism. *Financial Post*. <https://financialpost.com/fp-work/employee-dei-experience-cautionary-tale-companies-wokeism>

Lewis. (1992). *Report of the Advisor on Race Relations to the Premier of Ontario, Bob Rae*.

https://www.siu.on.ca/pdfs/report_of_the_advisor_on_race_relations_to_the_premier_of_ontario_bob_rae.pdf

- Liadakis, & Satzewich. (2003). From Solution to Problem: Multiculturalism and “race relations” as new social problems. In L. Samuelson, *Power and resistance: Critical thinking about Canadian social issues*. <https://search.worldcat.org/title/power-and-resistance-critical-thinking-about-canadian-social-issues/oclc/51274268?page=citation>
- Lingard, F. R., Bob. (2009). *Globalizing Education Policy*. Routledge.
<https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203867396>
- Macedo. (2000). Introduction to the Anniversary Edition. In Freire, *Pedagogy of the oppressed* (30th anniversary ed, pp. 11–28). Continuum.
- Martino, W., & Rezai-Rashti, G. (2013). ‘Gap talk’ and the global rescaling of educational accountability in Canada. *Journal of Education Policy*, 28(5), 589–611.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/02680939.2013.767074>
- Marx, D. M., Ko, S. J., & Friedman, R. A. (2009). The “Obama Effect”: How a salient role model reduces race-based performance differences. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, 45(4), 953–956. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jesp.2009.03.012>
- May, S., & May, S. (1998). *Critical Multiculturalism: Rethinking Multicultural and Antiracist Education*. Taylor & Francis Group.
<http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/york/detail.action?docID=240297>
- Maychak, M. (1992, May 6). Hooligans to blame, not racism Rae says: [AM Edition]. *Toronto Star*, A7.
- Maynard. (2020). Police Abolition/Black Revolt. *TOPIA: Canadian Journal of Cultural Studies*, 41, 70–78. <https://doi.org/10.3138/topia-009>
- McGregor, S. (2018). *Critical discourse analysis: A primer*.
<https://www.semanticscholar.org/paper/Critical-discourse-analysis%3A-A-primer->

McGregor/aa2a27cfb29f1c728680cd53cf07e15e3427ff85

- McLaren, P., & Farahmandpur, R. (1999). Critical Multiculturalism and the Globalization of Capital: Some Implications for a Politics of Resistance. *Education Faculty Articles and Research*. https://digitalcommons.chapman.edu/education_articles/163
- Meister, D. R. (2021). *The Racial Mosaic: A Pre-History of Canadian Multiculturalism*. McGill-Queen's University Press.
<http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/york/detail.action?docID=6728657>
- Ministry of Education and Training. (1993). *Antiracism and Ethnocultural Equity in School Boards*. <https://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/document/curricul/antiraci/antire.pdf>
- Mock, K., & Masemann, V. L. (1990). *Implementing race and ethnocultural equity policy in Ontario school boards*. Ministry of Education : MGS Publications Service [distributor].
- Morgan, A. (2018). *Populism and racism in two Ontario elections*. Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives. <https://policyalternatives.ca/publications/monitor/populism-and-racism-two-ontario-elections>
- Naidu, M. V. (1995). Canadian multiculturalism: A discussion. *Peace Research*, 27(2), 1–22.
- Naseem, M. A. (2011). Conceptual Perspectives on Multiculturalism and Multicultural Education: A Survey of the Field. *Canadian Issues*, 9–14.
- Nicholls, R. M. (2020). *A Walk Around the Lake: Critical Reflections on Place of Identity, Equity, and Inclusion in a Rural Ontario School Board* [Ph.D., University of Toronto (Canada)].
<https://www.proquest.com/docview/2468408508/abstract/80CF2EEC30264F59PQ/1>
- Nittle. (2024, January 3). *The Short-Lived Promise of "40 Acres and a Mule."* HISTORY.
<https://www.history.com/news/40-acres-mule-promise>

O. Reg. 330/10: School Councils, Pub. L. No. 330/10 (2010).

<https://www.ontario.ca/laws/regulation/r10330>

OME. (2009a). *Ontario's equity and inclusive education strategy, 2009* | ontario.ca.

