Ontario's Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy: A Critical Analysis of School Board Policy Documents

Soudeh Oladi [1,*], **John P. Portelli** [1]; **Maral Karimi** [1]; **Henrjeta Mece** [1]; **Tanitia Munroe** [1]; **Manuel Ellul** [1]

[1] Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, University of Toronto. M5s 1A1 Ontario, Canada

Email: soudeh.oladi@utoronto.ca; john.potelli@utoronto.ca (J.P.);
maral.karimi@mail.utoronto.ca; h.mece@utoronto.ca; tanitia.munroe@mail.utoronto.ca;
mj.ellul@mail.utoronto.ca

***Correspondence:** soudeh.oladi@utoronto.ca (S.O.)

Abstract: This SSHRC-funded study critically analyzes equity policies across 14 Ontario school boards, based on their engagement with equity-related concepts and data collection practices. The analysis reveals a spectrum of policies, from weak to robust, and the risk of perpetuating inequalities through diversity-heavy rhetoric. It explores how the absence of clear demographic data collection and reliance on school climate surveys in weaker policies can impede efforts to identify and address systemic barriers. It also emphasizes the need for adopting *apophatic* language, promoting transparency, and radically revising professional development for meaningful transformation. The study underlines the urgent need for a reflexive policy blueprint that adheres to the ideals of the Ontario Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy. Recommendations from this study offer pathways towards fostering authentically equitable educational environments.

Keywords: Ontario equity policy; anti-oppressive; anti-racist; decolonizing

1. Introduction

As equity discourses become intensified in the Canadian context, Ontario's Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy (OES) offers important interventions in a long line of regional and federal equity and inclusion policies. The OES has been designed with the stated aim of improving the conditions of traditionally marginalized groups [52, 8, 1]. Implemented in 2009 by the provincial goverment, the Ontario Equity Strategy's stated aims include helping all students achieve excellence, promoting student wellbeing, enhancing public confidence in the educational system, and ensuring equity particularly for marginalized groups. To meet these goals, the province's 72 school boards were mandated to develop equity and inclusive education policies. The Ontario Ministry of Education's 2009 Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy, supplemented by the Ontario Education Equity Action Plan, mandates schools to craft equity and inclusion policies grounded in principles aligned with the Ontario Human Rights Code, the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, and the provincial Code of Conduct. The policy also emphasizes the integration of equity and inclusive education into curriculum revisions, teacher training, but stops short of mandating explicit implementation and evaluation strategies for each equity statement, leaving a gap in explicitly required actions versus encouraged practices. Additionally, the underlying assumptions of the 2009 Ontario Equity Strategy have been criticized for emphasizing testing and achieving excellence without tackling systemic barriers that lead to achievement gaps in the first place. To remedy these concerns, the OES was revised in 2014, followed by the publication of the Ontario Education Equity Action Plan (OEEAP) in 2017. The OEEPA launched a three-year detailed plan focused on the identification and elimination of discriminatory practices, systemic barriers, and bias within educational settings, aiming to enhance equity in schools and classrooms [48].

2. Theoretical Lens and Analytical Criteria

Decoding the different iterations of the Ontario Equity Strategy through a lens of critical policy analysis reveals various adaptations within an equity framework. Following Ball, Maguire, and Braun (2011), a distinction between enactment and implementation is made, with the former incorporating a Freirean dialogic lens that brings into conversation contextual, historic, and psychosocial dynamics into a relationship with texts. Policy is thus understood as "systems of values and symbilic systems"[4, p. 124] that is nuanced and political and requires us to move beyond an understanding of policy as authorative decisions written in official texts

[53]. Consequently, policy analysis becomes an interpretive act, decoding texts in relation to their context of enactment and analyzing the effects they produce that can be "ongoing, interactional and unstable" [6, p. 8]. Adopting the concept of bricolage [38], also enhances our approach to critical policy analysis. This approach allows us to utilize a diverse array of theoretical perspectives and methodologies, facilitating a more comprehensive examination of equity policies. The integration of bricolage into our analysis acts as a bridge, connecting the theoretical underpinnings of critical policy analysis with the practical intricacies encountered in policy enactment. It assists in a deeper understanding of how equity policies are crafted, interpreted, and operationalized, reflecting the multilayered nature of policy work.

The notion of policy as neutral is contested in our analysis, exposing 'policy silences' [12, p. 7] and critiquing the use of seemingly critical rhetoric that may undermine the transformatory potential of a policy and endorse oppressive conditions. Lingard and Rizvi (2010) articulate that the silences of a policy text are strategic omissions that reveal the power relations within the policymaking process, mapping not only who wields power but also which interests and ideologies are prioritized. These silences, integral to the framework of policy formation, underline "policy analyses as discursive practices that create, share, and produce truth claims that can be questioned" [34, p. 51], while also bringing to light hidden assumptions and unintended consequences of policy practices [3].

In the initial phase of a multi-year Social Sciences and Human Research Council (SSHRC)-funded study, an investigation was conducted into the effectiveness, strengths, potentials, and limitations of the equity policies enacted by 14 school boards in Ontario. Researchers from the University of Toronto's Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (OISE) conducted a detailed textual analysis of equity and inclusive education policies across seven public and seven Catholic school boards. This analysis employed a comprehensive policy framework grounded in critical pedagogy [32, 33], anti-oppressive, anti-racist, and decolonizing theories and practices [16, 57], and critical democratic educational theory and practice [50, 37, 10].

The initial phase of the study yielded themes based on five sections in the analysis framework (APPENDIX 1): policy substance, style and readability, document structure, accountability and evaluation, and funding. Analytic criteria in each section provided benchmarks for assessing policies as weak, medium, or robust. In this paper, a critical examination of the themes of "policy substance" and "accountability and evaluation" in the robust and weak policies is undertaken.

2. Critical Analysis of Equity Policy Documents

2.1. Robust Policies: An Overview

The Toronto District School Board's (TDSB) document is the sole robust document from the 14 reviewed, employing an "equity for all" stance that outperforms the Ontario Equity Strategy (OES). The TDSB serves over 250,000 students in nearly 600 schools and created its own personalized equity policy documents, namely the Equity Foundation Statement (1999); Human Rights Policy (2000); and Guidelines and Procedures for Religious Accommodation (2000) before the mandated OES. The TDSB policy recognizes systemic barriers and commits to principles of f*airness, non-discrimination, anti-oppression*, *and anti-racism, equity, acceptance and inclusion* across eight focus areas [58, p. 5]. The document also identifies historically marginalized groups and specifically acknowledges forms of discrimination absent in the OES document.

Further, the TDSB equity policy offers a framework detailing the communities that have been historically marginalized and continue to face systemic biases:

Oppression and Discrimination related to Race, Colour, Creed, Culture, Ethnicity, linguistic origin, Disability, level of ability, socio-economic class, Age, Ancestry, Nationality, Place of Origin, Religion, Sex, Gender Identity, Gender Expression, Sexual Orientation, Body Image, citizenship, immigration status, Family Status, and Marital Status. Similar Biases, Barriers. (p. 5)

Specifically, the TDSB equity policy acknowledges the existence of Islamophobia, anti-Semitism, sexism, homophobia, classism, ableism, transphobia, and frequently refers to other forms of historic and institutional discrimination some of which are not found in the OES document.

