

**EDUCATION WITHOUT MARGINS: AN EXPLORATION OF SIX TEACHERS'
UNDERSTANDINGS AND ENACTMENT OF EQUITY AND INCLUSIVE EDUCATION
IN DIVERSE URBAN CLASSROOMS**

by

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ABSTRACT

Context: According to the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), approximately 40,000 immigrant students enter into the Canadian public school system each year; of those students, 80% are non-English speaking and 90% will attend schools in Montreal, Toronto, or Vancouver (OECD, 2011). As a result of this level of immigration, the Greater Toronto Area (GTA) is one of the most richly diverse communities in the world. While visible minorities account for 20.6% of the total Canadian population, 46% of the GTA are visible minorities (Statistics Canada, 2014). Diversity is also increasing in relation to religion, language, and Aboriginal peoples, as well as same-sex marriages (Statistics Canada, 2014).

Purpose: The purpose of this qualitative study is to explore how in-service teachers' identities impacts their practice in diverse urban classrooms, as well as to identify what types of professional development and school initiatives, if any, are occurring to address equity issues.

Method: The conceptual framework for this study views equitable reform across the following three levels: the macro/institutional (school structure), micro/personal (teacher identity), and meso/instructional (practices). Six one-hour, semi-structured interviews were conducted with teachers who are currently working in diverse urban communities in the GTA. Data were first coded deductively to explore the extent to which the data were consistent with variables arising from the literature and the conceptual framework. Following deductive coding analysis, inductive coding was used to interpret concepts and themes arising from the raw data that were not represented in the conceptual framework.

Results: The findings suggest that, by validating and honouring diverse student identities and experiences, teachers can tackle equity issues in the classroom through culturally responsive practices that place the student at the center of the learning experience. If the goal of equitable

reform initiatives is to transform the learning outcomes for minoritized groups, then teachers need to be supported in their endeavours to create transformative learning spaces that engage students in their own learning in authentic ways and also challenge social inequities both inside and outside the classroom.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

The Problem

As the 2011 National Household Survey (NHS; Statistics Canada, 2014) indicates, Ontario and Canada are becoming increasingly diverse, with 20.6% of Canada's total population identified as foreign-born (also referred to as immigrants), of which the majority (53.3%) choose Ontario as their home. Additional demographic data from Statistics Canada reveals the following:

- **Visible minorities:** Ontarians represent more than half of Canada's total visible minorities, with an estimated 3.3 million identifying themselves as visible minorities. Between 2006 and 2011, Ontario's visible minority population increased nearly five times faster than the population as a whole (not counting those who self-identified as Aboriginal; Ministry of Finance [MOF], 2013a).
- **Aboriginal peoples:** Between 2006 and 2011, Ontario's Aboriginal population grew faster than the non-Aboriginal population, increasing 24.3% (five times faster than the 4.8% rate of growth for the non-Aboriginal population). One in five of the country's Aboriginal population (21.5%) lived in Ontario in 2011 (MOF, 2013b).
- **Religion:** The six largest denominations by number of adherents in Ontario during 2011 included: Christianity (64.6%), Islam (4.6%), Hindu (2.9%), Jewish (1.5%), Sikh (1.4%) and Buddhist (1.3%). Specific to Toronto's Census Metropolitan Area, 21.1% reported no religious affiliation, Christianity was the largest faith group (56.7%) followed by Islam (8.2%) and Hinduism (5.9%; Statistics Canada, 2011a).

- Families: Between 2006 and 2011, the number of lone-parent families in Ontario increased by 11.8% (MOF, 2012a).
- Same-sex couples: Findings from the 2011 Census indicated that there were 23,380 same-sex couples in Ontario, which represented 0.8% of all couples. Between 2006 and 2011, the number of same-sex couples increased by 34%. (It should be noted that this number might underestimate same-sex couples, as some are closeted due to stigmatization; MOF, 2012a).
- Language: In 2011, around 200 languages were reported by Ontarians as their mother tongue (MOF, 2012b). While English was the predominant language spoken in Toronto (57%), other significant language groups included: Indo-Iranian (10%), Chinese (8%), Slavic (5%), and Malayo-Polynesian (3%; Statistics Canada, 2011b).

According to the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), approximately 40,000 immigrant students enter into the Canadian public school system each year; of those students, 80% are non-English speaking and 90% will attend schools in Montreal, Toronto, or Vancouver (OECD, 2011). As a result of this level of immigration, the Greater Toronto Area (GTA) is one of the most richly diverse communities in the world (OECD, 2011). While visible minorities account for 20.6% of the total Canadian population, 46% of the GTA population are visible minorities (Statistics Canada, 2014). However, visible minorities only account for one of the many diversity categories within the GTA. Others include: sexual orientation, gender, and ability.

The changing face of Ontario's diversity is also reflected within its schools. This diversity has presented both unique challenges and opportunities for teachers who are teaching within

increasingly diverse contexts. Findings from the Toronto District School Board's (TDSB) 2006 Student Census reported the following:

- Statistical findings for the secondary achievement levels across the four mandatory subjects (English, math, science, and geography) reported that 71% of East Asian, 59% of South East Asian, and 54% of White students were at the provincial standards, compared to 47% of Mixed, 40% of Middle Eastern, 34% of Latin, and 30% of Black students.
- Statistical data reporting on students' sexual orientation revealed that heterosexual students are somewhat less at-risk than lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, Two Spirited, queer, or questioning (LGBTQ) students (11% to 17%) and are more likely to be at the provincial average in the four mandatory Grade 9 subjects. However, this figure may underestimate the extent of the problem as many LGBTQ students do not self-identity (Brown & Sinay, 2006).

Graduation rates also show gaps in student trajectories based on ethnicity and sexual orientation:

- Students in the Grade 9 cohort with the highest percentage of graduation identified themselves as East Asian (91.2%), South Asian (87%), South East Asian (84.1%), and White (81.9%). In contrast, students who were Black (64.5%), Latin (69.9%), Mixed (73%), and Middle Eastern (77.5%) had lower graduation rates (TDSB, 2011).
- Heterosexual students were more likely to graduate (82%) than LGTBQ/ two-spirited students (69%; TDSB, 2011).

- Black, Middle Eastern, Mixed, and Latin students continue to perform at rates 10-40% lower than their Asian and White counterparts in relation to provincial standards, and also have lower graduation rates (TDSB, 2011).

While Asian, White, and heterosexual students tend to fare well in the school system, Middle Eastern, Latin, Mixed, Black, and LGBTQ/ two-spirited students have lower levels of academic achievement. Similar to the data on achievement, graduation rates tend to be higher among Asian, White, and heterosexual students, while Black, Middle Eastern, Latin, Mixed, and LGBTQ/ two-spirited students have lower completion rates.

While there are many complex factors related to the underachievement and drop-out rates of these groups, many Canadian scholars claim that powerful structural factors and institutional barriers such as systemic racism, negative teacher perceptions, gender and sexual discrimination, cultural inequities, socio-economic status, and poverty greatly influence student achievement and drop-out rates (Dei, Karumanchery, & Karumanchery, 2004; Dei, Karumanchery, Wilson-James, & Zine, 2000; Ghosh & Abdi, 2004; Henry, Rees, & Tator, 2010; James, 2010; Solomon & Levine-Rasky, 2003). In fact, the Supreme Court of Canada acknowledged in 2005 “that racial prejudice against visible minorities is so notorious and indisputable that its existence needs to be treated as a social fact” (R. v. Spence, 2005, para. 5).

Some initial efforts have been made to address the complex and multidimensional factors associated with the underachievement and drop-out rates for these groups. At the provincial level, the Ontario Ministry of Education (MOE) has made some attempts over the past two decades to address differential student achievement, releasing documents such as: *Antiracism and Ethnocultural Equity in School Boards: Guidelines for Development and Implementation*

(MOE, 1993); *Ontario Statistical Neighbours: Informing Our Strategy to Improve Student Achievement* (MOE, 2007); *Schools on the Move: Lighthouse Program* (MOE, 2008). Most recently in 2009, the MOE introduced a large-scale provincial strategy, which outlined a provincially mandated four-year framework for building more inclusive school communities by creating equitable learning opportunities for all students (MOE, 2009a; 2009b). Despite the launch of the equity and inclusion strategy (MOE, 2009a; 2009b), gaps continue to persist among various groups of students. Other small-scale research projects have already attempted to explore the educational and instructional factors associated with these achievement disparities by examining issues such as professional development designed to build teachers' culturally responsive strategies (Aujla-Bhullar, 2011; Lawrence, 2005; Schniedewind, 2005), and community and school initiatives such as after-school programs for culture and heritage training as well as workshops centered on race, diversity, and power (Dei, 2005).

Definitions

In this study, equity refers to “a condition or state of fair, inclusive, and respectful treatment of all people. Equity does not mean treating people the same without regard for individual difference” (MOE, 2009a; 2009b). Inclusive education is “based on the principles of acceptance and inclusion of all students” (MOE, 2009a; 2009b) that takes into consideration student diversity and acts upon “the dynamic interconnectedness of visible, invisible, seen, unseen, recognized, and unrecognized individual and group identities that may lead to potential social marginalization and lack of equity in education” (Cooper & Levin, 2011, p. 80).

While there are many approaches to creating equitable schools, the focus in this study is placed on culturally responsive teaching and social justice education. Culturally responsive

teaching emphasizes the need for educators to validate and honour students' diversified social identities by ensuring that they are reflected in the curriculum and classroom practices (Gay, 2010). Social justice education is an approach to learning that emphasizes the importance of analyzing multiple systems of oppression to help learners tease out an understanding of difference in both social systems and their own lives (Solomon, 2011).

I acknowledge that there is a great deal of debate surrounding the use of the terms visible minority, minority, and global majority (Portelli & Campbell-Stephens, 2009); however, the term minoritized, unlike minority, is used throughout this research. Ascribed by dominant social forces, the term "minority" is a noun that implies a static state of being and suggests that within the same society there exists a "majority group" that assumes a position of power. Whereas, the term "minoritized" is a verb which emphasizes the active and ongoing social experiences of marginalization, as a result of the exclusionary practices of dominant groups resulting from historical and contemporary discrimination (Gillborn, 2005). Minority is also problematic in that it can be used to denote a numerical value— 'minority' groups can be larger in number than the 'majority', hence another reason this term can be confusing. In addition, the term, minoritized, suggests the possibility of shifting between fluid ontological spaces that are both temporally and spatially bound, wherein an individual can experience either minoritization or privilege or both simultaneously depending on the social contexts they are navigating. The term refers to groups who are marginalized based on sexual orientation, gender, ability, religion, ethnicity, and race. In addition, minoritized refers to racialized groups that have been marginalized, which include (but are not limited to) Black, Latin American, Filipino, Arab, Middle Eastern, and First Nations groups. Although I include all these groups in my definition,

much of the empirical evidence that exists on equity issues focuses on race; as a result, this category is dominant throughout the literature review despite my interest in other categories, such as sexual orientation, gender, ability, religion, and ethnicity. Table 1 outlines terms specific to Ontario's Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy (MOE, 2009b).