<https://www.ontario.ca/page/ontarios-equity-and-inclusive-education-strategy-2009>

OME. (2009b, April 6). *Helping More Students Succeed*. News.Ontario.Ca.

<https://news.ontario.ca/en/release/5363/helping-more-students-succeed>

OME. (2013, April 22). *Policy/Program Memorandum 119 | Education in Ontario: Policy and program direction* | ontario.ca. Policy/Program Memorandum 119.

<http://www.ontario.ca/document/education-ontario-policy-and-program-direction/policyprogram-memorandum-119>

OME. (2014). *Achieving Excellence: A Renewed Vision for Education in Ontario*.

OME. (2017). *Ontario's Education Equity Action Plan*.

OME. (2019). *Quick Facts: Ontario's Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy*.

<https://oneca.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/EquityQuickFacts-ON-equity-and-inclusive-education-strategy.pdf>

Ontario Ministry of Education. (2014). *Equity and Inclusive Education in Ontario Schools—GUIDELINES FOR POLICY DEVELOPMENT AND IMPLEMENTATION*.

<https://files.ontario.ca/edu-equity-inclusive-education-guidelines-policy-2014-en-2022-01-13.pdf>

Onwuachi-Willig, A., & Barnes, M. (2012). The Obama Effect: Specialized Meanings in Anti-discrimination Law. *Indiana Law Journal*, 87(1), 325.

Paluck, & Greene. (2009). Prejudice Reduction: What Works? A Review and Assessment of Research and Practice. *Annual Review of Psychology*, 60. <https://www-annualreviews->

org.ezproxy.library.yorku.ca/content/journals/10.1146/annurev.psych.60.110707.163607

Paradis, P., & Karbani, T. (2017). *The Significance of the Charter in Canadian Legal History*.

LawNow Magazine. <https://www.lawnow.org/significance-charter-canadian-legal-history/>

Pasternak, S. (2015). How Capitalism Will Save Colonialism: The Privatization of Reserve Lands in Canada. *Antipode*, 47(1), 179–196. <https://doi.org/10.1111/anti.12094>

Pasternak, S. (2016). The fiscal body of sovereignty: To ‘make live’ in Indian country. *Settler Colonial Studies*.

<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/2201473X.2015.1090525>

PDSB. (2018, November 13). *POLICY-54—Equity-and-Inclusive-Education.pdf*.

<https://www.peelschools.org/documents/POLICY-54---Equity-and-Inclusive-Education.pdf/POLICY-54---Equity-and-Inclusive-Education.pdf>

PDSB. (2022). *PDSB Anti-Racism Policy.pdf*.

<https://www.peelschools.org/documents/ab192a1f-7504-41bb-80d6-e9d02900a512/PDSB%20Anti-Racism%20Policy.pdf>

PDSB. (2023, June 14). *15.1a D14 Comprehensive Four-Year Equity Strategy and Action Plan.pdf*. [https://www.peelschools.org/documents/879df3d7-ba8d-42b2-bb53-243cb3a2021f/15.1a%20D14%20Comprehensive%20Four-](https://www.peelschools.org/documents/879df3d7-ba8d-42b2-bb53-243cb3a2021f/15.1a%20D14%20Comprehensive%20Four-Year%20Equity%20Strategy%20and%20Action%20Plan.pdf)

[Year%20Equity%20Strategy%20and%20Action%20Plan.pdf](https://www.peelschools.org/documents/879df3d7-ba8d-42b2-bb53-243cb3a2021f/15.1a%20D14%20Comprehensive%20Four-Year%20Equity%20Strategy%20and%20Action%20Plan.pdf)

[Year%20Equity%20Strategy%20and%20Action%20Plan.pdf](https://www.peelschools.org/documents/879df3d7-ba8d-42b2-bb53-243cb3a2021f/15.1a%20D14%20Comprehensive%20Four-Year%20Equity%20Strategy%20and%20Action%20Plan.pdf)

PDSB. (2024). *About us*. Peel Board Office Site. <https://www.peelschools.org/about-us>

Peck, C. L., & Sears, A. (2023). Teachers’ Understandings Of Ethnic Diversity: After 50+ Years Of Official Multiculturalism In Canada, Are We Any Further Ahead? 60. *Canadian Issues*, 39–42.