2.1.1. Policy Substance

The TDSB policy provides a critical definition of equity that surpasses the generic one offered by OES, emphasizing the importance of recognizing, respecting, and supporting the intersectionality of multiple identity markers. The Enhancing Equity Task Force (EETF), established by the Toronto District School Board in 2017, aimed to infuse an 'equity for all' approach across all aspects of the Board's operations, emphasizing the creation of barrier-free, inclusive educational environments that reflect and respond to the diversity of the TDSB's student and staff population. The EETF's recommendations, focusing on equitable access,

experiences, and opportunities, underline the need for systemic changes to foster equitable educational outcomes and highlight the importance of understanding and explicitly defining 'equity' to address systemic and institutional barriers effectively. The revised policy envisions TDSB schools as strong neighborhood schools, offering learning environments free from barriers; it commits to programming and staffing that reflect and adapt to the needs of its diverse student body and promotes a culture of safety, inclusion, and active community partnership. By addressing a wide spectrum of systemic barriers more comprehensively than the OES, the TDSB equity policy aims to lay a more solid foundation for equity, inclusion, and dignity within its educational framework. Promoting values of dignity, the TDSB document also makes numerous references to systemic barriers including, systemic abuse of power (p. 35), systemic disadvantaging of others (p. 36), systemic racism (p. 39), systemic discrimination (p. 10, p. 38), systemic biases and barriers (p. 2), systemic marginalization (p. 6), systemic inequities (p. 7), and systemic oppression (p. 10). Outlining various forms of systemic barriers, the TDSB equity policy surpasses the OES document which refers to systemic barriers (p. 4) and systemic bias (p. 23) as general concepts.

Despite major revisions in 2018 following EETF's recommendations, it could benefit from more direct reference to several points made by various TDSB sub-committee reports. For instance, the EETF Report emphasized that, "Equity requires evidence-informed decision-making and better understanding of local communities" (p. 22). This demonstrates a need for more evidence on practices of demographic inclusivity, largely due to an absence of data, annual reviews and community engagement efforts. Furthermore, the policy could grain from detailing the implementation of suggested actions for achieving its equity goals. The TDSB document also need to make more explicit reference to the impact of oppression and discrimination on First Nation, Métis and Inuit communities (p. 5), and further underline the impact of systemic barriers and discrimination on the communities of Indigenous, Black, and other racialized people.

The TDSB equity policy could provide a more comprehensive approach in explicitly addressing Canada's colonial history, such as the lasting impacts of Residential Schools and slavery on affected communities. Furthermore, its references to the detrimental effects of oppression and discrimination on First Nation, Métis, and Inuit communities, along with Indigenous, Black, and other racialized groups, warrant further elaboration. Although the TDSB equity policy shows promise in its conceptual framing, unless these recommendations are translated into real actions, it risks being reduced to mere performative rhetoric, failing to

effectively address the broad spectrum of equity issues across varied identities and experiences.

The Toronto District School Board's policy demonstrates a strong commitment to equity through its use of progressive language. However, understanding this within the broader context of school board policy making reveals tensions between equity ideals and the pragmatics of political realities. School board members, who are elected to represent their communities, can find themselves in a difficult position where embedding anti-oppressive, anti-colonial, and critical democratic language in equity policies—despite its alignment with their goals—might not be politically feasible given the diverse and sometimes resistant contexts in which they serve. This challenge is compounded by the political diversity and potential resistance within their jurisdictions. Despite this, interviews with educators and administrators as part of our study, have revealed a commitment to nurturing anti-oppressive and inclusive spaces, even in the absence of concrete evidence detailing the impact of political climates on the adoption of such language, and a gap in research on the political leanings of different school boards.

2.1.2. Accountability and Evaluation

The TDSB equity policy commits to a multitude of actions including utilizing a "critical equity lens" for all data collection and analysis (p. 9), acknowledging intersectionality and multiple identities (p. 9), and developing an Equity Assessment Tool (p. 20). It pledges to distribute equity-related information to stakeholders (p. 21) and offer assistance to non-English speakers regarding this information (p. 21). The policy also encompasses regular evaluations, reports, and an annual Equity report from the Director of Education to identify equity gaps and systemic barriers. It emphasizes developing processes involving performance indicators, compliance mechanisms, and data tracking to monitor progress. Each school's improvement plan is encouraged to implement equity-focused learning priorities based on specific community needs. The policy also refers to the results of each school's bi-annual School Climate Survey, Safe Schools, achievement, and well-being data trends. Nonetheless, the absence of a clear recommendation and implementation section leaves these commitments without any defined parameters or guidelines, thereby making their execution ambiguous.

The TDSB equity policy promises ongoing professional learning across all staff tiers to cultivate an equitable, anti-oppressive, accepting, safe, and inclusively positive environment. These sessions concentrate on critical issues like bias, power, privilege, and delve into the intricacies of laws, policies, practices, frameworks, and pedagogies to rigorously confront

oppression, racism, classism, and other forms of institutional discrimination. Additionally, TDSB is expected to provide public access to information on specific resources and action plans to tackle systemic barriers. Targeted interventions in professional learning could clarify ambiguities, especially terms like "ongoing opportunities," that lack detail on methods, plans, and specific actions. The decentralization of training to individual schools, however, shifts responsibility from the TDSB and may limit the Board's accountability. The implementation of these commitments depends on sufficient funding and resources, and distributing these to school units could further complicate employment relations, thus perpetuating systemic injustices.

An important critique of the TDSB equity policy is its lack of indication on how staff and school administrators are incorporating equity, inclusive, and anti-oppression education principles in schools, classrooms, and improvement plans. While the policy refers to accountability measures if these steps are not adequately enacted, it lacks details on how teachers' pedagogies and practices are impacted by an equity, anti-oppression, anti-racism framework. Concerning the overrepresentation of suspension and expulsion among Black, Indigenous, and racialized students in TDSB, the document does not provide strategies or recommendations on how students can counteract or disrupt racial discrimination or barriers they encounter related to school disciplinary measures, or how families and parents can proactively address these issues.

In the context of Student Evaluation, Assessment, and Placement, the TDSB equity policy acknowledges the systemic discriminatory bias and barriers that create unequal opportunities and outcomes for disenfranchised groups. Despite valuing student voice and participation, it fails to address adequately the role of structural racism and systemic anti-Black racism within school environments and its impact on the rights of racialized students who are streamed. To dismantle these systemic biases, a clear outline informed by disaggregated data is needed to guide schools in planning, selecting interventions, allocating resources, and predicting trends. The policy also requires accessibility to data from various surveys, reports, and evaluations, including annual evaluations for educators, administrators, and a Ministry of Education report, either on the TDSB website or upon stakeholder request. This underscores the current policy gaps: a lack of comprehensive data collection and analysis, absence of performance indicators, compliance, reporting mechanisms, and progress tracking in professional learning.

2.2. Weak Policies: An Overview

In the analysis of 14 policy documents, nine are classified as weak, with two of these showing medium levels in some areas (See TABLE 1). These policies belong to various Catholic and Public School Boards including Dufferin-Peel Catholic District School Board (DPCDSB), Durham Catholic District School Board (DCDSB), Halton Catholic District School Board (HCDSB), Halton District School Board (TCDSB), Lakehead District School Board (LDSB), Peel District School Board (PDSB), Rainbow District School Board (RDSB), Sudbury Catholic District School Board (SCDSB), York Catholic District School Board (YCDSB), and York Region District School Board (YRDSB). Generally, these weak policies fail to meet the standards of the original equity strategy (OES) set by the Ministry of Education. They incorporate the term 'equity', but lack originality, failing to distinguish between the Ontario Equity Strategy and the Ontario Human Rights Code. On the whole, these policies are generic, promote a "one-size-fits-all" vision, lack critical engagement with equity-related issues, and do not embody anti-colonial, critical democratic, anti-oppressive, and integrative anti-racist perspectives.