Table 1.
Ontario’s Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy—Terminology

<u>Term</u>	<u>Description</u>
Barrier	“An obstacle to equity that may be overt or subtle, intended or unintended, and systemic or specific to an individual or group, and that prevents or limits access to opportunities, benefits, or advantages that are available to other members of society” (p. 87).
Dominant Group	“A group that is considered the most powerful and privileged of groups in a particular society and that exercises power and influence over others through social and political means” (p. 86).
Discrimination	“Unfair or prejudicial treatment of individuals or groups on the basis of race, ancestry, place of origin, family status, or disability, as set out in the Ontario Human Rights Code, or on the basis of other, similar factors. Discrimination, whether intentional or unintentional, has the effect of preventing or limiting access to opportunities, benefits, or advantages that are available to other members of society. Discrimination may be evident in organizational and institutional structures, policies, procedures, and programs, as well as in the attitudes and behaviours of individuals” (p. 88).
Diverse	“The presence of a wide range of human qualities and attributes within a group, organization, or society. The dimensions of diversity include, but are not limited to, ancestry, culture, ethnicity, gender identity, language, physical and intellectual ability, race, religion, sex, sexual orientation, and socio-economic status” (p. 88).
Power dynamics	“The process by which one group defines and subordinates other groups and subjects them to differential and unequal treatment” (p. 91).
Stereotype	“A false or generalized, and usually negative, conception of a group of people that results in the unconscious or conscious categorization of each member of that group, without regard for individual differences. Stereotyping may be based on race, ancestry, place of origin, colour, ethnic origin, citizenship, creed, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, age, marital status, family status, or disability, as set out in the Ontario Human Rights Code, or on the basis of other factors” (p. 91).
Systemic Discrimination	“A pattern of discrimination that arises out of apparently neutral institutional policies or practices, that is reinforced by institutional structures and power dynamics, and that results in the differential and unequal treatment of members of certain groups” (p. 92).

Purpose

In order to address the diverse needs of Ontario students and their families, the MOE announced the release of its newest policy document, *Realizing the Promise of Diversity: Ontario's Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy*, in a press release dated April 6, 2009. The Minister of Education at the time, Kathleen Wynne, stated that “all students must be able to learn and grow in schools free of discrimination and bullying. This strategy will help us close the gap in student achievement by removing barriers to success” (MOE, 2009c, Quotes section). The policy stipulates in the first couple of pages of the document that the goal of the MOE is to “create the best publicly funded education system in the world” based on the following three core priorities: “(a) high levels of student achievement; (b) reduced gaps in student achievement, and (c) increased public confidence in publicly funded education” (MOE, 2009a, p. 5). Central to achieving these core priorities is an equitable education system, wherein all educational partners are actively engaged in identifying and removing barriers to create the conditions needed for student success (MOE, 2009a). Figure 1 provides an overview of the policy’s eight areas of focus.



Figure 1. Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy: Guiding Principles and Areas of Focus (MOE, 2009b)

Figure 1 illustrates the eight areas of focus in relation to the Ontario Human Rights Code, as well as the guiding principles outlined in the Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy (MOE, 2009a; 2009b). These eight focus areas are paired with action items that outline responsibilities for key stakeholders to effectuate over the amended four-year implementation plan spanning from 2009 to 2013. The areas of focus encompass: (1) board policies, programs, guidelines, and practices; (2) shared and committed leadership; (3) school-community relationships; (4) inclusive curriculum and assessment practices; (5) religious accommodation; (6) school climate and the prevention of discrimination and harassment; (7) professional learning; and (8) accountability and transparency (MOE, 2009a; 2009b).

As the action items outlined in the policy document (see Appendix A) reached the final year of its amended four-year implementation plan in 2013, it is critical that research be conducted to examine the application of the Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy initiatives. The paucity of research specific to this large-scale provincially mandated policy necessitates additional empirical research to determine whether or not this initiative has generated substantive change in the school system. Therefore, it is necessary to explore the extent to which the action items outlined in the policy have supported teachers in their efforts to enact equitable practices, as well as address the discriminatory bias that may silence the voices of minoritized students and contribute to achievement disparities. The purpose of this study is to explore how in-service teachers' identities impacts their practice in diverse urban classrooms, as well as to identify what types of professional development and school initiatives, if any, are occurring to address equity issues.

Research Questions

This study responds to the following major research questions in relation to educators working in diverse urban school communities in the Greater Toronto Area:

- 1) How do school structures (policies, school initiatives, community involvement, and professional development) hinder or facilitate teachers' ability to work more successfully with minoritized students?
- 2) How do teachers' identities (attitudes, beliefs, and personal narratives) influence their interactions with minoritized students?
- 3) How do teachers adapt their pedagogies and classroom practices to respond to diverse student identities within the school community?

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for this study was adapted from Fullan's (2009) tri-level reform model to explore how the 1) school structure, 2) teacher identity, and 3) practices influence or impact teachers' understandings and enactment of equity and inclusive education at the institutional (macro), personal (micro), and instructional (meso) levels. Figure 2 provides a visual representation of my conceptual framework.

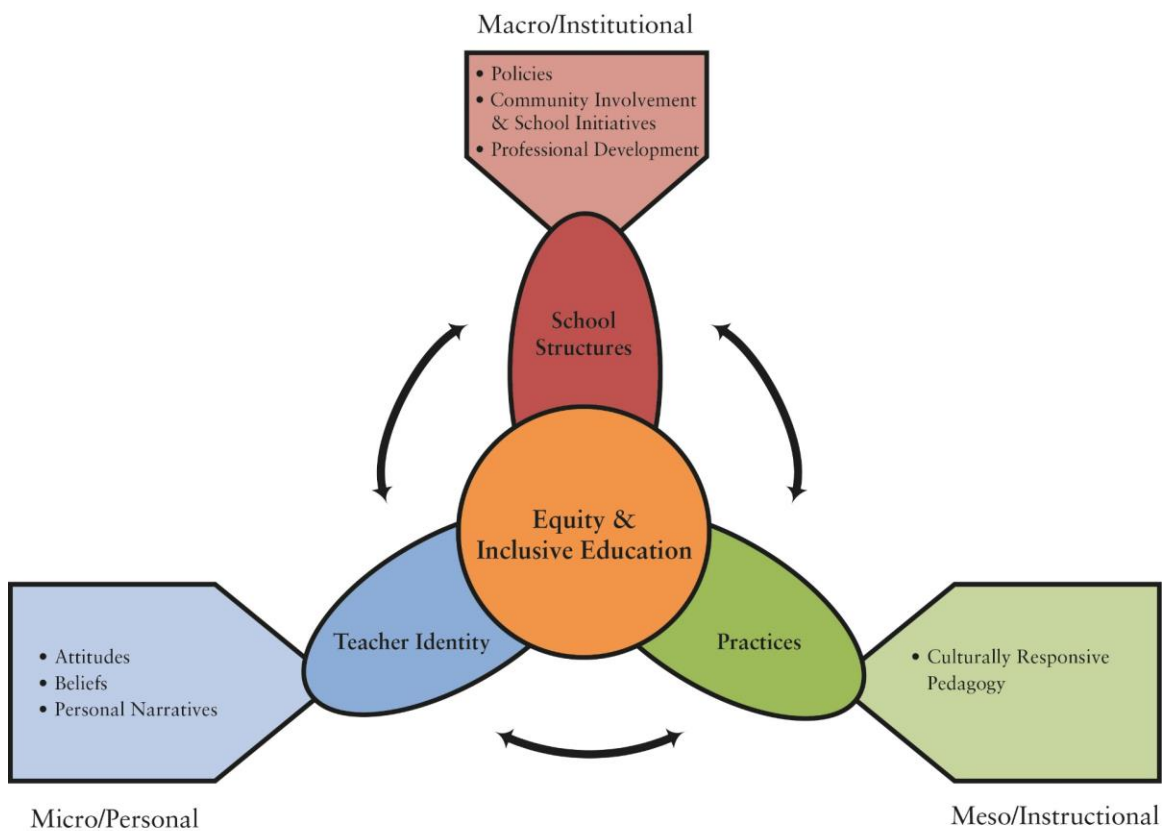


Figure 2. Conceptual Framework for Equity and Inclusive Education: A Tri-Level System Approach to School Reform.

Table 2 provides more detailed information about the dimensions and indicators of my conceptual framework.

Table 2.

Conceptual Framework for Equity and Inclusive Education: A Tri-Level System Approach to School Reform—Dimensions and Indicators

<u>Level</u>	<u>Dimension</u>	<u>Indicator</u>	<u>Summary</u>
Macro/ Institutional	School Structure	Policies Community Involvement School Initiatives Professional Development	The framework considers the individuals, both internal and external to the institution, as well as the processes and formations in the school system that produce exclusion and inequity.
Micro/Personal	Teacher Identity	Attitudes Beliefs Personal Narratives	The framework considers the personal narratives of teachers, as well as their beliefs and attitudes.
Meso/Instructional	Practices	Culturally Responsive Pedagogy	The framework considers the culturally responsive pedagogy and practices of teachers, which include recognizing, respecting, and restructuring instruction to be inclusive of minoritized students' identities.

In accordance with Fullan's (2009) tri-level model, any of the levels of the model (macro/institutional, micro/personal, or meso/instructional) may be the focus of initial school reform, but efforts to implement an equitably and socially just education system will not be sustained unless all three levels are actively involved and engaged in cultivating and nurturing an equitable school culture (Barber & Fullan, 2004; Fullan, 2009). The research questions, literature review, and interview protocol are tightly coupled to the conceptual framework. Subsequent findings and discussion are also organized according to these three dimensions.

Significance of the Study

As diversity increases in classrooms across Ontario, statistical data have revealed that gaps continue to persist for students who occupy various identity categories, some of which include

race, ethnicity, language, social class, religion, and sexual orientation. In order to address these gaps and ensure that all students achieve their full potential, more work needs to be done to support and prepare teachers to address issues of diversity in their classrooms. Accordingly, this study extends our knowledge about the beliefs, practices, and challenges faced by teachers as they deal with issues of diversity in socio-economically, culturally, racially, and linguistically diverse urban settings. Furthermore, the study provides an overview of the types of professional development (PD) emerging in the field, as well as a description of the types of PD that could be useful in the future to better support teachers in addressing issues of diversity.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature review has been organized according to the three dimensions of the conceptual framework: school structures, teacher identity, and educational practices. Most of the literature surrounding equity in education focuses on issues of race; hence, despite this study focusing on a broader range of equity issues, the literature review utilizes empirical evidence on race.

School Structures

Policies

Educational policy refers to a governing set of principles, rules, and regulations that “direct and govern schools, higher education institutions, and other organizations, programs, and initiatives that consciously promote learning” (Donmoyer, 2010, p. 259). This section provides an overview of some of MOE’s policies and initiatives that were in place prior to the implementation of the *Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy* (MOE, 2009a), as well as giving a detailed overview of the strategy and supporting literature.

Ministry Policies. In recent decades, the MOE enacted numerous policies in an effort to address minoritized student underachievement and drop-out rates. In 1993, the MOE issued the document *Antiracism and Ethnocultural Equity in School Boards: Guidelines for Development and Implementation*, which had four core objectives:

- (a) to articulate clearly the board’s commitment to principles of antiracism and equity in all existing and new board policies, guidelines, operations, and practices;
- (b) to eliminate racial and ethnocultural biases in board policies, guidelines, and day-to-day practices;

(c) to establish a mechanism for measuring progress towards antiracism and ethnocultural equity; and

(d) to develop clear criteria for French-language boards and sections to be used by their admissions committees. (MOE, 1993, p. 12)

However, in the summer of 1995, within days of winning the provincial election, the Progressive Conservative Party, under the leadership of Mike Harris, started to strongly criticize antiracist education and began to formally disassemble years of equity work (McCaskell, 2005).

Employment equity legislation was disbanded, as was the MOE's antiracism and ethnocultural equity branch (Klassen & Cosgrave, 2002). The anti-racism policy, while never formally revoked, was never fully implemented, assessed, or monitored, despite the policy stipulating that school boards submit annual reports (Carr, 2008). Operating more as a discretionary rather than mandatory document, the policy remained stagnant, and it became difficult to assess what the memorandum had accomplished in practice (Carr, 2008).

Nearly 15 years later, the MOE, with a Liberal government, released its *Realizing the Promise of Diversity: Ontario's Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy* on April 6th 2009 in an effort to acknowledge and address the institutional barriers and factors that hinder the academic achievement of minoritized students (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2009a). In order to achieve equity and inclusive education in Ontario schools, the document outlines the following three goals:

1. Shared and committed leadership by the Ministry, school boards, and schools will play a critical role in eliminating discrimination through the identification and removal of

bias and barriers. Achieving equity is a shared responsibility; establishing an equitable and inclusive education system requires commitment from all education partners.