People for Education. (2024). *How Ontario's Education System Works | Publicly Funded*

Education. People for Education. <https://peopleforeducation.ca/public-education-in-ontario/>

Perry, E. L., Kulik, C. T., & Field, M. P. (2009). Sexual harassment training: Recommendations to address gaps between the practitioner and research literatures. *Human Resource Management, 48*(5), 817–837. <https://doi.org/10.1002/hrm.20316>

Pickerden, A., Evans, D., & Piggott, D. (2015). The formation of 'policy truths': Foucault and social policy discourse. *Conference: European Sociological Association Conference*.

Ponterotto, J. (2006). Brief Note on the Origins, Evolution, and Meaning of the Qualitative Research Concept Thick Description. *The Qualitative Report, 11*(3), 538–549. <https://doi.org/10.46743/2160-3715/2006.1666>

Ramiah, V., Pichelli, J., & Moosa, I. (2015). Environmental regulation, the Obama effect and the stock market: Some empirical results. *Applied Economics, 47*(7), 725–738. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00036846.2014.980572>

Ravitch, D. (1990). Multiculturalism: E Pluribus Plures. *The American Scholar, 59*(3), 337–354.

Reid, C., Greaves, L., & Kirby, S. (2016). *Experience Research Social Change: Critical Methods, Third Edition*. University of Toronto Press.

<http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/york/detail.action?docID=4931386>

Rezai-Rashti. (2009). Neo-liberal assault on Ontario's secondary schools. In C. Levine-Rasky, *Canadian perspectives on the sociology of education*. Oxford University Press.

Rezai-Rashti, G., Segeren, A., & Martino, W. (2017). The new articulation of equity education in neoliberal times: The changing conception of social justice in Ontario. *Globalisation, Societies and Education, 15*(2), 160–174.

<https://doi.org/10.1080/14767724.2016.1169514>

Rezai-Rashti, G., Zhang, B., Abdmolaei, S., & Segeren, A. (2022). A Critical Policy Analysis of the Ontario Equity and Inclusive Strategy: The Dynamics of Non-Performativity. *Journal of Higher Education Policy And Leadership Studies*, 2.

<https://doi.org/10.52547/johepal.2.4.7>

Rose. (1999). *Powers of freedom: Reframing political thought*. Cambridge University Press.

Rose, N. (1991). Governing by numbers: Figuring out democracy. *Accounting, Organizations and Society*, 16(7), 673–692. [https://doi.org/10.1016/0361-3682\(91\)90019-B](https://doi.org/10.1016/0361-3682(91)90019-B)

Sarkonak, J. (2023, July 6). Jamie Sarkonak: Principal berated for “white supremacy” sues TDSB over equity training. *National Post*. <https://nationalpost.com/opinion/principal-berated-for-white-supremacy-sues-tdsb-over-equity-training>

Savage, G. C., Sellar, S., & Gorur, R. (2013). Equity and marketisation: Emerging policies and practices in Australian education. *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education*, 34(2), 161–169. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01596306.2013.770244>

Scarritt, A. (2019). Selling Diversity, Promoting Racism: How Universities Pushing a Consumerist Form of Diversity Empowers Oppression. *Journal for Critical Education Policy Studies*, 17(1), 188–228.