Table 1: Ontario School Boards Policy Analysis

Ontario School Boards	Policy Substance	Style & Readability	Structure of Document	Accountability & Evaluation	Funding
Dufferin-Peel Catholic District School Board	Weak	Weak	Weak	Weak	Weak
Durham Catholic District School Board	Weak-Medium	Medium	Weak	Weak	Weak
Durham District School Board	Medium-Weak	Medium	Medium-weak	Medium	Weak
Halton Catholic District School Board	Weak	Weak-Medium	Weak	Weak - Medium	Weak
Halton District School Board	Weak-Medium	Weak	Weak	Weak	Weak
Lakehead District School Board	Weak	Weak	Weak	Weak	Weak
Peel District School Board	Weak	Weak	Weak	Weak	Weak
Rainbow District School Board	Weak	Weak	Weak	Weak	Weak
Sudbury Catholic School Board	Weak	Weak	Weak	Weak	Weak
Thunder Bay Catholic District School Board	Medium-Weak	Medium	Medium	Medium-Weak	Weak
Toronto Catholic District School Board	Medium-Robust	Medium	Medium	Medium	Medium
Toronto District School Board	Robust	Robust	Robust	Robust	Medium-Robust
York Catholic District School Board	Weak	Weak	Weak	Weak	Weak
York Region District School Board	Medium	Medium	Weak	Weak	Weak

2.2.1. Policy Substance

Considering the ideologies within policy documents is crucial, as they reveal the nature of the ideologies that guide them. The language employed, the constructs emphasized, and the omission of concepts crucial for a robust understanding of equity highlight a lack of critical, decolonial, and anti-racist perspectives in the weak policy documents. The Lakehead District School Board equity policy, for instance, offers several definitions and expectations of equity. For instance, in one instance equity is considered a fundamental requirement for educational excellence and high standards of student achievement (p. 1). These policies primarily display a conservative ideology subtly mixed with liberal undertones, marked by a near total absence of references to affirmative action and systemic issues, while emphasizing individual potential development and cultural aspects over systemic barriers and the engagement with learners' funds of knowledge and lived experiences. The lack of a clear definition of equity that can be communicated through an inclusive curriculum questions the Boards' promise to assess the effectiveness of the equity policy, pointing to superficial and celebratory rhetoric devoid of critically engaged perspectives. This analysis underlines the prioritization of certain values and perspectives over others, revealing a significant gap in the pursuit of meaningful equity and inclusion.

Most of the weak policy documents provide definitions for central equity concepts like bias, discrimination, marginalization, and racism that are either too generic, superficial, or taken directly from the Ontario Equity Strategy. While these documents acknowledge barriers, they fail to specify how these obstructions can be resisted, disrupted, or eliminated, despite promises to counteract biases and barriers faced by students, including Islamophobic, anti-Indigenous, anti-Semitic, and anti-Black racism. The policy structure revealed by our analysis overlooks the multiple grounds of inequality and fails to anticipate the impacts of inequitable practices on vulnerable and marginalized groups. These policies also neglect inclusive demographic representation and the complexity of all identities in hiring practices. Furthermore, they either disregard the engagement of communities, families, and parents on the micro and macro levels, or reference it without providing tangible opportunities for such engagement.

These policies notably lack a critical representation of important historical moments like Residential Schools, treaties, and colonialism. Additionally, they depart from critical language towards conservative language in their commitment to "create and maintain harmonious learning and work environments and equitable outcomes for all students" [24, p. 1A]. This

shift is evident in the equation of 'sense of belonging' with 'sense of well-being,' as the LDSB equity policy promotes "a sense of belonging; Equity and inclusive education contribute to every student's sense of well-being" (p. 1). Furthermore, the Thunder Bay Catholic District School Board (TBCDSB) states that it is committed to providing quality education which combines academic excellence with a concern for the spiritual, moral, social, emotional, cultural, and physical growth of students (p. 1), in an effort to address a comprehensive view of student well-being. The inability to distinguish between a sense of 'belonging'—an elusive construct for marginalized students—and 'well-being'—a more comprehensive, identifiable concept in school settings—undermines these boards' pledge to help all students reach their full potential. The absence of provisions prioritizing student mental health and well-being, including the need for trauma-informed spaces, is also visible. Additionally, there is a subtle reference to avoiding the use of anti-racist language, when the TBCDSB policy states: "Ensure that codes of conduct are revised to address all forms of racism, discrimination, and harassment" (p. 10).

Furthermore, these policies overlook the need for equity-related information to support non-native English speakers and economically disadvantaged learners. Moreover, Catholic School Board policies remain silent on the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedom and offer no clarification on their interpretation of 'Christ-centered' education or equity. Although there is no explicit reference to affirmative positive action regarding religious accommodations, the TBCDSB policy implicitly maintain that "Within the framework of gospel values … the Board will attempt to provide reasonable accommodation for students' and staffs' religious beliefs and practices, while also protecting its denominational rights" (p. 8). Specifically, in the TBCDSB equity policy, the words "harassment" (p. 1, 9, 10, 11), "discriminatory"(p. 2, 6, 9, 10, 11, 13) and "bias" (p. 2, 6, 7, 11) are mentioned throughout the policy document, but any attempt at next-steps in dealing with these problems are either absent or need to be 'Christ-centred'. The term 'Christ-centered' could be understood liberally or more robustly to incorporate liberation theology aspects. Similarly, these policies fail to articulate what providing 'reasonable accommodations' to students facing various inequalities entails, missing a crucial aspect of inclusivity and equity.

2.2.2. Accountability and Evaluation

Considering these factors, the policies' deficiencies are further highlighted in their approaches to accountability and evaluation. They conspicuously lack clear measures, formal evaluations, or corrective actions to be enforced if the equity policy is not upheld in schools. The weak

policy documents are notably deficient in establishing clear performance measures or indicators for evaluating progress towards the equity policy's enactment. Although some of these weak policies point towards an accountability and transparency mechanism, they fail to specify necessary strategies, tactical goals, and tools. These policies neglect to outline particular evaluation criteria to monitor progress and detect challenges post-enactment of the equity policy. These policies either offer broad generic statements related to accountability or altogether fail to define any accountability criteria and implementation plans. For example, the Lakehead District School Board policy does not make any reference to race-based data, if and how race-based data is to be collected, and how it will be used. Taking into account that the Board, school, and staff's 'performance appraisals' and 'performance indicators' are not defined, it is challenging, if not impossible, to measure the school's performance following the enactment of the equity policy. Additionally, these policies do not detail formal evaluations, corrective actions, or even references to self-assessment and self-reflection tools for administrators and educators if schools fail to adhere to the equity policy.

While the policies analyzed generally reference the Ontario Human Rights Code of discrimination, they offer no detailed plans for providing statistics on reported cases of bias and discrimination. Most acknowledge their responsibility towards religious accommodation but lack outlined strategies against discrimination targeting religious minorities. In a move toward creating a more inclusive environment, Lakehead District School Board policy does, however, maintain that, "What is important is that schools work together with students and their families to build trust and understanding about various faith accommodations (p. 1). Despite promises to implement equitable and inclusive initiatives, specific plans are absent. Several weak category policies pledge to conduct regular evaluations, reports, and publish an annual Equity report from the Director of Education. Yet, upon closer inspection of the School Boards' websites, these reports are either incomplete, unpublished, or inaccessible to the public.

Policy documents emphasizing the importance of evaluating equity policy effectiveness typically define success indicators in terms of student achievement and fundamental needs. This language echoes the Ontario Equity Strategy. However, defining clear success measures without considering systemic barriers creates a liberal-leaning discourse. It identifies a problem, addresses it, but overlooks the ideological, socio-political, and historical roots of the issue. Furthermore, students' 'fundamental' needs are perceived in relation to achievement gaps and success, rather than experiences of bias, discrimination, and inequality.