2. Equity and inclusive education policies and practices will support positive learning environments so that all students feel engaged in and empowered by what they are learning, supported by the teachers and staff from whom they are learning, and welcome in the environment in which they are learning. Students, teachers, and staff learn and work in an environment that is respectful, supportive, and welcoming to all.
3. Accountability and transparency will be demonstrated through the use of clear measures of success (based on established indicators) and through communication to the public of our progress towards achieving equity for all students. Accountability is necessary to maintain and enhance public confidence in the education system. (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2009a, p. 12)

To execute these goals, the document outlines action items to be phased in, initially over a four-year period from 2008 to 2012 (later extended to 2013). Action items are organized into a four-year implementation plan spanning from 2008 to 2012, which are then further broken down into stakeholder categories outlining specific directives for the Ontario Ministry of Education, school boards, and schools. The Ministry undertakes various actions on an ongoing basis, while individual school boards and schools are responsible for the yearly action items as outlined in the policy (MOE, 2009a).

Concurrently released was the document, *Equity and Inclusive Education in Ontario Schools: Guidelines for Policy Development and Implementation* (MOE, 2009b). The guidelines provide practical strategies, advice, and templates that boards can utilize to inform the process.

The document is broken down into numerous sections: (a) information about the legislative and policy context and the historical context for the guidelines; (b) an overview of Ministry expectations with regard to the policy development and implementation process; (c) a section on implementation outlining steps to be taken at the board and school levels; (d) a section on monitoring and reporting that identifies potential indicators; (e) a variety of practical and self-reflective tools and templates a board can use to review and/or develop, implement, monitor, and communicate its policy and progress; (f) additional resources to which a board can refer in policy development and implementation; and (g) a section on policy development setting out a process and framework for developing an equity and inclusive education policy, including expanded objectives for each year of implementation and descriptions of the eight areas of focus outlined in PPM No. 119.

As a policy that has earned national and international attention for winning the policy award from the Canadian Race Relations Foundation, the provincial government has taken a step in the right direction, but it remains unknown if this policy has been translated into effective equity praxis and moved beyond “abstract idealism indicated in the ‘shoulds’ ubiquitous in education” (Solomon & Levine-Rasky, 2003, p. 5).

Applying equity and inclusive education policies. Educational policies that are not effectively implemented often remain symbolic rather than instrumental. Solomon and Levine-Rasky (2003) designed a large-scale mixed-methods study with over 1000 educators in five urban centres from the provinces of British Columbia, Manitoba, Nova Scotia, and Ontario to explore the implementation of equity policies in different provincial contexts. Data were not disaggregated; therefore, empirical findings specific to Ontario, which could have informed the

conceptual framework, interview protocol, and deductive data analysis of this study, were not available. Despite the existence of formal school district policies on equity and the high presence of racial diversity within the selected school sites, many educators had not embraced equity and diversity education. Many participants reported being unaware of the policies within their schools, or expressed feelings of discomfort when discussing issues of race or educational inequality, leading Solomon and Levin-Rasky to argue that “equity policies sometimes elicit silence rather than discussion” (p. 42). Solomon and Levin-Rasky postulated that the ineffectiveness of professional development initiatives could be one of the factors contributing to teachers’ lack of awareness or resistance to equitable and inclusive education reform initiatives. Solomon and Levin-Rasky contended that accommodation had been piecemeal and “an observer of Canadian teachers’ classroom practices would discover a generally unsystematic, serendipitous implementation of equity education” (p. 52). A significant pattern that emerged from the data demonstrated that teachers relied on students’ initiation of issues related to equity; these participants would only implement equitable and inclusive practices when students randomly brought up related issues. Another theme that materialized concerned the accommodation and representation of different cultures in traditional schools. Anecdotal data revealed that teachers typically employed non-Western cultural symbols, such as a holiday ritual or dance. The authors speculated that this approach to equitable and inclusive education was static and additive in nature, creating one-dimensional representations of diversity that concealed the deeper issues of oppression and limit cultural understandings to food, clothing, games, and dance. This research exhibited that, despite mandated school-level equity policy documents, not all teachers had adopted the practices and principles of equitable and inclusive education.

Building upon Solomon and Levine-Rasky's (2003) research, Jacquet (2008) explored the impact of changing student demographics in British Columbia by examining 38 elementary school teachers' and administrators' beliefs about ethnocultural diversity in their schools. Many participants attributed the profile of their school's diversity to the presence of minoritized groups, not citing other identity categories such as gender, religion, or sexual orientation. Participants in all the programs demonstrated a limited knowledge of resources designed to specifically support the implementation of equitable and inclusive practices, which led Jacquet to argue that "teachers are largely left to their own personal resources and initiatives to face the challenges [of diversity]" (p. 72). When asked about the types of supports they utilized to manage ethnocultural diversity in their classrooms and schools, most of the participants reported that they relied on personal values and experiences, such as "travel, interest in other cultures, and the experience of immigrating or being a member of a visible minority themselves" (p. 68). Responses from the third interview question concerning participants' knowledge of diversity policies indicated that teachers from all three programs demonstrated a limited knowledge of policies. Although being limited in scope to BC, findings from this research provide additional empirical evidence to support Solomon and Levine-Rasky's (2003) data, whereby both studies reported an overall lack of awareness concerning policy documents, as well as inadequate professional training on issues related to diversity. My study does not specifically examine the MOE's (2009a) *Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy* in a comprehensive way; rather, like these two studies, it briefly assesses the extent to which teachers are aware of the policy, before focusing predominantly on how much issues of equity and diversity are included and addressed in these teachers' instructional practices when working with minoritized groups.

The literature on Ontario's *Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy* is sparse, especially concerning policy implementation; little to no research has been conducted to ascertain whether or not inclusive strategies are actually being implemented at the school and classroom levels (or whether the policy has increased these efforts across school communities). As such, more research is needed to explore the extent to which the policy implementation has occurred on the front lines.

School Initiatives and Community Outreach

The term school community refers to the various individuals, community outreach groups, businesses, and institutions that are invested in the overall vitality of a school (Maslowski, 2006; Smey-Richman, 1991). The following section provides an overview of research reporting on school initiatives and programs within diversified classrooms.

The hallmark of a thriving equitable and inclusive education system is collaboration, which requires administrative support and meaningful cooperation amongst educators, student leadership, and strong community-partnerships (Fullan, 2009). Addressing the heterogeneity of school communities involves more than simply acknowledging difference and requires moving beyond superficial discourses proclaiming to value and embrace diversity. If the goal is to cultivate and nurture an equitable and inclusive education system, wherein all voices are spoken and heard within the school culture, acknowledgment must move into concrete and comprehensive action. Dei (2005) argues that, to address the disengagement of minoritized students within the education system, schools and local communities can work in partnership to create alternative educational outlets that can help develop a more inclusive learning space. As an example, Dei (2005) describes the Mentors Program in Toronto offered by the Community

Initiatives for Student Success in partnership with the Toronto District School Board, George Brown College, and other community organizations. The program is designed to provide a space for academic counselling and support for elementary students who have been suspended.

Furthermore, Dei argues that innovative educational programs for adults in the community can be quite beneficial, such as the Regent Park Learning Exchange, which is a partnership among the University of Toronto, the Toronto Community Housing Corporation, and the Regent Park Community Organization. The program provides courses on globalization, world politics, and issues of diversity and equity in the labour force. Many of the participants are community-based students who were former school dropouts and foreign-trained professionals who were trying to secure professional positions or gain access to postsecondary institutions. Other educational practices named for addressing difference and diversity included: supportive networks with student-led initiatives, promoting religious accommodations, and community outreach, comprised of resource centres, after-school programs for culture and heritage training, community forums, and workshops, all centered on issues of race, difference, power, and oppression (Dei, 2005). Equitable and inclusive practices must be embraced within the core of the school community, but they must also percolate down through the hallways, into the schoolyards, out into the streets, and into the homes of community members in order to create a shared community-based vision of education. The current study aimed to examine the landscape of school initiatives and community outreach programs that have been operationalized within the participants' school communities, as well as whether or not participants found these initiatives beneficial to creating an equitable and inclusive school community.

Professional Development

While governmental action in the form of policy implementation is central to creating an equitable and inclusive education system, PD designed to improve educators' cultural competency and culturally responsive strategies is necessary for policy initiatives to be implemented within the curriculum. Specifically examining the effectiveness of a professional development initiative, Aujla-Bhullar (2011) conducted a study as a follow-up to a PD day organized at an elementary school in Calgary, wherein the majority of the student population identified as visible minorities and the composition of the teaching staff was predominantly White. Aujla-Bhullar's research sought to explore whether or not the PD initiative entitled "Deconstructing Diversity" had assisted participants in developing an understanding of diversity issues, as well as to understand the impact of the PD initiative on teachers' and staff's relationships within diverse communities. Participants (N=8) were recruited through convenience sampling and included educators, educational assistants, and administrators, all of whom participated in the PD. Following the one-week timeframe for the completion of the open-ended questionnaire, only seven of the eight distributed questionnaires were received. The open-ended questionnaire data indicated a strong need for additional PD initiatives around diversity and community knowledge, as well as an increase in time for any future PD sessions. The most noteworthy finding in this study revealed that many participants remained silent out of discomfort, or fear of potentially disrupting the positive learning environment. Based on these findings, Aujla-Bhullar hypothesized that the concept of silence becomes especially problematic as certain thoughts or feelings are concealed, which increases anxiety on how to address the complex issues of diversity, racism, and discrimination. However, in her claims, it is unclear

where these findings emanated from as she did not collect a sufficient number of open-ended questionnaires (N=7) to substantiate her assertions. Furthermore, Aujla-Bhullar did not include information about testing the questionnaire for validity. Despite these methodological shortcomings, the concept of silence, evoked by many participants in the Aujla-Bhullar study, was also explored in this research.

Schniedewind (2005) employed a parallel approach in examining the racial awareness of five teachers from the mid-Hudson area of New York who participated in a 30-hour professional development program in diversity education, wherein teachers examined their own experiences with various forms of discrimination and investigated ways in which bias exists in schools. Teachers who took the course and participated in follow-up sessions were invited to partake in two focus group discussions. Using transcripts of group discussions, the study documented the teachers as they reflected on the development of their racial consciousness throughout the PD program (referred to as cultural competence in this study), and its implications for their practice with diverse groups.

The PD program, participants reported, had enabled them to build and extend their cultural competence, which later assisted them in supporting students of colour, as well as empowered them to challenge stereotypes and institutional racism within their classrooms and school communities (Schniedewind, 2005). While findings indicated that the PD workshop was successful for the sample population, participant recruitment was slightly problematic as the teachers who chose to partake in this PD program might have already had a heightened interest in cultivating or improving their cultural competency. In addition, Schniedewind did not disclose the total number of attendees of the PD program, making it unclear as to whether or not the

positive experiences expressed by the participants (N=5) were representative of all those who attended. On another note, a 30-hour professional development program could be quite resource-intensive and costly, which has implications for going to scale in a large education system. The study does provide empirical evidence to suggest that PD can help teachers develop and refine their cultural competency, which could enable them to work more effectively with minoritized groups and could alleviate any of the discomforting feelings when they are discussing issues of diversity, inequality, and discrimination. Accordingly, professional development is included in my study due to the growing body of research, such as Schniedewind's study, that highlights the importance of teaching and learning for equitable and inclusive education.