Scheurich, J. J. (1994). Policy archaeology: A new policy studies methodology. *Journal of Education Policy*, 9(4), 297–316. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0268093940090402>

Segeren, A. L. (2016). *How Schools Enact Equity Policies: A Case Study of Social Justice Leadership* [Ph.D., The University of Western Ontario (Canada)].

<https://www.proquest.com/docview/2714866642/abstract/505FA822EDD14840PQ/1>

Segeren, A. L., & Kutsyuruba. (2016). *Twenty Years and Counting: An Examination of the*

- Development of Equity and Inclusive Education Policy in Ontario (1990-2010)* [M.Ed., Queen's University (Canada)].
<https://www.proquest.com/docview/1012121104/abstract/D757DA76B7A14AA6PQ/1>
- Shah, V., Cuglievan-Mindreau, G., & Flessa, J. (2022). Reforming for Racial Justice: A Narrative Synthesis and Critique of the Literature on District Reform in Ontario Over 25 Years. *Canadian Journal of Educational Administration and Policy*, 198, 35–54.
<https://doi.org/10.7202/1086426ar>
- Shewchuk, S., & Cooper, A. (2018). Exploring Equity in Ontario: A Provincial Scan of Equity Policies Across School Boards. *Canadian Journal of Education*, 41(4), 917.
- Skerrett, A. (2008). Racializing educational change: Melting pot and mosaic influences on educational policy and practice. *Journal of Educational Change*, 9(3), 261–280.
<https://doi.org/10.1007/s10833-008-9071-0>
- Skinner, A. L., & Cheadle, J. E. (2016). The “Obama Effect”? Priming Contemporary Racial Milestones Increases Implicit Racial bias among Whites. *Social Cognition*, 34(6), 544–558. <https://doi.org/10.1521/soco.2016.34.6.544>
- Smith, H., & Midzain-Gobin, L. (2021, March 28). *Not in the past: Colonialism is rooted in the present*. The Conversation. <http://theconversation.com/not-in-the-past-colonialism-is-rooted-in-the-present-157395>
- Stefanovich, O. (2019, June 16). *UN Human Rights Office calls on feds to assess serious claims of genocide* | CBC News. CBC. <https://www.cbc.ca/news/politics/stefanovich-un-national-inquiry-genocide-response-1.5174855>
- Steinberg, S., & Kincheloe, J. L. (1998). *Unauthorized Methods: Strategies for Critical Teaching* (1st ed.). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203379578>

- Stricker, L. J., & Rock, D. A. (2015). An “Obama effect” on the GRE General Test? *Social Influence*, 10(1), 11–18. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15534510.2013.878665>
- Sue, D. W. (2017). Microaggressions and “Evidence.” *Perspectives on Psychological Science*, 12(1), 170–172. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1745691616664437>
- Tadeu da Silva, T., & McLaren, P. (1993). KNOWLEDGE UNDER SIEGE: The Brazilian debate. In P. McLaren & P. Leonard, *Paulo Freire: A Critical Encounter* (pp. 36–46). Routledge.
- Táíwò, O. O. (2022). *Elite capture: How the powerful took over identity politics (and everything else)*. Haymarket Books.
- Taylor, A., & Bedard, G. (2001). The politics of education reform in Alberta. *Canadian Public Administration*, 44(3), 380-.
- TDSB. (2018). *Policy P037—Equity*. <https://www.tdsb.on.ca/About-Us/Policies-Procedures-Forms/Detail/docId/200>
- TDSB. (2022). *Integrated Equity Framework Action Plan*.
- TDSB. (2024). *Working at the Toronto District School Board*. <https://www.tdsb.on.ca/About-Us/employment>
- Thompson, C. A., & Barker, L. A. (2016). The Obama Effect on Racial Attitudes: A Review of the Research. In L. A. Barker (Ed.), *Obama on Our Minds: The Impact of Obama on the Psyche of America* (p. 0). Oxford University Press.
<https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199390618.003.0006>
- Toronto District School Board (Director). (2017, October 6). *TDSB Enhancing Equity Task Force*. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MckjPO_E0F8
- Tuck, E., & Yang, K. W. (2012). Decolonization is not a metaphor. *Decolonization : Indigeneity*,