Although student success is central to the OES and all analyzed equity policies, weak documents fail to clarify the meaning of this concept. These weak policies lean toward a comprehension of student success tied directly to standardized test performance, a perspective noted as a source of inequity reproduction within and beyond educational contexts. This testing approach is rooted in a deficit mentality that, by its nature, creates exclusion from a closed accountability system. The acceptance of measurement and quantification language risks endorsing unreserved commitment to meritocratic educational practice, a "social control mechanisms implicated in the inequitable achievement and the advancement of students within the educational system" [15, p. 26]. The idea of meritocracy, critically examined by Littler (2013), suggests that societal affirmations and opportunities are allocated based on individual achievement and talent. However, this concept masks the systemic inequalities that favor those already in positions of privilege, falsely implying that success is solely a result of personal merit and obscuring the impact of systemic discrimination and historical disadvantages on upward mobility. Deficit mentality, meanwhile, is a pervasive ideology that privileges certain norms, often reflecting White, middle-class values, and marginalizes those who deviate from these standards by deeming them less valuable or unworthy. This mentality, deeply rooted in a history of oppression and negation, attributes educational failures to the individual, their family, or culture, rather than systemic inequities, effectively negating genuine inclusivity by maintaining an 'us versus them' binary [49].

Bridging the gap between the theoretical aspirations of equity and the pragmatic challenges of policy enactment, specifics are offered in some policies like ensuring "all incidents of discrimination and harassment are addressed in a timely and appropriate manner" [24, p. 5], but lack clarity on implementing this plan and defining parameters for 'appropriate'. The Lakehead District School Board policy outlines a strategic plan that includes: (i) suspension reduction, (ii) professional learning opportunities related to student mental health and well-being, (iii) increasing student involvement in Board-wide initiatives, (iv) improving student achievement, and (v) partnering with various Board committees and resources regarding student success, information technology, safety, and accessibility [24, p. 8]. Yet, it fails to explicitly reference crucial issues of equity, diversity, and inclusivity. To address the highlighted problem, for example, the policy could specify if suspension reduction targets the disproportionate suspension of minority, particularly Black youths, in Ontario. General promises, like Lakehead District School Board's commitment to "provide ongoing and open communication to keep all stakeholders informed of the Board's goals and progress as they

relate to the principles of equity and inclusive education policy" (p. 3A), lack detailed plans on how equity policy-related information will be disseminated among stakeholders.

2.2.3. School Climate Surveys and Demographic Data

The lack of references to demographic data collection in the weak policies casts doubt on claims of formulating operational processes to pinpoint disparities in student achievement. School climate surveys are sporadically mentioned as tools for preventing bias and harassment, cultivating an environment free from prejudice for each individual. However, a question that emerges is how can the commitment to identify and rectify potential barriers and biases leading to inequalities among students be effectively realized without clear mechanisms to detect such bias.

The few weak policies that do promise to collect demographic data assert that these results will be used to identify discriminatory behaviors and biases faced by students. The findings are generally hailed as the quick-fix that can counter the academic disparities of the 'achievement gap' and be used to identify equity gaps and systematic barriers. Bell and Hartman (2007) argue that the adoption of the language of diversity and equity allows an institution to promote itself and create the illusion of happiness. Consequently, institutions project the 'happy diversity' image where 'diversity talk' morphs into 'happy talk'. Sara Ahmed (2012) further problematizes this model by pointing out that the positive image projected often leads non-performativity, where discourse does not produce the effects that it names. Therefore, institutions adopt equity language as a way to minimize criticisms and de-thorn equity-seeking initiatives of their transformative potential.

For example, Lakehead District School Board commits to cultivating a positive school climate where all members feel safe, welcomed, and free from discrimination or harassment. The envisioned positive environment relies on protocols allowing students and staff to securely report discrimination and harassment incidents, with a commitment to a timely response. Such measures, however, are couched in the language of management that have the potential to resurrect victim-blaming accountability discourses. The TBCDSB policy introduces self-assessment processes to determine the effectiveness of the school's equity and inclusive education plans and procedures (p. 33), leaving the practical implementation and impact of these measures open to evaluation. The lack of evaluation and accountability processes indicates the potential for ad hoc measures, born from lack of detail and clarity, which could reinforce mainstream biases when addressing specific cases of harassment and discrimination.

Building upon the critical analysis of weaker policy documents, the next phase of the examination explores the impact these policies may have in a school setting. While these policies make ambitious commitments, they hesitate in addressing systemic and ideological issues head-on. For example, school improvement plans pledge to identify and eliminate any barriers to student learning, centering on student success, closing the achievement gap, and fostering a respectful and responsive school climate. However, these commitments tactfully avoid addressing the systemic and ideological roots of these issues. Compounding this concern, these policies are subtly entangled in administrative language that, while offering a façade of systematic control, could unintentionally resurrect narratives that fault the victims, further entrenching the very systemic issues they seek to resolve.

In the case of the Rainbow District School Board's (RDSB), the criteria for accountability among different stakeholders are left undefined. Specifically, RDSB's equity policy "affirms the Board's responsibility to provide a protected learning and working environment that is supportive, nurturing, welcoming, respectful and inclusive for everyone" (p. 1). However, without detailed plans for remedial actions if the policy fails to be effectively implemented, and lacking proof that the policy document has enabled substantial change in addressing equity-related issues, these commitments remain more as intentions than actions. The creation of this envisaged environment relies on protocols that allow students and staff to report instances of discrimination and harassment with assurance of confidentiality, and a swift response. Coupled with the lack of explicit evaluation and accountability processes, this could potentially give rise to ad hoc measures, stemming from a lack of detail and specificity. Such responses could inadvertently reproduce prevailing biases when dealing with particular incidents of harassment and discrimination.

Even when there is implicit mention of training and "guidance", it is to ensure "outcome-based" results instead of the initial promise of identifying equity gaps and systemic barriers. This is while the medium and robust policies demonstrate an intentionality in identifying opportunities for collecting and analyzing additional demographic data on equity-related issues. This entails "data on suspensions, expulsions, and on groups affected, and identify[ing] ways to address disparities revealed by the data" [28, p. 34] and identifying vulnerable groups affected specifically by mental health issues, socio-economic barriers, and various forms of racism including anti-Black, anti-Muslim, and anti-Indigenous racism.

In terms of adopting an inclusive curriculum framework, some of the weak policies reference memorandum 119 as a guide, and promise to focus on inclusive curriculum and assessment

practices. However, with minimal or no reference to racism, accessibility issues, or inclusion of the histories and voices of minority students in the curriculum, there is no evidence that the promise has been actualized. This raises the question of how students can possess agency and thrive rather being mere spectators if they do not feel included and their voices are not reflected in the curriculum and in the classroom. Furthermore, the commitment to use valid and reliable assessments to improve student learning lacks details about the nature and quality of these assessments and the criteria determining their validity and reliability.

2.2.4. Professional Development

Professional learning is critical not only for effective communication and understanding of equity policy, but also for its practical enactment in classrooms and schools. Generally, weaker policies highlight the need for professional development and training for educators and administrators. For instance, one Board (HDSB) commits to providing continual staff development and professional learning to identify and tackle bias and discrimination, and to confront and dismantle systemic racism and discrimination barriers. Despite promises of equitable access to ongoing professional development opportunities, there is no specification on the number of sessions per year, nor reference to addressing specific equity-related issues such as anti-Black racism, anti-Muslim racism, anti-Semitism, Sexism, Homophobia, Classism, Ableism, and other forms of institutional discrimination.