Lawrence (2005) examined teachers' (N= 7) perceptions of the influence of school community on the implementation of equitable practices learned through a professional development session administered to teachers from school districts in the Northeast of the United States. Through semi-structured interviews that explored the participants' prior teaching experiences, knowledge learned through PD sessions, current practices in the classroom, and interactions with parents, administrators, and colleagues, Lawrence (2005) discovered that the participants felt they required more than professional development to sustain their commitment to equitable classroom practice. The participants also contemplated their new learning as it related to value and support from staff, administration, and personnel. The findings suggested the collegial support of the school community was imperative to the long-term success of the teachers' equitable practice and had a profound effect on setting the tone for school culture and climate (Lawrence, 2005). The educators involved in this PD session enlisted voluntarily and, therefore, their views or opinions may not be representative of a wider teaching corps as it is

likely that they had a vested interest in equitable and antiracist issues. Despite these critiques, the findings highlight the importance of the school community and the pivotal role it plays in supporting teachers' endeavours to cultivate more equitable and just school communities. In the same vein as Aujla-Bhullar's (2011) research, school-wide collegial support from principals, administration, and colleagues was reported as playing an important role in creating school communities that could advance teachers' cultural competency. My study examined the types of PD that had been made available for teachers to assist them in the enactment of the equity policy, as well as to explore whether or not they found this training useful.

Teacher Identity

The following section contains two sub-sections. First, teacher identity, which refers to "how teachers define themselves to themselves and to others" (Laskey, 2005, p. 901), is considered in the context of cultural competence. Second, teacher identity is explored in relation to the challenges faced by educators who are currently working in diverse classrooms.

Cultural Competence

Minoritized students continue to have higher dropout rates than non-minoritized groups, as well as continue to underachieve in relation to their East Asian, Southeast Asian, and White counterparts (TDSB, 2011). In an effort to better prepare teachers to support the identities and needs of minoritized students, providing teachers with opportunities to develop cultural competency may be one viable solution. A culturally competent educator has an awareness and respect for the values, beliefs, traditions, and customs of students' cultural identities. Culturally competent teachers are aware of their own biases and understand the influence these assumptions can have on their interactions with students and consider all these factors in all facets of their

pedagogy and classroom practice (Ladson-Billings, 2001). Gay (2010) argues that increasing cultural competence can help educators develop the knowledge, confidence, and competence needed to implement culturally responsive strategies. According to Dillard (1997), a culturally competent teacher is able to understand, relate to, and respond to the needs of diverse student identities by:

learning how to live and teach through diversity, including the inevitable struggles and contradictions. [Becoming a culturally literate teacher], in relation to diversity, means doing more than writing and reading about culture—it means learning to be diverse in perspectives, skills, and knowledges. (p. 94)

More specifically, Ladson-Billings (2001) states that cultural competence is present in classrooms when: “(a) the teacher understands culture and its role in education; (b) the teacher takes responsibility for learning about students’ culture and community; (c) the teacher uses student culture as a basis for learning; and (d) the teacher promotes a flexible use of students’ local and global culture” (p. 98). As an urban centre that has been characterized as “hyper-diverse” (Doucerain, Dere & Ryder, 2013; Kirmayer, 2013) in terms of a variety of diversity markers including ethnicity, language, class, religion, and sexual orientation, Toronto’s educational climate posits the question: is it actually feasible for a teacher working in diverse urban contexts to be culturally competent? Furthermore, the literature surrounding cultural competency emphasizes the importance of understanding the perspectives of members of different cultural groups, which in effect boils culture down to a superficial list of items that can be ‘known’, running the risk of perpetuating stereotypes about individual differences or presenting tokenistic representations of difference. Culture is a much more diffuse and complex

concept than is often represented in the literature or by the argument for which cultural competence implicitly advocates.

Natesan, Webb-Hasen, Carter, and Walter (2011) designed a parallel mixed method study to explore teachers' cultural competency and beliefs about their African American students and the effects this perception might have on their students' academic achievement. Using a 46-item cultural awareness and beliefs inventory (CABI) and three open-ended questions for qualitative analysis, the study measured the perceptions of 1,253 urban educators teaching in a school district located in the southeastern part of the United States. The researchers' data aligned with Ladson-Billings' (1994) notion of dyconscious racism, which is a colour blinding process that becomes an uncritical habit of mind that justifies inequity by accepting the existing order of things. Natesan et al. (2011) argued that the participants' responses consistently revealed significant resistance to and misunderstanding of the racial realities of their school district. The majority of the responses to the questions on race, ethnicity, and socio-economic status (SES) indicated perceptions grounded in the cultural deficit perspective, which is the perspective that attributes students' underachievement to their cultural backgrounds (Natesan et al., 2011). Many Euro-American participants believed that race was not an issue that needed to be addressed at all. Despite this research being specific to the United States, the findings revealed a lack of cultural competency amongst some of the participants, whereby some teachers articulated colour blind philosophies.

This notion of colour blindness, as described by Natesan et al. (2011), was also reported in an Ontario study. Gérin-Lajoie (2008) conducted 100 interviews with Anglophone and Francophone teachers and principals to explore their perceptions of student diversity within

Catholic, English language, and French language schools in the GTA. Both teachers and principals felt they lacked adequate training to support the development of their cultural competence and knowledge-base when working with culturally diverse students (Gérin-Lajoie, 2008). Furthermore, consistent with the large body of literature surrounding colour blindness and the discourses of difference (e.g., Harper, 1997; Levine-Rasky, 2002; Sleeter, 2004; Solomon & Levine-Rasky, 2003), Gérin-Lajoie found that some participants reported they did not see race, ethnicity, or language differences amongst their students; rather they viewed all students as being the same. Gérin-Lajoie argues that, when teachers and principals consider all students equal, they “do not question how power comes into play in society and, most importantly, in the school setting” (p. 123). It is, therefore, according to Gérin-Lajoie, the role of an education system to move away from discourses of colour blindness and beyond simple recognition of differences to specifically address “how educational policies and practices contribute significantly to the reproduction of all sorts of inequalities, where race is central” (p. 112). The lack of adequate training to support teachers in the development of their culture competency was a noteworthy finding from this research. This finding has informed the present study as it was important to explore whether or not teachers believed they had received adequate training to develop the practices or skills necessary to work more effectively with minoritized students.

In a similar fashion, Knight (2008) investigated the perceptions and beliefs of 73 White teachers from the GTA by using research findings specific to the GTA from project four of the *Current Trends in the Evolution of School Personnel in Canadian Elementary and Secondary Schools* five-year national project that began in 2002. More specifically, Knight utilized data obtained from the second interview, which explicitly focused on ethnocultural diversity and

analysed 73 of the 87 interviews conducted, as these 73 participants represented White teaching personnel. In addition, the researcher utilized only the first three questions of the second interview data, as the fourth question fell outside the scope of the research purpose. The three questions analyzed were: 1) Does ethnocultural diversity exist in your class/school? 2) On a daily basis, what helps you deal with the ethnocultural diversity of your school or classroom? 3) Could you talk about a recent event in which you adapted your practice due to ethnocultural diversity? (Knight, 2008, p. 85). Knight's research findings directly support the data previously outlined in Gérin-Lajoie's (2008) and Natesan et al.'s (2011) research, whereby the studies reported colour blindness as a dominant teacher ideology. In addition to discourses of colour blindness, which Knight terms as the myth of racelessness and sameness, some participants felt that diversity was not an issue that needed to be "dealt with" at all since there was no evidence of animosity among groups, which suggests that the participants' belief in the "invisibility of conflict meant that oppression was non-existent" (p. 91). In a similar vein, participants noted that addressing diversity was only necessary during times of conflict, which Knight hypothesizes positions power and oppression as only existing in overt individualistic expressions, as opposed to structural and covert forms. An area of concern within the study was the data collection procedures. Knight relied on data collected from a previous research project that did not examine Whiteness or White privilege; rather, ethno-cultural diversity. It was unclear as to whether or not participants were made aware that their data would be used to examine an altogether different construct that is much more controversial in nature. The present research builds upon other studies cited throughout the literature, wherein the construct of colour blindness is repeatedly

reported as an issue limiting teachers' ability to build their cultural competency, which is a key dimension of the conceptual framework.

In an effort to mitigate discourses of colour blindness and negative cultural perceptions, it is necessary that educators think critically and reflect upon issues of equity, diversity, and inclusion as these issues relate to their own identity and practice, as well as the institutional school structure. Simply reading a policy document that identifies the issues will not suffice, which is why this research study sought to tease out the issues, challenges, and complexities associated with teaching diverse classrooms, some of which might include a lack of professional development, as well as teachers' colour blind ideologies and their lack of cultural competence. Even if teachers are aware of policy documents, this awareness does not guarantee that policy directives will be translated into daily classroom practices (Cooper et al., 2009). Subsequently, this study examined teachers' awareness of the *Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy* (MOE, 2009a), as well as explored how their conceptions of equity and diversity influenced their practice within diverse classrooms in the GTA.

Specifically researching the application of Ontario's *Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy* (MOE, 2009a), Jones (2014) conducted a qualitative study with four Ontario elementary teachers in a low-diversity school environment who participated in semi-structured interviews to examine their decisions when teaching about equity. As Jones did not provide a definition or clear explanation of the term "low-diversity schools," it was unclear as to whether the term referred exclusively to racial, cultural, or ethnic diversity, or if other identity categories were also included in her definition. As result of this ambiguity, the inclusion criterion for the selection of the research sites and participants was vague. From what I could deduce, Jones selected the

research sites and participants based on those who reported or perceived the diversity of their student population to be low. Despite these methodological ambiguities and small sample size, results provided some tentative evidence that the term diversity was generally conceptualized solely in terms of ethno-cultural diversity. However, once the researcher presented the participants with a written copy of the MOE's (2009a) definition for diversity, the participants tended to move their discussion focus to special education diversity or to intellectual diversity in general. As a result of the evidence detailing the participants' altered definitions in response to the MOE's description, participants were not provided with a copy of the policy document during the interview session of the current study as one objective of this research was to elicit and uncover the participants' insights and underlying beliefs about the terms equity, diversity, and inclusion. As the teachers in Jones' (2014) study did not encounter specific visible differences in their school communities, these teachers taught about equity when they saw a student need. While this study is not generalizable at all with a sample size of four participants specific to only rural communities, these findings are useful for the present study as there is not only very little research specific to the *Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy*, but also studies specific to Ontario that explore issues of equity, diversity, and inclusion are sparse.

Challenges

Issues of racial and cultural diversity pose particular challenges for educators that may hinder their ability to enact practices that align with their own professional beliefs. Parhar and Sensoy (2011) conducted a study with teachers (N=10) from Vancouver to examine how the participants described their culturally responsive pedagogy and its challenges. Using purposive snowball sampling, three professors who worked in the areas of equity and education were asked

to nominate teachers they knew from the Metro Vancouver area whose classroom praxis aligned with antiracist education, critical multiculturalism, and culturally responsive pedagogy. Accordingly, three teacher participants' names repeatedly emerged. These three teachers then nominated other educators with whom they had worked and who they believed practiced culturally responsive pedagogy. Following the one-hour interviews, analysis of the data revealed significant constraints that added complexity to the participants' agency to enact culturally responsive pedagogies. Although participants articulated their commitment to supporting students who were culturally diverse, many of them described institutional constraints, such as a lack of time, the hierarchical nature of school decision-making for community-based action, lack of resources, the imposition of standardized tests that restrict creative and critical thought, and a lack of ongoing and sustained opportunities for professional development (Parhar & Sensory, 2011). In addition to these structural barriers, the participants reported interactions with families, the supremacy of dominant ideologies especially within the standard curricula, and the individualistic and competitive nature of mainstream assessment practices to be particularly challenging. The results from this study reveal that the vast majority of challenges associated with culturally responsive pedagogy are institutional in nature, which raises questions as to how much teachers can truly exercise pedagogical agency to support the success of culturally diverse students. These data documenting the structural constraints cited by participants provide further support for my conceptual framework, which also emphasizes institutional practices within the school structures, such as those described by Parhar and Sensory (2011).