- Education & Society*, 1(1), 1–40.
- Van Dijk, T. A. (1993). Principles of Critical Discourse Analysis. *Discourse & Society*, 4(2), 249–283. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0957926593004002006>
- Walcott. (2021). *The Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion Industry* (w/ Rinaldo Walcott). Spreaker. <https://www.spreaker.com/episode/the-equity-diversity-and-inclusion-industry-w-rinaldo-walcott--46848015>
- Walsh. (2012). *Obama Backs University of Texas on Race in Admissions*. <https://www.edweek.org/education/obama-backs-university-of-texas-on-race-in-admissions/2012/08>
- Wang, F. (2015). Conceptualizing social justice: Interviews with principals. *Journal of Educational Administration*, 53(5), 667–681. <https://doi.org/10.1108/JEA-07-2014-0080>
- Welch, S., & Sigelman, L. (2011). The “Obama Effect” and White Racial Attitudes. *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 634(1), 207–220. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0002716210386302>
- Willmott, K., & Skillings, A. (2021). Anti-Indigenous policy formation: Settler colonialism and neoliberal political advocacy. *Canadian Review of Sociology/Revue Canadienne de Sociologie*, 58(4), 513–530. <https://doi.org/10.1111/cars.12357>
- YRDSB. (2017). *2017-2021-Equity-Strategic-Plan.pdf*. <https://www.yrdsb.ca/Programs/equity/Documents/2017-2021-Equity-Strategic-Plan.pdf>
- YRDSB. (2022, March 16). *Policy #261.0, Equity and Inclusivity*. York Region District School Board. <https://www2.yrdsb.ca/pol-261-EquityandInclusivity>
- YRDSB. (2023, October 4). *About YRDSB*. York Region District School Board. <https://www2.yrdsb.ca/about-us/about-yrdsb>

Appendix

Table 1

*Table Showing Timeline of Ontario's Political Party Changes and Major EDI- related
Legislations from 1943 - present*

Time period	Political Party	Ontario Premier	Major Equity / Education policy Enacted (P= provincial, F= federal)
1943-1948	Progressive Conservative	George Drew	-
1948-1949	Progressive Conservative	Thomas Kennedy	-
1949-1961	Progressive Conservative	Leslie Frost	Ontario Human Rights Code (1962) (P)
1961-1971	Progressive Conservative	John Robarts	Closing of Ontario's last racially segregated school (1965) (P) Announcement of Multiculturalism Policy (1971) (F)
1971-1985	Progressive Conservative	Bill Davis	Abella Report (1984) (F) and The Employment Equity Act (1986) (F) The Canadian Human Rights Act (1977) (F) The Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms (1982) (F)
1985	Progressive Conservative	Frank Miller	-

1985-1990	Liberal	David Peterson	Multiculturalism Act (1988) (F)
1990-1995	New Democratic Party	Bob Rae	The Lewis Report (1992) (P) Anti-Racism and Ethnocultural Equity in School Boards (1993) (P)
1995-2002	Progressive Conservative	Mike Harris	Common Sense Revolution (P), \$1B dollars cut from educational funding, repeal Ontario Equity Act & cancel anti-racism secretariat
2002-2003	Progressive Conservative	Ernie Eves	-
2003-2013	Liberal	Dalton McGuinty	Implemented Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy (2009) (P)
2013-2018	Liberal	Kathleen Wynne	-
2018- present	Progressive Conservative	Doug Ford	\$47 Million funding cut to education (2023), rescinded funding to EDI organizations (P)

Table 2.