One salient issue is how schools can effectively address inequities when forms of discrimination are not identified, and professional development opportunities do not specifically address these problems. In the weak policies, there's no emphasis on equity or anti-oppression issues, and a lack of strategies and actions to address these challenges. Specifically, these weak policies fail to designate resources to aid policy implementation. For instance, Lakehead District School Board's (LDSB) website declares that the Board's employees will engage in staff development activities on equity and inclusive education issues to develop the knowledge, skills, and behaviors required to eliminate bullying, harassment, discrimination, and systemic barriers. But a deeper examination of the equity policy document exposes inconsistencies that challenge their initial assertion. For example, professional learning activities are expected to be ongoing, contingent on evidence of 'positive results' [24, p. 3]. In LDSB's case, the questions arise; what constitutes 'positive results,' how is such evidence collected, and will specialized workshops or training be provided once specific equity-related problems are identified? Such discourse becomes problematic as the

coded and liberal language overlooks the equity policy's mandate to promote equitable access in confronting and dismantling systemic racism and discrimination barriers.

The absence of equity-specific data raises issues, as professional learning opportunities should be informed by data analysis and rooted in findings from school climate surveys and demographic data. Consider York Region District School Board (YRDSB), which mandates all staff to undertake equity training and emphasizes the need to "involve community groups, as appropriate, in the design and implementation of professional development programs by assessing staff needs" [30, 1.3. n.p.]. However, without supporting data, fulfilling such promises becomes challenging and could inadvertently overlook fundamental inequity and inequality issues in schools.

Furthermore, it is essential to consider the engagement of staff and students from marginalized groups in the design of professional development programs and policies, in addition to community involvement. Given that individuals from marginalized groups are often underrepresented among those creating the policies, their active inclusion at both the school and district levels is important. This approach ensures that their experiences and insights are brought to the forefront, enriching the policy formation process and the development of professional learning programs with diverse perspectives and needs.

3. Discussions and Concluding Remarks

Our analysis of different school boards across Ontario aspiring to or moving beyond the OES policy document reveals a complex narrative. Out of the fourteen policy documents analyzed, the Toronto District School Board alone produced a policy document classified as robust and strong, with three policies categorized as medium and the remaining nine as weak, primarily due to a lack of critical engagement with equity-related concepts and unique definitions of equity-centric terms. These policies risk perpetuating inequalities through the use of a "neutral," diversity-heavy rhetoric. It is essential to explicitly identify and challenge ideological issues that lead to unintended policy enactment consequences to tackle structural and epistemic forms of injustice. The OES, for example, explicitly mentions removing student achievement barriers. However, if current accountability systems equate "good" schools solely with higher test scores [64], equity policies may be negatively impacted. In this context, as Wells and Homes (2005) point out, a paradox emerges. Schools that are more racially and socioeconomically diverse, potentially reflecting a more equity-focused approach, are also

more likely to score lower on standardized tests compared to schools where the majority of the population is White and from a socioeconomically advantaged background. This discrepancy may further complicate the enactment and evaluation of equity policies.

Informed by the belief that critical enactment of policies is "a creative, sophisticated and complex but also constrained process" [13, p. 568], we propose three recommendations for educators, administrators, and policy makers. Our primary suggestion is to encourage the emergence of intersecting and diverse experiences, a task that necessitates integrating flexible and *apophatic* language into policy vocabulary. Adopting apophatic language, which emphasizes what cannot be explicitly said or directly described, diverts from the Eurocentric binary paradigm and enables the inclusion of silenced and uncodified narratives and experiences. The apophatic - derived from the Greek term apophasis, meaning 'to convey without direct reference' [58, p. 303] - allows for silenced stories and experiences to be shared and acknowledged. The utilization of *apophatic* language offers a shift away from the dominant Eurocentric binary paradigm, paving the way for the expression of silenced and uncodified narratives and experiences. Increasingly, marginalized students find their experiences are either not-represented, minimalized, or misrepresented in the frameworks offered by the majority of the equity policies [14, 51, 54]. As such, it is critical to ensure uncodified experiences of oppression and marginalization are also voiced and appropriate action taken to address the inequities.

Secondly, underlining transparency is key to evade the ambiguity present in equity policies' language, procedures, programs, and practices, thus urging us to move beyond the recurring cycle of damage and repair. Many of the school boards in our study have adopted remedial strategies for students experiencing discrimination or bullying. However, an often overlooked aspect is that students who do not see themselves represented in the curriculum, by their teachers, or in the overall schooling process struggle to establish the essential trust needed for effective use of these resources. Consequently, a pattern tends to emerge where non-racialized students, being more confident and familiar with the equity language [35], lead in voicing discontent to support marginalized and racialized students. While such experiences may not be problematic from a humanistic perspective, they persistently reproduce the issue of marginalized students' voices being filtered, potentially leading to ineffective recommendations and interventions. It is of utmost importance to intentionally identify equity gaps and systemic barriers and integrate mechanisms that include students' voices and stories of marginalization and discrimination into understanding and addressing inequalities.

Engaging critically with equity policy texts involves ensuring that enacted documents align with their stated objectives and are not mere one-sided, top-down discourses. Inclusive demographic representations, including surveys and other systematic data collection methods, must be developed in dialogue with students and educators, and policy documents should be revised in response to students' experiences of marginalization and oppression.

Finally, professional learning opportunities require transformative revisions to authentically reflect the intent of the policy itself. Currently, many professional development programs are saturated with liberal rhetoric, distilling various forms of oppression into digestible chunks for educators. It is vital that these programs do not simply become a mere add-on [39, p. 68] to educators' already demanding workload. As part of a transparent accountability and evaluation system, professional development sessions should be designed collaboratively with educators and students, integrating anti-oppressive, anti-racist, and anti-discriminatory practices and procedures to ensure fairness and equity for all intersectional identity markers including race, gender, sexual orientation, and religion. Radically revising professional learning also means that educators need to go beyond just using the language of equity, but also to explicitly naming and taking action to eliminate systemic barriers perpetuating oppressive conditions. Simply being familiar with 'equity talk' can lead some educators to exploit ideological sympathies without truly investing in the cause, without having any 'skin in the game'.

This constrained dialogue impedes substantial transformations in educational settings. It is therefore crucial for the creators of equity policies to engage in a reflexive practice of cultural and social deconstruction. This engagement will help to ensure that policy documents, which are influenced by and the result of numerous often contradictory vulnerabilities, do not end up reinforcing oppressive conditions. Our findings underscore the immediate need to address these concerns, not as a mere academic discussion, but as an essential step towards cultivating genuinely equitable educational spaces.

Our comprehensive critical policy analysis underlines the crucial necessity for a policy blueprint that recognizes the intricacies and complexities of equity-oriented policies. The gradual and systemic disconnect of power discussions from fundamental equity-centric concepts allows the real-world effects of oppressive conditions to be addressed in a limited way that does not inspire significant change in educational settings. This silenced dialogue hinders substantial transformations, inhibiting our journey toward truly equitable schooling environments. Therefore, it becomes imperative for architects of equity policies to commit to

a practice of cultural and social deconstruction. This dedication helps ensure that policy documents, entwined with and shaped by a tapestry of often contradictory vulnerabilities, do not inadvertently reproduce oppressive conditions.

Our findings highlight the urgent need to address these concerns - this is not merely an academic discourse but a fundamental stride towards fostering genuinely equitable educational environments. Our analysis calls for an unwavering commitment to challenge existing structures, to cultivate an authentic dialogue around the heart of equity issues, and to ensure that our collective actions are guided by a vision of substantial transformation. It demands a bold reimagining of educational landscapes to ensure they genuinely reflect and foster social justice and equality. It is a call to disrupt and rebuild, echoing our collective pursuit for a future where equity in education is not merely a policy objective, but a lived reality.