In an effort to better support and prepare teachers to implement equity and inclusive strategies and culturally responsive pedagogy, Lopez (2013) conducted a case study with two

White educators to examine tensions these teachers experienced with equity and diversity and the knowledge base necessary for a proposed collaborative mentorship. The study was conducted in a large multi-ethnic and multi-racial secondary school with a diverse student population in southern Ontario. In comparison to the institutional challenges outlined in Parhar and Sensoy's (2011) study, data from the semi-structured interviews, reflective journal entries, and mentoring dialogue reported intrapersonal challenges, wherein issues of race, racism, Whiteness, and the professional and emotional risks of embedding equity and diversity in teaching practice emerged as areas of tension for the participants. During the collaborative mentorship process of the study, both participants found it challenging to decode their own biases. However, Lopez argues that collaborative mentoring can support teachers to admit to bias, accept responsibilities for racial disparities, and make a commitment to equity and diversity; a commitment that differs "from 'celebrating diversity', 'valuing diversity', or other forms of 'comfort equity' that permeate the existing discourse on diversity" (Lopez, 2013, p. 307). While the sample size is small, the research does describe some of the challenges teachers experience when teaching and learning for equity and inclusive education in diverse classrooms.

As the review of literature demonstrated, teachers need to be cognizant of their own biases, subjectivities, and prejudices in order to deliver a curriculum that listens to and provides a forum for both minoritized and non-minoritized students to engage with and critically challenge social inequities both inside and outside the walls of their school communities.

However, much of the research indicates that educators are largely left to their own devices; many of these educators cite a lack of professional development necessary to enact equitable and inclusive practices. Accordingly, educators must be given an opportunity to engage

in professional development (PD) designed to improve their cultural competence, decode their own biases and perceptions, and refine their instructional practices to meet the diverse needs of their students.

Educational Practices

The following section explores educational practices, which refers to teachers' professional practices in the context of culturally responsive pedagogy.

Culturally Responsive Teaching

Given the current social trends and demographic changes in Canada, the need for increased student engagement and educational success for all learners has become a key priority for policy makers and school systems across the country. However, as the research has demonstrated, many educators confront unique challenges when working with diverse student populations, such as discourses of colour blindness, a lack of cultural understanding or knowledge concerning the history of oppressed groups, insufficient instructional resources, and emotional and professional risks. Culturally responsive pedagogy can mitigate some of these issues, which Gay (2010) describes as a style of teaching anchored “in caring, commitment, cultural competence, and an understanding that school performance takes place within a complex sociocultural ecology and is filtered through cultural screens both students and teachers bring to the classroom” (p. 54). Through pedagogical self-awareness and self-reflection, culturally responsive teachers decode their own biases and challenge their perceptions by acquiring more “knowledge about ethnic and cultural diversity, become more conscious of themselves as cultural beings and cultural actors in the process of teaching, and engaging in courageous conversations about issues fundamental to social justice in society and educational equity” (Gay, 2010, p. 5). For instance, Lopez (2011)

designed a case study of one teacher's agency and activism in an English classroom at Millridge Secondary School, a multi-ethnic and multi-racial school in southern Ontario. The participant had critically re-conceptualized her Grade 12 Writer's Craft class to build cross-cultural understandings and increase student engagement through culturally responsive pedagogy and critical literacy. While there are few empirical studies of culturally responsive teaching practices with diverse student populations specific to Ontario educators, Lopez's research provides a rich example of how culturally responsive pedagogy is operationalized in a diversified class community through challenging and deconstructing curricula, centering the voices and lived experiences of students, cultivating nurturing learning environments, and raising students' critical consciousness. These claims were made on the analysis of one interview; such a limited sample is not generalizable. However, Lopez's findings are pertinent to the present study, as it too focused on the practices of Ontario educators who work with diverse student populations to explore whether or not they are adapting their practice through culturally responsive pedagogy.

Morrison, Robbins, and Rose (2008) utilized six online databases to identify peer-reviewed journals published on culturally responsive pedagogy. The majority of the studies were conducted in the United States, but the accessed studies also included research from classrooms in Canada. Paralleling the culturally responsive teaching strategies described in Lopez's (2011) case study, the researchers found the following eight components of culturally responsive pedagogy to be dominant themes through the literature: (a) reshaping the curriculum; (b) cultural competence; (c) building on students' funds of knowledge; (d) encouraging relationships between schools and communities; (e) critical consciousness; (f) engaging students in social justice work; (g) making explicit the power dynamics of mainstream society, and (h) power

sharing in the classroom (Morrison, Robbin, & Rose, 2008). Data from this large-scale empirical review provide a relevant list of categories to explore how much teachers are using these strategies when working with diversified student populations in the present study. Furthermore, the eight components described by Morrison and colleagues (2008) was also used during data analysis to code participants' culturally responsive practices.

Summary of the Literature

An overview of relevant literature on equity and inclusive education demonstrates that equity education encompasses a wide variety of pedagogies, some of which include culturally responsive practices, antiracist approaches to education, and social justice education. The vast majority of the literature focuses on high-diversity school communities, wherein educators cited numerous difficulties and challenges encountered when working with students in such contexts. Three central threads running throughout the literature revealed the issue of silence in relation to dialogues surrounding issues of social inequities, as well as the issue of colour blindness to be a dominant teacher ideology and tokenistic approaches to the inclusion of student diversity. The findings of relevant studies also suggest an overall lack of professional development opportunities and resources to support teachers in teaching and learning for equitable and inclusive education. One of the most prominent themes that arose across the review of studies was teachers' conceptions of diversity in relation to ethnocultural diversity rather than other identity categories such as gender, religion, and sexual orientation, among others. Furthermore, the review of relevant literature suggests that, to address the achievement disparities for minoritized groups, requires the support of not only Ministry policies, but also school initiatives and professional development opportunities for educators to learn and adapt culturally

responsive pedagogical practices. As the majority of the literature was conducted prior to the implementation of *Ontario's Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy* (MOE, 2009a), the review draws attention for the need to further explore whether or not the dominant themes cited throughout the literature have remained consistent with trends in Ontario classrooms and schools.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

Rationale for Research Design

This study used a qualitative research design. Data were collected through semi-structured open-ended interviews with participants (N=6) who were currently working in diverse urban settings in the Greater Toronto Area (GTA). Qualitative research “is the search for stories to tell” (Grady, 1998, p. 33). Eisner (1998) argues that a qualitative study “enables the researcher to say what cannot be said through numbers” (p. 187) and empowers the research to “get below the surface to that most enigmatic aspect of the human condition; the construction of meaning” (p. 15). This research, which explored how teachers’ identities impacted their practice in diverse urban contexts, lends itself to a qualitative methodology.

Data Collection

The study involved the participation of educators working in the Greater Toronto Area (GTA). The research site was carefully selected based on statistical data reported by Statistics Canada. Across the GTA, visible minorities represent approximately 47% of Toronto’s total population, and they are projected to comprise between 51 to 54% of the population by 2017. As the demographic landscape of the GTA shifts, so too does the richness and complexity of student diversity increase within the classroom, which presents unique opportunities and challenges for educators working in these school communities. Because of my interest in how teachers are addressing equity issues in diverse settings, the GTA was a suitable research site for the purpose and design of the research.

Sampling

Purposeful snowball sampling was the primary strategy used to select participants (Patton, 2002). Snowball sampling is an approach for locating information-rich key informants, wherein a few potential respondents are contacted and asked whether or not they know of anyone else with the necessary characteristics that the researcher is seeking (Patton, 2002). An initial recruitment (Appendix B) email was sent through a university's Faculty of Education listserv in a mid-sized, southeastern city in Ontario. The email invitation sent through the listserv to prospective participants contained information about the purpose of the study, time commitments, data collection procedures, and the overall benefits. The email invitation also included two attachments: the Letter of Information (Appendix C) and the Consent Form (Appendix D). In order to participate in the research, recipients had to meet the following inclusion criteria: (a) the participant had to be an in-service full-time teacher in the Greater Toronto Area (GTA), and (b) the participant had to self-identify as working in a diverse classroom. The recruitment email asked not only if the recipient wished to partake in the research, but also if s/he knew of any teachers who fit the inclusion criteria and might be interested in participating in the research. If initial recipients had suggestions for potential participants, they were encouraged to forward the invitation directly. Participants were given two weeks to respond to the recruitment email.

Changes to the Inclusion Criteria. Following the two-week response period, the participant pool was expanded due to the low number of teachers who responded to the original recruitment email. In an effort to secure a greater number of potential participants, the inclusion criteria were expanded to include educators who were not employed with full-time contracts; instead, it was widened to include those who occupied a variety of teaching roles within the

GTA. Full-time teachers (n=4), an occasional teacher (n=1), and a teaching and learning coach (n=1) volunteered to participate in the study. All six participants self-identified as having fulfilled the inclusion criteria and willingly participated in the research by providing informed consent (Appendix D). Appropriate precautions were taken to protect the confidentiality of participants. Subsequently, participants were given the following pseudonyms: Vanya, Rosemary, Daniel, Adam, Richard, and Gregory. As a result of adapting the inclusion criteria and due to the number of participants, the interviews do not illustrate a composite representative sample. While this sampling may limit generalizability, it was not a specific goal to achieve representation; rather, the focus was to explore the issues educators face as they grapple with questions of equity while navigating increasingly diverse classrooms and school communities. Table 3 provides an overview of the participants' attributes, including their roles, years of experiences, gender, and the minoritized category they occupy in order to provide a more holistic representation of the participants and the various locations they occupy and speak from.

Table 3

Data Table of Attributes for Participants

<u>Name</u>	<u>Role</u>	<u>Years of Experience</u>	<u>Gender</u>	<u>Self-Identification</u>
Vanya	Full-time Teacher	20	Female	White/Female
Rosemary	Full-time Teacher	15	Female	Black/ Female
Daniel	Occasional Teacher	3	Male	Black
Adam	Full-time Teacher	15	Male	Asian
Richard	Teacher and Learning Coach	6	Male	Black
Gregory	Full-time Teacher	25	Male	White/Homosexual

Ethical Considerations

As per Tri-Council policy, this research attained ethical clearance from Queen's University's General Research Ethics Board (GREB) (Appendix F). Each participant was required to read and sign the consent form, which was reviewed and discussed with participants prior to data collection. Before beginning the interview, I also summarized the research topic and reviewed the structure of the interview to ensure participants had a full understanding of the purpose of the study. The participants were advised of the interview process and all consented to having their interviews audio recorded. I reassured each participant that her or his name, school, and any other identificatory information would remain confidential, with anonymity assured insofar as possible through the use of pseudonyms for names or initiatives with which the participants were involved. Participants were continuously informed that should they wish to withdraw from the study at any point in the process to contact either the principal investigator (me) or the supervisor, and their data would be destroyed. Participants also received an electronic copy of their individual transcribed interview allowing for them to clarify any comments to ensure accuracy.

Data from the study will be stored on an encrypted, password-protected external hard-drive for a period of five years. Only the principal investigator and my supervisor had access to the data in their raw form. After the five-year period, the hard drive will be entirely formatted, destroying all data contained on it. Any paper copies or consent forms from the study are kept in a locked filing cabinet, to which only I have access. After the five-year period, all paper copies of the data will be shredded by a micro-cut shredder.

Potential Harm. Dialogues centering on equity, race, and diversity may elicit discomforting or negative feelings. However, precautionary steps to minimize such risks were taken. Participants were made aware of their ability to withdraw from the study at any time without consequence. While there were no known physical, psychological, or social risks, I disclosed to participants that it was possible when discussing issues related to equity and diversity that they might experience a minimal level of discomfort. As a means to minimize such risks, a list of support contacts and services was available prior to and during the interview. In addition, participants were reminded periodically throughout the interview process that they were free to withdraw from the study at any time and they could choose to have their data removed without consequence or penalty. Moreover, the Letter of Information described the possibility that interview questions seeking to elicit information about school initiatives and professional development could identify the school board or the participants' specific school site. While school initiatives or professional development are described in subsequent sections, no identifying characteristics are used. When working with practitioners, it is important that they be given the opportunity to discuss specific initiatives that anchor their responses in practice; as such, all the initiatives and professional development were anonymized. Furthermore, due to the multiplicity of equity initiatives occurring across the GTA and the number of school boards, these anonymized initiatives are difficult to identify in relation to a particular school or school board.