School Board Data Collected and Analyzed in the Study

Institution	Name of data	Last updated	Type of data
Durham District School Board (DDSB)	Equity and Inclusive Education Policy	2018	Policy
Durham District School Board (DDSB)	Equity and Diversity Strategic Plan	2018	Action Plan
Peel Region District School Board (PDSB)	Equity & Inclusive Education	2018	Policy
Peel Region District School Board (PDSB)	Directive 14 - Comprehensive Four-Year Equity Strategy and Action Plan	2023	Action Plan
Toronto District School Board (TDSB)	Integrated Equity Framework Action Plan	2016	Action Plan
Toronto District School Board (TDSB)	TDSB Enhancing Equity Task Force	2017	Communication/ Video
Toronto District School Board (TDSB)	Policy P037: Equity	2018	Policy
York Region District School Board (YRDSB)	Policy #261.0, Equity and Inclusivity	2022	Policy
York Region District School Board (YRDSB)	Equity Action Plan: A Vision for Transformation	2017	Action Plan

Table 3

Table Showing Data Source-Code-Theme Interpretation of all Data Studied

Source (see legend)	Theme	Code
1, 3, 4, 5, 6, 8, 9	Neoliberal pursuit of Excellence and Achievement	Improving achievement, successful outcomes, enhance service excellence, committed to student achievement, lead to excellence in schools and workplaces
2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 8, 9	Well-being of a neoliberal capital-generating labor	Fostering Well-being and mental health, committed to student well-being, student's well-being is at the center of every decision we make,
1, 3, 5, 8	Evolution of Multicultural policies to today's EDI policy	Policy timeline shift: "Multiculturalism/ Race relations", "Anti-racism & Ethnocultural Equity", "Ontario's Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy"
1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9	Erasure of race and racism from equity policies	Utterances of "race", "racism", "racial"
2, 4, 7	Happy/ Colorful Diversity	Smiling faces, colorful titles and taglines, images of racialized students in cultural clothing, cheerful music
1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9	Numerics and Metrics to measure EDI	Accountability and transparency, data analysis, measurements, monitor, appraisals, audits, assessments, report cards, metrics, consistency, demonstrated leadership, outcomes, report, goals

1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9	EDI as a commitment	Commitment, we are committed to, reflect a commitment to, we want to, upholds the principles,
1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 8, 9	EDI as legal compliance	In accordance to, criteria, legal duty, legal recognition, required by, requirements, full compliance, complies with, alignment with, legislative, PPM No. 119, Human Rights Code, Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, the Constitution Act (1982), Education Act
1, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9	Racism as skills and knowledge deficit	Anti-racism training, skills, knowledge, attitudes, behaviors, professional learning, biases, staff development, critical consciousness, building capacity, ongoing education
2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 8, 9	Expanding EDI to address systemic oppressions and power inequities	Power dynamic, systemic oppression, anti-oppressive, power and privilege, systemic barriers, colonialism, Eurocentrism
1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 8, 9	Identity and Representation politics	Representation, identity, reflect identities, equitable hiring, recruitment, mentoring, retention, promotion, employment practices, recognition, books, committees, human resource, demographic, curriculum, material
1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9	Democratic schools	Shared leadership, decision-making, advisory councils, responsive programming decisions, responsive to communities, reflective, surveys, feedback, consultation, partnerships, school community relationships,

2, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9	Deference politics	Lived experiences, center student voices, draw from voices and realities of students, community voices, marginalized and underserved communities, listening to students' voice, we need to hear from you
---------------------	--------------------	--

Legend:

DDSB EIE Policy (1)

TDSB Equity Policy (5)

DDSB Equity and Diversity Strategic Plan (2)

TDSB Equity Framework Action Plan (6)

PDSB E&I Policy (3)

TDSB Enhancing Equity Task Force Video (7)

PDSB Four-year Equity Strategy and Action Plan

YRDSB Equity and Inclusivity policy (8)

(4)

YRDSB Equity Action Plan (9)



Certificate of Completion

This document certifies that

Rachel Pui Ching Tam

*successfully completed the Course on Research Ethics based on
the Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research
Involving Humans (TCPS 2: CORE 2022)*

Certificate # 0000961912

10 October, 2023