Author Contributions: Conceptualization, S.O. and J.P.; Formal analysis, S.O. and J.P.; Investigation, Soudeh Oladi; Data curation, S.O.; Writing – original draft, S.O.; Writing – review & editing, S.O. and J.P.; Supervision, J.P.; Project administration, S.O.; Funding acquisition, J.P.

Institutional Review Board Statement: Not applicable.

Informed Consent Statement: Not applicable.

Data Availability Statement: The data presented in this study are available on request from the corresponding author.

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

Appendix: Figures

Table 1: Policy Analysis Framework

Analytic Criteria	Analytic Criteria Framework	
Length	Short	**3 pages**
	Medium	**More than 3 pages**/ Less than 10
	Long	**More than 10 pages**

Robust Policy
- → Understands equity from an anti-colonial, critical democratic, anti-oppressive, integrative anti-racist perspective
- → Highlights the concept of **intersectionality** [gender/ sexuality/ ethnicity/ race/ religion, etc.] and addresses the inequalities experienced by various social groups
  - → Addresses the **diversity** of the school board's demography
  - → Promotes **values of dignity**, respect, fairness, and autonomy
  - → Adamantly/explicitly acknowledges the **existence of bias**
- → Acknowledges the existence of Islamophobic, anti-Indigenous, anti-Semitic, anti-Black **racism and bias**
  - → Highlights the roles of the school board and the school policies, regulations and initiatives, in addressing discriminatory practices
  - → Highlights the **engagement of parents**, families, and communities at the micro and macro level
    - → Makes reference to anti-racist, anti-colonial, **anti-oppressive language**
- → Resists group generalizations and emphasizes on **layered interrelations** among social inequities

Substance
- → Defines affirmative positive action as **proportionate measures** aimed at attaining full and effective equality in practice for socially and economically disadvantaged learners
- → Makes explicit reference to the promotion of affirmative positive action in an effort to address **discriminatory practices**
  - → Defends **affirmative positive action** regarding religious accommodation
  - → Includes explicit elements of **action and recommendations** to prevent or remedy discrimination
    - → The **spirit of the policy** exceeds the original Ontario equity policy

Medium Policy
- → Equity policy is explained in **board terms** including definitions of important concepts
  - → **Lack of explicit reference** to actual instances of anti-oppressive actions
  - → **Absence of terms** like marginalized, racism, sexism, homosexuality, bias, discrimination, Islamophobia, Anti-Semitism, etc.
    - → Action against inequality is left to the **individual**
- → Specifically, actions recommended against discriminatory practices are only at the **individual discretion** of the educator
- → Actions are only taken when a problem arises and there is no reference to **systemic barriers**
- → Absence of explicit/implicit reference to **collective action** needed to prevent or remedy discrimination
  - → Instead of explicit definition and examples of affirmative positive action, **general recommendations** are offered
  - → Generic references are made to promote the **values of dignity**, respect, fairness, and autonomy
    - → The language of the equity policy is **general and broad**
  - → General references are made regarding the **engagement of parents**, families, and communities at the micro and macro level
- → Linguistically, theoretically, and conceptually the board policy is the **same as the 2009 Ontario equity** policy
  - → The **spirit of the policy** is in line with the original Ontario equity policy

	Weak Policy
	→ The **standards** of the equity policy fall below the robust and medium categories
	→ There is an **absence of clear definitions** for important concepts including equity
	→ **Superficial** definitions are offered for central concepts including equity, bias, discrimination, marginalization, racism, etc.
	→ The policy fails to acknowledge the existence of Islamophobic, anti-Indigenous, anti-Semitic, anti-Black **racism and bias**
	→ The policy fails to promote **values of dignity**, respect, fairness, and autonomy
	→ The equity policy is **generic** and lacks originality
Policy Substance	→ The policy appears to have been created merely because it is **mandated**
	→ The policy offers no working **definition of affirmative positive action**
	→ The policy makes limited or no reference to affirmative positive action regarding **religious accommodation**
	→ There is an **absence of recommendations** or proportionate measures aimed at attaining full and effective equality in practice for socially and economically disadvantaged learners
	→ The policy fails to differentiate between the Ontario equity policy and the Ontario **Human Rights Code**
	→ The equity policy fails to address **multiple grounds of inequality**
	→ The policy fails to predict or address **foreseeable impacts** on vulnerable and marginalized groups
	→ The policy is structured in a way that causes or **perpetuates disadvantage**
	→ The policy makes little or no reference to the **engagement of parents**, families, and communities at the micro and macro level
	→ The **spirit of the policy** falls below the original Ontario equity policy

	Robust Policy
	→ The policy is written in **lay/common language** and easy to comprehend
	→ The policy makes reference to **race-based data** collected or to be collected from school boards
	→ Equity is interpreted in a **robust** manner
Style & Readability	→ Equality of opportunity is defined as affirmative positive action that contrasts equality of opportunity with **equality of outcome**
	Medium Policy
	→ The board policy is a **verbatim transcription** of the original Ontario equity policy
	→ The policy makes limited or **general references** to race-based data collected or to be collected from the school board
	→ Equity is interpreted in a **medium** manner
	→ Equality of opportunity is understood as being **socially just**
	Weak Policy
	→ The policy is filled with **legalistic terminology** and difficult to comprehend
Style & Readability	→ The policy makes **no reference to race**-based data collected or to be collected from the school board
	→ Equity is interpreted in a **weak** manner
	→ **Equality of opportunity** is defined literally as offering everyone the same chance to succeed without taking systemic barriers into account

	Robust Policy
	→ The policy offers an **original mission statement** that goes beyond the original Ontario equity policy
	→ The policy moves **beyond the structure** of the Ontario equity policy
	→ The policy includes **critical definitions** of major terms and concepts
	→ The policy makes reference to the school board's **goals regarding equity**
	→ The policy has a separate section on **recommendations**
	→ The policy has a separate section on the **role of different educators** on the school board
	→ The policy **fails** to provide an **executive summary**

Medium Policy

→   The policy's mission statement is a copy of or **similar** to the Ontario equity policy

        →   The policy **follows the structure** of the Ontario equity policy

     →   The policy include **generic definitions** of major terms and concepts

Structure of Document   →   The policy **fails** to offer a **clear picture** of the board's goals regarding equity

   →   The policy makes **general recommendations** similar to the Ontario equity policy

→   The policy does not include a **separate section** on the role of different **educators** on the school board

     →   The policy has a **short summary** taken from the Ontario equity policy

Weak Policy

     →   The policy's structure falls **below the robust and medium** categories

        →   The policy does **not** have a **mission statement**

     →   The policy **fails to follow the structure** of the Ontario equity policy

        →   The policy **fails to offer definitions** of major terms and concepts

          →   The policy does **not** have a section on **recommendations**

→   The policy does **not** have an **executive summary**

Robust Policy

→   The school board policy includes **detailed recommendations and implementation plan** that promote the adoption of the policy

   →   The school board policy includes a **detailed accountability**/evaluation process of the work on equity being done in schools

     →   **The strategic or tactical goals** of the equity policy have been clearly defined

   →   Clear **measures are outlined** to be taken if the equity policy is not being followed in schools

Feasibility, Accountability, Evaluation, and Data Collection Regarding Equity Activities   →   Continuous **professional development** is offered specifically on the notion of equity

     →   Continuous professional development is offered on **anti-oppression issues**

   →   Equity and human rights indicators and **outcomes** are clearly **defined** in the policy

   →   Each school's performance in relation to the equity policy are measured through **predetermined indicators**