Potential Benefits. This study provided participants with an opportunity to voice their opinions about teaching and learning in diversified school communities. Furthermore, participation in this research could be seen as a form of professional development, becoming an

enriching opportunity for the teachers involved to reflect on and discuss their pedagogy, which could assist them in refining their professional practices.

Interviews

Seidman (2012) argues that telling stories, narrating the scripts of experience, is an integral part of the meaning-making process that human beings use to understand themselves and the world around them. At the root of interviewing is a desire to hear others' stories and understand the experiences of other people and the meaning they draw from those experiences. In other words, Chase (2003) contends:

Life stories themselves embody what we need to study: the relation between *this* instance of social action (*this* particular life story) and the social world the narrator shares with others; and the ways in which *this* narrator makes use of cultural resources and struggles with cultural constraints. By analysing the complex process of narration in specific instances, we learn about the kinds of narratives that are possible for certain groups of people, and we learn about the cultural world that makes their particular narratives possible – and problematic – in certain ways. (p. 290)

As the main focus of this inquiry was to invite educators to share their experiential stories about how they negotiated issues of equity in diverse urban school communities, a semi-structured interview guide was used as the primary data collection instrument for this study (Appendix E). The interview guide approach provides the interviewer with basic lines of inquiry to build a conversation around the issues of equity and inclusive education, but still remains flexible to explore and probe concepts that are of particular importance to the participants (Patton, 2002). Subsequently, themes arising from the conceptual framework and cited throughout the literature

were selected in advance to inform the basic structure and content of the interview guide.

However, to build a comprehensive understanding of the intricacies of cultural and race relations in urban school communities through the eyes of educators, a semi-structured approach was used to probe deeper into participants' intentions, beliefs, and values and how they made sense of their experiences (Merriam, 2009; Patton, 2002). Using direct quotations allows the participants to speak for themselves enabling the researcher:

to understand the world from your point of view. I want to know what you know in the way you know it. I want to understand the meaning of your experience, to walk in your shoes, to feel things as you feel them, to explain things as you explain them. Will you become my teacher and help me understand? (Spradley, 1979, p. 34)

Subsequently, conducting interviews enabled me to explore the views of educators by listening to different voices and experiences, which allowed me to gain a diverse insight into how participants interpreted and understood their nuanced experiences with issues of equity and diversity in urban contexts.

Interview Questions. Following an extensive and recursive review of the literature, the process of developing the conceptual framework for this study brought out a number of significant themes and ideas, which provided orientation as to the important factors to discuss with participants during the interview process. The initial interview protocol was tightly and thematically coupled to the conceptual framework, my research questions, and the literature review. Accordingly, the interview questions were divided into seven categories that specifically explored how issues of equity, power, and minoritization manifested themselves at various stakeholder levels: (a) background information; (b) teacher-to-student; (c) student-to-student; (d)

teacher-to-colleague; (e) teacher-to-administrators; (f) teacher-to-community; and (g) professional development. The interview protocol began with background data and then moved to descriptive open-ended questions concerning participants' social identities, as well as their experiences, actions, and practices related to addressing issues of equity in their classrooms and school communities. Subsequent sections of the interview guide focused on drawing out data in relation to equity concerns between students, as well as how these issues materialized themselves between the participants and their colleagues, administrators, and the community. The final section of the interview protocol probed into participants' perceptions of the professional development they had received, including questions endeavouring to draw out information about the types of teacher training they would like to receive in order to work more successfully with minoritized students. While the interview guide provided basic structure for data collection and ensured that the same general topics were covered with each participant, the interview questions remained open-ended to provide participants with the opportunity to elaborate on issues in ways that reflected their own experiences and teaching practices.

Interview Process. A total of six one-hour, in-person, semi-structured interviews was conducted. Before each interview, I conversed amicably with participants as I was setting up for the interview, which I felt provided me with the opportunity to establish a trusting relationship and good rapport with interviewees. While participants had already received copies of the Letter of Information (Appendix C) and Consent Form (Appendix D) with the initial recruitment email, I began each interview by reviewing the details of the research and the structure of the interview. Participants were then invited to review and sign the Consent Form, and were given a copy of the interview questions to use as a guide throughout the interview. Each participant's consent was

given to digitally record the interview. Five participants chose to conduct the interview in their own offices or classrooms within their specified schools, except one participant who opted to host the interview at his home. While most of the interviews were held after school hours, two interviews were conducted during the participants' planning time, which resulted in periodic non-intrusive interruptions. The interview guide structured the general direction of the interviews, but questions were not uniform for all participants. It was important for me to listen vigilantly during the interview process to probe themes or ideas participants expressed that were not necessarily represented in the interview protocol. Before ending the interview, I asked participants if they had anything else they would like to add or clarify, as well as if they felt I had missed something of particular importance.

Reflective Research Journal. Handwritten notes were taken during each interview to highlight key points and issues to return to later in the interview for further elaboration, as well as to aid in the analysis and fill in gaps or non-verbal cues during transcription. Shortly after each interview, I reviewed the written notes I had taken during my conversation with participants and immediately began writing about my experiences and responses to each interview in my research journal. The issue of researcher subjectivity and bias in qualitative studies is a challenge that requires special attention. I was, therefore, attuned to my own biases and the socio-cultural context through which I understood and interpreted the stories of the voices around me. Throughout the research process, there were times when I inevitably formed an opinion about the meaning behind a specific story a participant was recounting, but my research journal provided a good medium for me to problematize and question my perceptions, assumptions, and beliefs.

Data Analysis

Audio-recordings of the interviews were transcribed verbatim into Microsoft Word with accompanying research notes. Each file was labelled with a number assigned to each participant along with the date of the specified interview. Paper copies of the transcribed textual data were filed in folders along with the participants' consent forms, contact information, and filed notes from the interviews. Once transcription of the data was completed, participants received a copy of their individual transcribed interview by e-mail allowing for them to clarify or modify any comments. Participants were given a two-week response period to return the interview transcript with the changes they would like made or to request that their data be removed. Only one participant responded to the email requesting that minor changes be made to the transcript. The data were then entered into and analyzed using NVivo (Version 10, 2012). The analysis involved a deductive and inductive approach. LeCompte and Schensul (1999) argue that a deductive-inductive process can be as simple as “dividing data into piles according to their congruity with the principal concepts” (p. 47) or categories can “be derived from the conceptual and theoretical frames or research questions around which the researcher built the study” (p. 60) before turning to “an examination of the more intuitive ways that results begin to emerge from a mass of less structured data” (p. 46). Thus deductive-inductive approaches to coding begin by initially identifying some broad a priori themes and then move to the inductive process of generating codes through an interpretive analysis of the raw data. This approach enables the researcher to link the more iterative process of inductive reasoning with pre-existing research and theory. In brief, interview transcripts were first deductively analyzed using a coding framework derived from the conceptual framework, research questions, and review of the literature. Inductive

analysis was then used to interpret concepts and themes arising from the raw data that were not represented in the coding framework (Thomas, 2006). More specifically, data analysis involved a four-step process of preparing for initial coding, constructing a visual mind map, applying the coding system, and interpreting data.

Step 1. Preparing for Coding

I began by rereading my literature review and reviewing the structure of my conceptual framework and research questions to ensure that I was familiar with the empirical work and constructs related to my study. I then read through the transcriptions to “develop a sense of the data and to begin the process of making sense of them” (Creswell, 2003, p. 154). Using a colour coding system, I initially coded by hand directly on the transcript using the right-hand margin for writing codes and notes.

Step 2. Constructing a Visual Mind Map

I then broke down and cut up the transcript into small excerpts, placing quotes against the general coding framework, which I had roughly laid out on a table. Post-it notes with code and sub-code labels written on them were then posted on the wall and served as a visual diagram, enabling me to experiment with combinations and different patterns, as well as refine and collapse emergent codes and organize parent and child nodes before entering them into NVivo (Version 10, 2012).

Step 3. Applying the Coding System

Having entered the transcripts into the coding software, I began deductive coding by applying the general categories drawn from the initial coding framework and then revisited each interview excerpt to generate new inductive codes as they emerged from the raw data. I

continued to analyze the emerging categories by comparing them with the codes that had been defined through deductive analysis to establish the relationships between different categories and to refine redundant codes. Once all the data were coded, I reviewed each code and sub-code to reorganize, consolidate, and collapse interview excerpts based on overall patterns, trends, and findings.

Step 4. Interpreting the Data

I then reviewed all coded data and began the process of narrowing down the information from each code and sub-code by selecting a representative sample of salient quotes to provide concrete explanation of what was occurring. From there, thematically organized quotes were placed in a Microsoft Word document and shared with my supervisor who provided feedback, which then informed the final interpretation of the data. Main themes and sub-themes were identified and summarized in a detailed outline, which was used to structure the presentation of my findings and discussion, as recorded in Chapters 4 and 5.

Ensuring Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness refers to the process of establishing the extent to which the results of a research inquiry are an accurate representation of the perspectives of the participants. Put simply, the notion of trustworthiness asks “how can an inquirer persuade his or her audiences that the research findings of an inquiry are worth paying attention to?” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 290). Lincoln and Guba (1985) argue that some of the ways of ensuring the trustworthiness of a qualitative study are through credibility, dependability and confirmability.

Credibility is less dependent on the sample size; rather, it emphasizes the richness of the data gathered and the analytical abilities of the researcher (Patton, 2002). Credibility can be

enhanced through triangulation and through member checking. Triangulation refers to the multiple cross data references that the researcher uses to increase the trustworthiness of the results. In an effort to increase the credibility of the data through triangulation, this research study utilized textual interview data, field notes, and a reflective researcher journal.

Another strategy used for enhancing credibility is member checking, in which participants are asked to corroborate findings. Before beginning data analysis, participants were e-mailed a copy of their interview transcripts. Participants were asked to verify the accuracy of excerpts from their interview and confirm that I had described their experiences in a way that was true to their perspectives and interpretation of meaning.

Two other mechanisms through which a researcher can increase trustworthiness are dependability and confirmability. Lincoln and Guba (1985) describe dependability as the criterion used to evaluate the completeness, accuracy, and quality of data collection and data analysis; whereas they define confirmability as the degree to which the research findings are the product of the quality of the inquiry as opposed to the biases of the researcher. The primary strategy for addressing dependability and confirmability of the findings of a qualitative inquiry is through an audit trail, which is comprised of a detailed record of all procedures, process, and products related to data collection and data analysis. In order to address issues of dependability and confirmability, I established a detailed audit trail for this study. Copies of all material generated from this study including transcribed interviews, field notes, and data analysis were stored in print and electronic format. Given the primary role of the researcher as instrument in qualitative studies, the audit trail also included my reflective journal, which provides a detailed

account of my own positionality in relation to various phases of the research process, as well as my own reactions and assumptions during data collection and analysis.

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

This chapter presents findings from semi-structured interviews with six educators who taught in diverse urban classrooms in the Greater Toronto Area (GTA) in relation to my central research questions: (a) how do school structures hinder or facilitate teachers' ability to work more successfully with minoritized students?; (b) how do teachers' identities influence their interactions with minoritized students?; and (c) how do teachers adapt their pedagogies and classroom practices to respond to diverse student identities within the school community?

Three themes emerged from participants and are grouped according to the institutional, individual, and instructional levels of my conceptual framework: (1) school level issues, such as: a lack of awareness about equity policies; piecemeal approaches to school initiatives and community outreach programs; different types of equity issues occurring in participants' school communities; the need for ongoing professional development; the succession of leadership, and the Eurocentric curriculum; (2) the role of teacher identity and the problems with the relatively homogenous teaching corps, as well as issues of power and privilege; and (3) educational practices: culturally responsive pedagogy. Some practices described include adapting the curriculum to be more inclusive of minoritized identities, as well as developing meaningful and authentic student-teacher relationships. The themes are further divided into sub-themes to allow more focused understanding of the central research questions. However, these themes are not mutually exclusive categories; rather, they are a part of a wider overlapping and interrelated dialogue derived from both the deductive and inductive analysis of participants' narratives.