→   The **methods, instruments, and specific activities** through which the objectives of the equity policy may be realized have been outlined

→   The school board conducts its own **formal evaluation** annually and the process and results of the annual evaluation are presented to educators and administrators

Medium Policy

→   The school board policy includes **general recommendations** that promote the adoption of the policy

→   The school board policy includes a general/**vague accountability**/evaluation process of the work on equity being done in schools

→   The strategic or **tactical goals** of the equity policy have been generally/**vaguely defined**

   →   **Some measures** may be taken if the equity policy is not being followed in schools

     →   **Few professional development** is offered specifically on the topic of equity

        →   **Few professional development** is offered on anti-oppression issues

Feasibility, Accountability, Evaluation, and Data Collection Regarding Equity Activities   →   **Equity** and human rights **indicators** and outcomes are **sporadically mentioned** and vaguely defined in the policy

   →   Some schools' performances in relation to the equity policy are **measured generally** through predetermined indicators

→   The methods, instruments, and specific activities through which the **objectives** of the equity policy may be **realized** have **not** been clearly **outlined**

   →   The school board conducts a **semi-formal evaluation** of how the equity policy is enacted in schools

Weak Policy

→   The school board policy includes **no recommendations and implementation plan** that promote the adoption of the policy

→   Regarding accountability and evaluation, the equity policy **falls below the robust and**

→ The school board policy does **not** include an **accountability/evaluation process** of the work on equity being done in schools

→ The strategic or **tactical goals** of the equity policy have been **not** been **defined**

→ **No measures** are taken if the equity policy is not being followed in schools

→ **No professional development** is offered specifically on the topic of equity

→ **No professional development** is offered on anti-oppression issues

→ **Equity** and human rights **indicators** and outcomes are **not defined** in the policy

→ **No schools' performances** in relation to the equity policy are **measured** through predetermined indicators

→ The methods, instruments, and **specific activities** through which the objectives of the equity policy may be realized are **not outlined**

→ The school board does **not** conduct any **formal evaluation** on the enactment of the equity policy

Robust Policy

→ The policy makes references to **specific funding** the board has allocated to ensure the enactment of the equity policy

→ The policy ensures **equitable access to funding** and resources among schools

→ The policy focuses on **equitable allocation of resources** as opposed to efficient allocation of resources

Medium Policy

→ The policy makes **vague references to funding** the board has allocated to ensure the enactment of the equity policy

Funding → It is not clear how effectively the policy seeks to **ensure equitable access** to funding and resources among schools

→ The policy focuses on the **efficient allocation of resources** with limited reference to equity

Weak Policy

→ The policy makes **no reference** to specific **funding** the board has allocated for ensuring the enactment of the equity policy

→ The policy does **not ensure equitable access** to funding and resources among schools

→ The policy either completely disregards the issue of resource allocation or focuses **only** on the **efficient allocation** of resources

References

[1] Agocs, C. (2004). Surfacing racism in the workplace: Qualitative and quantitative evidence of systemic discrimination. *Canadian Diversity/Diversite Canadienne*, *3*(3), 25-28. https://www.ohrc.on.ca/en

[2] Ahmed, S. (2012). On being included: Racism and diversity in institutional life. Duke University Press.

[3] Allan, E. J. (2009). Feminist poststructuralism meets policy analysis: An overview. *Reconstructing policy in higher education*, 31-56.

[4] Ball, S. J. (1998). Big policies/small world: An introduction to international perspectives in education policy. *Comparative education*, *34*(2), 119-130. https://doi.org/10.1080/03050069828225

[5] Ball, S. J. (2012). Global education inc. New policy networks and the neoliberal imaginary. Routledge.

[6] Ball, S. J. (2013). The education debate (2nd ed.). The Policy Press, University of Bristol.

[7] Ball, S. J., Maguire, M., & Braun, A. (2011). *How schools do policy: Policy enactments in secondary schools*. Routledge.

[8] Barrett, S. E., Solomon, R. P., Singer, J., Portelli, J. P., & Mujuwamariya, D. (2009). The hidden curriculum of a teacher induction program: Ontario teacher educators' perspectives. *Canadian Journal of Education/Revue canadienne de l'éducation*, *32*(4), 677-702. https://www.jstor.org/stable/canajeducrevucan.32.4.677

[9] Bell, J. M., & Hartmann, D. (2007). Diversity in everyday discourse: The cultural ambiguities and consequences of "Happy Talk." *American Sociological Review*, *72*(6), 895–914. https://doi.org/10.1177/000312240707200603

[10] Beyer, L. E. (2001). The value of critical perspectives in teacher education. *Journal of Teacher Education*, 52(2), 151–163. https://doi.org/10.1177/0022487101052002006

[11] Bowe, R., Ball, S. J., & Gold, A. (2017). Reforming education and changing schools: *Case studies in policy sociology* (Vol. 10). Routledge.

[12] Bradbury, A. (2020). A critical race theory framework for education policy analysis: the case of bilingual learners and assessment policy in England. *Race, Ethnicity and Education*, *23*(2), 241–260. https://doi.org/10.1080/13613324.2019.1599338

[13] Braun, A., Ball, S. J., & Maguire, M. (2011). Policy enactments in schools introduction: towards a toolbox for theory and research. *Discourse (Abingdon, England)*, *32*(4), 581–583. https://doi.org/10.1080/01596306.2011.601554

[14] Campbell, C. (2021). Educational equity in Canada: The case of Ontario's strategies and actions to advance excellence and equity for students. *School Leadership & Management*, *41*(4-5), 409–428. https://doi.org/10.1080/13632434.2019.1709165

[15] Darder, A. (2017). Reinventing Paulo Freire: A pedagogy of love. Routledge.

[16] Dei, G. J., & Johal, G. S. (2005). Critical issues in anti-racist research methodologies (Vol. 252). Peter Lang.

[17] Equity Action Plan (EAP). (2020). Toronto Catholic District School Board. https://assets.tcdsb.org/TCDSB/2253234/tcdsb-equity-action-plan-progress-report-2019-2020.pdf

[18] Employment Equity Policy (2004). *Toronto District School Board*. https://ppf.tdsb.on.ca/uploads/files/live/95/695.pdf

[19] Equity Policy DCDSB. (2022). Durham Catholic District School Board. https://www.dcdsb.ca/en/parents/equity-inclusive-education.aspx?_mid_=126867

[20] Equity Policy DDSB. (2018). *Durham District School Board*. https://durhamschboard.service-now.com/sys_attachment.do?sys_id=cd7f0eb1db1933805f6be3a84b96195f&view=true

[21] Equity Policy DPCDSB (2020). Dufferin-Peel Catholic District School Board. https://www.dpcdsb.org/Board%20Policies/12.00.pdf

[22] Equity Policy HCDSB. (2021). Halton Catholic District School Board. https://www.hcdsb.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/II-45-Equity-and-Inclusive-Education.pdf

[23] Equity Policy HDSB. (2022). *Halton District School Board*. https://www.hdsb.ca/our-board/Policy/EquityInclusiveEducationPolicyBP.pdf

[24] Equity Policy LDSB. (2020). *Lakehead District School Board*. https://www.lakeheadschools.ca/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/1020-Equity-and-Inclusive-Education-Procedure.pdf

[25] Equity Policy PDSB. (2018). *Peel District School Board.* https://www.peelschools.org/documents/POLICY-54---Equity-and-Inclusive-Education.pdf/POLICY-54---Equity-and-Inclusive-Education.pdf

[26] Equity Policy RDSB. (2018). *Rainbow District School Board*. https://www.rainbowschools.ca/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/Equity-and-Inclusive-Education-Administrative-Procedure.pdf