Themes and sub-themes are elucidated through the voices of the participants as they recounted the opportunities and challenges they encountered when teaching and learning for

equity in minoritized urban school communities. Interview excerpts are employed throughout this chapter to enable participants to speak for themselves, which provides a more authentic depiction of their perspectives. Participants' words, expressions, and stories become the process through which an understanding of their perceptions, underlying beliefs and experiences as urban educators becomes possible (Chase, 2003; Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). It also directly provides participants with an open platform to share and reflect upon their experiences as they encountered inequities in their classrooms, hallways, and staffrooms, as well as the structural barriers that, at times, limited their ability to enact equitable practices.

I begin with a discussion of the types of inequities participants encountered in their school communities. I continue by examining the effects of school-level factors and the impact they played on the participants' professional practice and the culture of the overall school community. I conclude by exploring culturally responsive pedagogy and practices gleaned from my analysis of participants' responses during the interview process.

Barriers and Resistance within the School Structure

Data from interviews with participants revealed structural challenges to addressing equity including limited awareness about equity policies, limited community outreach support and school initiatives, the presence of discriminatory language in the school community, a lack of ongoing and sustained professional development, the lack of consistent and committed leadership due to a succession of administrators, and the lack of diversity in the teaching corps. This section explores each of these issues in turn using excerpts from participants.

Silence Surrounding the Equity Policy

While the Ontario Ministry of Education's policy, *Realizing the Promise of Diversity: Ontario's Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy* (2009a; 2009b) reached the final year of its four-year implementation plan in 2013, all six participants had very limited knowledge of the policy document when questioned during the fall of 2014. For instance, Rosemary was aware of the policy document because she had taught a pre-service course at a Faculty of Education. She continued by explaining that "most teachers [have] not read the document . . . the reality is teachers aren't sitting around reading policy documents." Vanya knew about the equity policy and felt that "it's nice to have the policy to back you up. . . it's been very empowering for people doing equity work." Gregory also used the policy as "back-up" when navigating conversations with reluctant and resistant administrators. Richard had no knowledge of the policy document, while Adam was "vaguely familiar" with it. Subsequently, participants' limited awareness about the policy document may be illustrative of the difficulties surrounding translating equity policies into practice.

Community Outreach and School Initiatives in Relation to Equity

Central to creating a more equitable education system, schools and local community organizations need to work in partnership to create alternative outlets or initiatives that can help develop more inclusive learning spaces that address societal inequities within the school and community at-large (Dei, 2005). However, most participants (n=4) did not discuss school initiatives or community outreach programs in relation to equity at great length when prompted during the interview. Both Gregory and Vanya referenced "Day of Pink," which is a day where the entire school community is encouraged to wear pink to raise awareness about homophobia,

transphobia, transmisogyny, and other forms of bullying. Richard was the only participant who discussed at great length the types of equity initiatives occurring within various school communities by listing the following community programs: a hearing and vision clinic for students and their families; pediatric clinics; nutrition programs; tutoring programs for guardians or parents to learn how to support their child with homework; life skills programs; parenting classes; and family literacy programs.

Adam briefly mentioned an initiative put in place to address the low graduation rates and increase attendance among Black male students in the school community. In addition, he outlined a more substantive after-school program that also runs in the summer for Grade 8 students to help them bridge the transition into high school allowing them to earn a half credit before they even step foot into high school. Adam continued by explaining:

They have dance clubs, [they have] film, [they have] music editing and production . . . [They go on] outings and events. They will go to a Raptors game, they'll do those sort of things . . . [and] they also offer tutoring after school but it builds a community for the students. . . So they have a whole staff [and] they are based out of the building right here. I would say that's one of the places where I've seen over the year [to] have really benefitted our students. A lot of our students end up either working part-time or some even come back and now work full-time with them.

However, Adam explained that “we’ve also had a lot of organizations come and go” because his school has not had “continuity with administration” and “some community groups [have gone] on their own accord,” but others have been pushed out by “a new principal [that] comes in [and says] ‘well I don’t want you here anymore.’” Here, administrative buy-in was a contributing

factor around the quality or sustainability of school initiatives and community outreach programs, which becomes further exacerbated during administrative succession cycles. Consequently, the need for committed and consistent administrators who support the diverse needs of all learners through their commitment to equity in student outcomes becomes all the more critical to move these school initiatives forward in urban school communities.

Hallway Inequities: The Role of Discriminatory Language

Discussing issues of equity and diversity in schools with interview participants revealed that racism, sexism, gender equity, as well as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, Two Spirited, queer, or questioning (LGBTQ) issues, to be the types of inequities occurring within classrooms and school communities in the Greater Toronto Area (GTA). Some issues were considered more prevalent than others, such as discriminatory language in relation to racial and gender stereotypes. Furthermore, these inequities were reported by participants to be occurring not only between student-to-student interactions, but also between teacher-to-student dynamics and teacher-to-administrators.

Racial Inequities. Racism is a complex issue in diverse urban communities. The shift from segregation to more subtle expressions of racial discrimination, often referred to as “discourses of democratic racism” which refers to forms of racism that allows racial myths to co-exist with principles of liberal democracy, has engendered a situation in schools whereby racist ideologies are, in fact, evolving and simultaneously reworked in a covert manner (Henry & Tator, 2010). Participants (n=3) cited issues of racism relating to various areas, such as name calling, racial slurs, gang violence, and inter-ethnic conflicts. Two teacher participants described instances where racial slurs were used by primary and junior students. Richard provided an example in

relation to immigration: “There was this little boy who was calling a girl who was newly arrived a ‘FOB’ and that term [means] ‘fresh off the boat’.”

Adam discussed the existence of cultural racism exemplified through the presence of ethnic violence in the school community, which manifested itself in the form of territorial gang activity:

Unfortunately sometimes it gets expressed this way. Students get at each other because they’re from a particular part of the world and they’ve been taught or told certain things... We’ve had fights between ethnic groups of kids before. Last year, we had a number of incidents between Somalian boys and a group of West Indian, Caribbean kids. . . So our community is broken up, it’s territorial, you can either be from up top or you’re from down bottom. . . It’s literally like gang territory, they’ve taken to all of those symbols and it’s identified by colours and all the markings of gang representations.

Identity-based violence between factions or silos based on ethnicity was also described by another interviewee, Richard, who witnessed inter-ethnic conflict and communal divides in various school communities. He explained that “in some of the schools that I am going into, I am seeing it more because there’s a stronger divide in the community groups. I think there was one school that I was in where basically the split in the group was Jamaican and Somalian.” Gang turf issues were reported to be occurring in another school as well: “When I first started here, there literally were hallways that students didn’t go down because they just knew not to go down or hang out in certain areas of the school. If you did and you were from a different part of the community, then you were basically asking for trouble ” (Adam). Discussing issues of racism

with interview participants led to conversations about conflicts between students that usually materialized in relation to name calling, racial slurs, and inter-ethnic or gang violence.

Gender-based Inequities. The nature of gender equity in schooling has changed considerably over recent decades (Bank & Hall, 1997). Based on his work with teachers, Sadker (2000) noted that many experience what he calls a “gender block” or an inability to identify covert manifestations of gender biases in their daily practice as a result of this “false sense of accomplishment” or perceived advancement towards gender equity in education. Nevertheless, gender-based differences and inequities continue to persist in Canadian schools. Most participants (n=5) discussed various forms of gender-related discrimination and conflict. One participant, Vanya, shared her own personal experience with confronting sexist and discriminatory language in the classroom:

One of my White boys, able-bodied said to another boy “stop whining like a girl wearing high heels” [and] I pulled him out in the hall and had a little chat with him about how it’s not really appropriate and he just didn’t get it. We started talking about it [and I said] “I have to tell you that as a woman when you use sex as an insult to somebody, when you use my sex as an insult, I find that insulting [and] that bothers me”. . . Well, he didn’t get that. He said “well, we’ve been using that as an insult since I was in Grade 3 and nobody ever said anything and now suddenly it’s sexist.”

In an effort to humanize the discriminatory effects of his words, the participant located herself within the minoritized category by disclosing to the student that his remark was a blatant affront to her own identity. However, the student continued to disavow responsibility for his behaviour

by pleading ignorance through an active refusal of information and his dismissal of the issue as simply a problem that has always existed.

Realizing that her initial attempt was futile, Vanya decided “to equate it for him with racism because here’s the thing, even if you are internally racist, everybody knows you don’t use the ‘N Word’ . . . and so I said ‘you’ve got some Black friends, you wouldn’t use the ‘N-Word’ to insult them even if you were mad at them’,” to which he replied, “ ‘well, I might’ and I thought okay, we have a whole bunch more work to do here” (Vanya). The participant’s subsequent disciplinary response, which involved the student being sent to the behaviour teacher who was Black, resulted in the student suddenly “getting it” when the Black educator “used the same parallel.” While teachers play a critical role in correcting and eliminating discriminatory language in the classroom, the above scenario serves to highlight how it often takes cooperation amongst teachers to effect change.

Two participants talked about the relationship between cultural or religious beliefs and sexism. Vanya discussed the misogynist nature of some cultures and the difficulties that presented when attempting to address multiple axes of difference:

There’s the cultural piece, so we want to be sensitive to culture because that’s part of diversity too. But, the truth is there are some really misogynistic cultures out there. So now what do you do, right? Anything that is very traditional, where you have the expectation that Mom stays at home, does the cooking and looking after the kids and the cleaning. And now here’s the teacher saying “Well, no, no, it’s okay. Moms don’t have to do that, if they want to that’s fine.” So, we are supposed to address homophobia, we are supposed to address sexism, we are supposed to address culture, and yet we have kids that come to

school from cultures where it's wrong to be gay and "my holy book says it's wrong" and I'm saying "yeah, but the Charter of Rights and Freedom says it's okay, but I still want to respect your holy book." So, how do you do that?

Here Vanya draws attention to the difficulties surrounding respecting different cultural beliefs in Canada mediated by the human rights code that exists in this country. More specifically, she outlines tensions in the teaching profession between respecting students' human right to freedom of religious expression and the inclusion of LGBTQ youth.

This sentiment was also shared by the openly gay and White interviewee when he stated: I've had fathers come into me and say "well, why does Mohamed have to clean, the girls should be doing that" and I said "whatever rules you have at home are your rules. At school, if Mohamed gets a puzzle out, he tidies it up." Because I'm a man the dad didn't question me. He wasn't thrilled but didn't question me. And then of course one father came in and he was just livid and he said "why did you let him play with that doll" and I said "ohh" so I brought the kid over in front of his dad and I said "now have you ever seen Daddy holding a baby? Well that's what you are learning when you play with the doll, you are learning how to hold a baby. So, when you become a dad you'll be able to hold the baby" and the dad just didn't know what to say.

Vanya's and Gregory's narratives are indicative of parent-teacher tensions in relation to various identity categories. As evidenced in the anecdotal reports of these educators, attempts to address one minoritized identity category appears to at the same time inadvertently encroach on the human rights of another. In this context, the classroom is rendered a very tumultuous space to navigate for educators who are attempting to be more equitable and inclusive of all their

students. The same two participants, Vanya and Gregory, who focused their discussion predominantly around gender-based differences in their schools, also reported that discrimination against the LGBTQ community was an issue of particular concern to them.