[27] Equity Policy SCDSB. (2021). Sudbury Catholic District School Board. https://sudburycatholicschools.sharepoint.com/sites/SCSTeamSeniorAdministration/Polic

ies/Forms/AllItems.aspx?id=%2Fsites%2FSCSTeamSeniorAdministration%2FPolicies%
2FBR103%20Equity%20and%20Inclusive%20Education%2Epdf&parent=%2Fsites%2F
SCSTeamSeniorAdministration%2FPolicies&p=true&ga=1

[28] Equity Policy TCDSB. (2011). Toronto Catholic District School Board.
https://assets.tcdsb.org/TCDSB/2234321/HM24.pdf

[29] Equity Policy TDSB. (2018). *Toronto District School Board*.
https://ppf.tdsb.on.ca/uploads/files/live/97/200.pdf

[30] Equity Policy YCDSB. (2015). York Catholic District School Board.
https://www.gegi.ca/wpcontent/uploads/2021/04/YCDSB_2015_EquityAndInclusiveEdu
cation.pdf

[31] Equity Policy YRDSB. (2013). York Regional District School Board.
https://www2.yrdsb.ca/pol-261-EquityandInclusivity

[32] Freire, P. (1998). Pedagogy of freedom: Ethics, democracy, and civic courage. Rowman
& Littlefield Publishers.

[33] Giroux, H. A. (2011). Beyond the limits of neoliberal higher education: Global youth
resistance and the American/British divide. *Truthout.*
http://truth-out.org/index.php?option=com_k2&view=item&id=4646

[34] Hernández, S. (2013). Latino educational opportunity in discourse and policy: A critical
and policy discourse analysis of the White House initiative on educational excellence for
Hispanics [Doctoral dissertation]. Iowa State University.
https://doi.org/10.31274/etd-180810-3197

[35] hooks, B. (2014). *Teaching to transgress*. Routledge.

[36] Humes, W., & Bryce, T. (2003). Post-structuralism and policy research in education.
Journal of Education Policy,18(2), 175–187.
https://doi.org/10.1080/0268093022000043056

[37] Kincheloe, J. L. (2005). *Critical constructivism primer*. Peter Lang.

[38] Kincheloe, J. L., & Berry, K. S. (2004). *Rigour and complexity in educational research:
Conceptualizing the bricolage*. Maidenhead, England: Open University Press.

[39] King-Sears, P. (2014). Introduction to "Learning Disability" Quarterly Special Series on Universal Design for Learning: Part One of Two. *Learning Disability Quarterly, 37*(2), 68-70. http://www.jstor.org/stable/44290324

[40] Lingard, B. & Rizvi, F. (2010). *Globalizing Education Policy*. New York: Routledge.

[41] Littler, J. (2013). Meritocracy as plutocracy: The marketising of'Equality'under neoliberalism. *New Formations*, *80*(80), 52-72.

[42] Naimi, K., & Cepin, J. (2015). (Non)Construction of the teacher: An inquiry into Ontario's equity and inclusive education strategy. *Alberta Journal of Educational Research, 61*(1), 65−79. https://doi.org/10.11575/ajer.v61i1.56031

[43] OES (2009). Ontario's Equity and Inclusive Strategy. https://files.ontario.ca/edu-equity-inclusive-education-strategy-2009-en-2022-01-13.pdf

[44] Ontario Human Rights Council. (2022). The right to equal education includes the right to read. https://www.ohrc.on.ca/en/right-to-read-inquiry-report/executive-summary

[45] Ontario Ministry of Education. (2009). *Policy/Program memorandum no. 119*. Queen's Printer for Ontario. https://www.ontario.ca/document/education-ontario-policy-and-programdirection/policyprogram-memorandum-119

[46] Ontario Ministry of Education. (2014). Achieving excellence: A renewed vision for education *in Ontario*. Queen's Printer for Ontario. https://www.oise.utoronto.ca/atkinson/UserFiles/File/Policy_Monitor/ON_01_04_14__renewedVision.pdf

[47] Ontario Ministry of Education. (2016). Ontario's wellbeing strategy for education: *Discussion document*. Queen's Printer for Ontario. http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/about/wellbeingpdfs_nov2016e/wellbeing_engagement_e.pdf

[48] Ontario Ministry of Education. (2017). *Ontario's education equity action plan.* Queen's Printer for Ontario. https://www.ontario.ca/page/ontarios-education-equity-action-plan

[49] Portelli, J. P., & Koneeny, P. (2018). Inclusive education: Beyond popular discourses. *International Journal of Emotional Education*, *10*(1), 133-144..

[50] Portelli, J. P., Solomon, R. P., & Patrick, R. (2001). *The erosion of democracy in education: Critique to possibilities*. Detselig Enterprises.

[51] Rezai-Rashti, G., Zhang, B., Abdmolaei, S., & Segeren, A. (2021). 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*(4), 7-25. http://johepal.com/article-1-149-en.html

[52] Rezai-Rashti, G., Segeren, A., & Martino, W. (2017). The new articulation of equityeducation 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

[53] Rizvi, F., & Lingard, B. (2010). *Globalizing education policy*. Routledge.

[54] Rogers, P. (2021). From racial equity to closing the achievement gap: The discursive "whiting out" of race in neoliberal education policy. In *The Impacts of Neoliberal Discourse and Language in Education: Critical Perspectives on a Rhetoric of Equality, Well-Being, and Justice* (pp. 191–205). Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9780367815172-12

[55] Segeren, A. L. (2016). How schools enact equity policies: A case study of social justice leadership. ProQuest Dissertations Publishing.https://www.proquest.com/docview/2714866642?parentSessionId=mR1r1Vy3 6dLB9FqmA42dp8S2S2SaVx93aloa0GtTUE8%3D&pq-origsite=primo&accountid=147 71

[56] Shewchuck, S., & Cooper, A. (2018). Exploring equity in Ontario: A provincial scan of equity policies across school boards. *Canadian Journal of Education*, *41*(4). https://www.proquest.com/docview/2161251354?accountid=14771&parentSessionId=N %2B%2Fm7QL5QFWq3lPK5NQAdxJnGECcAeqt175GhLGcGjk%3D&pq-origsite=pri mo

[57] Smith, L. (2012). Decolonizing methodologies: Research and Indigenous peoples. Zed Books.

[58] Taleb, N. N. (2012).Antifragile: Things that gain from disorder. Random House.

[59] TDSB. (1999). Equity foundation statement and commitments to equity policy implementation. Toronto District School Board. https://tandis.odihr.pl/bitstream/20.500.12389/19475/1/01980.pdf

[60] TDSB. (2000) Guidelines and procedures for religious accommodation. Toronto District School Board. https://tandis.odihr.pl/explore?bitstream_id=22418&handle=20.500.12389/19476&provider=iiif-image#?c=0&m=0&s=0&cv=0&xywh=-2686%2C-184%2C7920%2C3666

[61] TDSB. (2004). *Human Rights Policy*. Toronto District School Board. https://ppf.tdsb.on.ca/uploads/files/live/53/195.pdf

[62] Unangst, L., Casellas Connors, I., & Barone, N. (2022). State-based policy supports for refugee, asylee, and TPS-background students in US higher education. *Refuge*, *38*(1), 95-110.

[63] Vidovich, L. (2013). Policy research in higher education: Theories and methods for globalising times. In *Theory and method in higher education research*. Emerald Group Publishing Limited.

[64] Wells, A. S., & Holme, J. J. (2009). No accountability for diversity: Standardized tests and the demise of racially mixed schools. In *School Resegregation* (pp. 187–211). The University of North Carolina.