LGBTQ Inequities. Many school boards have tried to make schools more accepting of all students by creating policies that specifically address prejudicial and discriminatory bullying against those who fall within the LGBTQ spectrum. However, discriminatory attitudes and incidents perpetrated against students who as identify lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, Two Spirited, queer, or questioning continue to persist. Two participants discussed LGBTQ issues extensively in relation to students. To break the silence and confront the stigmas around LGBTQ identities, many schools have introduced Gay-Straight Alliances (GSAs) to provide the much-needed safe space for students who fall on the LGBTQ spectrum. Conversely, Callaghan (2014) reported that many Canadian parents oppose GSAs because they are uncomfortable with school policies or practices exposing their children to discussions concerning sexual orientation. Vanya noted, some school communities have not yet established GSAs:

One thing I was looking forward coming to a big intermediate school like this was, I guess, a more overt approach to supporting students who fall outside the norm. We know that for example that 10 % of our population is LGBTQ, so in a school with 1000 kids, that means that 100 of those kids identify, or maybe don't identify yet, or are questioning. So, I was a little bit surprised actually when I came here that it wasn't more on the table. We don't even have a GSA. . . This school, surprisingly enough, seems to be a little bit still in the closet.

GSAs are an important support structure that can assist in challenging LGBTQ-based violence and discrimination, as well as ensuring that schools are more inclusive of sexual and gender minoritized youth (Lapointe, 2015; Mayo, 2015). Vanya recounted a personal experience that had occurred during Gay Pride:

So my partner's brother just got married and they just had a baby and ohh my God, the stuff he was spewing during Pride this summer, like "oh yeah, I'd like to go to the parade and stab all those fuckers" and he's raising a child, right? So that kid is going to be in a Grade 7 class someday.

As Vanya quite consciously points out, language is one of the many vehicles through which prejudice and discriminatory practices are learned, circulated, and perpetuated in society and, by extension, the education system. In addition, the home environment is one of the most influential factors in the formation of tolerant or intolerant beliefs, wherein inter-generational prejudices are circulated. An example of how prejudicial language and stereotypes become naturalized is found in the colloquial use of the term 'gay', which as Gregory, an openly gay participant, recalled was synonymously used by one of his former students to describe something as silly:

I had these kids in Kindergarten and they were [now] in Grade 6. I was up on the second floor doing something and [I overheard] a kid said "oh, that's so gay" and he then realized that I was there and said "oh, Mr. G, oh, I'm sorry, I'm sorry, I'm sorry, Mr. G!" because he knew I was gay. So I came over, and in a humourous way and said "now, tell me what that's all about," [and he said] "well, I meant it this way," and I said "well next time, you want to say [something else]" [and he replied] "yes, Mr. G, yes Mr.G." I could come down

on him for it, but I didn't. It was humorous, but they got the message loud and clear. You don't have to be a militant.

The educator used this situation as a teachable moment to address the issue. Rather than simply reprimanding the student, he injected humour into the situation and gave the student advice about how to proceed in the future.

In another example, Gregory challenged the exclusionary nature of heterosexist language by reporting that he consciously integrated gender-inclusive language in his Kindergarten classroom: "I never [say] your mommy or your daddy, it's the adults at home. That way, you don't say 'your mommy and your daddy' when they've got two mommies or two daddies." In a similar vein, he also highlighted the importance of using gender-neutral language to identify or describe items in the classroom that had previously been assigned a gender stereotype:

We don't call it the house centre, it's a living centre. The tools don't go in the block centre, they go in the living centre. I have a doll house, but it's not called a doll house. If you call it a doll house, the boys won't play there because dolls are for girls . . . so, if I call it an apartment, they'll play there.

Word choices, more often than not, unconsciously reflect societal assumptions about gender roles. For students who identify as LGBTQ, gender-inclusive and gender-neutral language can help counteract the constant inundation of messages and language that reinforce gender binaries. Gregory's remarks capture the critical role language can play in mitigating discrimination.

Rosemary commented on the existence of school-based inequities specific to sexual orientation:

Now part of this will relate to the cultures that are the predominant demographics for our kids and also the religious perspective of a lot of our kids. You don't see a lot of students who would identify as either homosexual or transgendered or bi. You really wouldn't see a lot of that. I think probably in the 15 years that I've been here, I would have known maybe two or three.

When I probed further about the possibility that some students might be closeted, the participant stated "it's hard to say, I mean I don't want to assume that they're here and they're closeted, it is possible, absolutely. I've actually known more closeted staff than I've known closeted kids in the building." More notably, when I asked the participant if it was possible that LGBTQ staff were closeted because of the demographics of the student population, the participant stated:

I think that [could] be it. I mean we've had staff that were flamboyant and who have been here a long time and are quite comfortable. But we've also had staff who, and this also may come back to their own issues of bias as well, just assume that people will [judge them, but] they tend to choose not to stay. And they'll go somewhere where they feel that they will be more comfortable, whether or not they out themselves in other situations.

This story highlights the possibility that LGBTQ educators may feel compelled to hide their identities for fear of being harassed or otherwise discriminated against by not only their colleagues, but students and administrators as well. Subsequently, LGBTQ issues can be difficult for teachers to navigate due to the stigmatization that can occur.

Responses from participants emphasized the importance of school-based advocacy in decreasing some of the challenges encountered by LGBTQ youth in schools; some examples of school-based advocacy included Gay-Straight Alliances, gender-inclusive and gender-neutral

language, and supportive educators who integrate LGBTQ issues into the curriculum to increase the visibility of the population.

Participants' anecdotal experiences revealed that inequities remain pervasive challenges for educators and students alike. Teachers in this study highlighted the role discriminatory language plays in perpetuating inequities in the classroom, but also cited practices they used to correct or challenge this type of language, such as gender-inclusive language.

Issues with Professional Development

An equitable education system that values respect, fairness, and diversity by holding high expectations for all students is very much contingent upon the organizational and structural processes of schools (Fullan, 2009). Teacher professional development (PD) is a critical organizational support that is necessary for teachers to develop and maintain skills and knowledge to work more successfully with minoritized youth (Aujla-Bhullar, 2011; Lawrence, 2005). All six participants made reference to the continual professional learning process embedded in effective teaching practices. For example, Vanya described a teaching for social justice training session she had attended: "it really challenged me to think about new things and because it wasn't just a one-off, it was a four-part course [and] you couldn't just go 'Oh well, I disagree with that'. There [was] more unpacking and more debriefing." Vanya and Richard were the only two participants who reported, though rather briefly, positive reactions to professional training programs they had attended where issues such as social justice, and equity were explored. Other participants either did not specifically mention PD in this area or had negative experiences, which are explored in subsequent sections. Some examples of reoccurring areas of concern from participants about PD included the need for more ongoing and sustained

professional learning, the superficial nature of board-level PD, and the issues between voluntary and mandatory PD. While the majority of teachers expressed concerns about the ineffectiveness of professional development (n=4), they also provided suggestions on how to improve in-service professional learning programs in order to facilitate teachers' ability to work more successfully with minoritized students.

A Call for More Sustainable and Ongoing Professional Learning. Commenting on the overall lack of PD and the futility of PD programs involving one-off events, two participants commented that teacher training, both formal and informal, needed to be sustainable. Vanya felt that “ongoing professional development is helpful” and necessary in order for it to be effective. Vanya pointed out that educational inequities “are coming more to the forefront. At least we are paying it lip service. Whether or not we are doing a good job actually training people, I don't know, but at least people are starting to talk about it now.”

Participants felt more substantive work was needed in this area. Vanya indicated, “I have certainly seen in the schools that I've taught at an awareness of a need for diversity training and sensitivity.” Adam also expressed concern when he admitted that he “definitely wouldn't say that there's been sufficient or adequate teaching or education on this”; however, he continued by suggesting that professional development might be more effective if it's “sustained, over time rather than a one-off that's never revisited.” Vanya also emphasized that “like with any PD, I think ongoing professional development is helpful.” Responses from participants revealed that equity-focused professional development should be a long-term process requiring a systemic and sustainable approach. Although interviewees discussed an overall absence of equity-focused PD

and problematized the piecemeal approach to professional learning, the superficial structure of board-level PD was also raised as an area of concern.

Equity Training often Superficial and Prescriptive. Three participants discussed the intermittent nature of board-level professional development in equity and diversity. Speaking of a professional development workshop on school climate that she had recently attended, Vanya noted that “although there was some good material and there were some good resources, there wasn’t nearly enough time spent on ‘okay, what are we going to do with these resources’.” Here Vanya drew attention to the importance of devising implementation strategies in order to roll-out initiatives or effectively use resources at the school and classroom levels. She added that “it was just a big show, here’s the muffins and the coffee and the glitzy video . . . the board just tends to be more glitzy.” Similarly, Adam found that “a lot of the times the PD’s were very superficial.” Describing the ‘check-it and forget- it’ mentality in board-level professional training, Adam pointed out that “it’s almost like ‘okay, well we need to do this, so let’s do it and then just check mark it off the list’, in terms of, ‘okay, now we’ve done a PD on equity and diversity and now we can move on’.” Another participant, Gregory, provided evidence of the disjointed and haphazard structure of board-level training, which speaks to the need for system alignment and a whole-system perspective to sustain improvement efforts (Fullan, 2009):

Usually the board-mandated stuff is like the left hand doesn’t talk to the right hand. This year we were sent to three half-day workshops all on the same thing . . . and we all dreaded it [but] we got all these little gifts [and] tools we can use in the classroom. . . Sure, I can use those but I don’t need three sets.

When I probed further about board-mandated professional training, Gregory referenced professional learning communities (PLCs):

I call it personal learning crap. . . . Originally it was all put upon us. . . and we didn't do a damn thing because it wasn't something we felt our kids needed. It was something that somebody at the board who doesn't work with kids decided that we needed to do.

Conversations about professional learning with interview participants led to discussions about the ineffectiveness of board-level PD, whereby participants recounted arbitrary implementation practices and sporadic training experiences that were typically both superficial and prescriptive in nature.

The Difficulties of Engaging Resistant Educators in Equity Training. In Ontario, teachers are expected, not mandated, to be committed to ongoing professional learning. As a result, teachers engage in self-directed professional development opportunities at their own discretion and on a voluntary basis. Participants (n=2) discussed the contention between compulsory and voluntary professional learning activities as they related to diversity training. For example, Rosemary highlighted that participation in professional learning specific to equity and diversity is typically voluntary, and practitioners who opt-in to such opportunities do so because they already identify, or envision themselves, as agents of change: “When it comes to equity training and voluntary PD, you are attracting the people who already believe it’s important, you’re attracting the people who are probably already building it into their practice in some level, or are conscious of it and want to do a good job with it.” She continued by asserting that “you are not getting the people who need it the most, which are the people who either don’t engage in it or don’t believe in it.” Gregory too pointed out that equity workshops usually

attracted teachers who were already willing to participate in dialogues about issues of diversity and discrimination. In this sense, he claimed that “you’re preaching to the choir. It’s the ones who don’t come to the committee meetings that are the ones who could really use the work.” Participants’ responses serve to outline some of the issues surrounding voluntary in-service teacher training, wherein such self-directed approaches may only attract practitioners who are already embedding issues of social justice and equity into their pedagogical practices. However, both Rosemary and Gregory argued that enforcing mandatory professional learning might not be the most effective way to engage resistant educators in the, at times, emotionally turbulent and difficult conversations surrounding issues of power, discrimination, and social inequity in education. Gregory argued that “you don’t want to mandate it, but the teacher needs to feel comfortable doing it.” Sharing the same sentiment, Rosemary expressed that, when it comes to mandatory PD, “how do you force that on [teachers]? [But], when it’s mandatory that’s the only time you hit those people and then how much are they engaging [with it, remains] questionable.” Based on responses from participants, the effectiveness of any professional development, be it compulsory or mandatory, relies heavily on the self-motivation and buy-in of educators.

Succession of Administrators: A Need for Committed Leadership

Many schools, especially those with high poverty, low-achieving, and disadvantaged student populations, face high rates of principal turnover (Béteille, Kalogrides, & Loeb, 2012; Loeb et al., 2010). Two participants discussed the succession of administrators, which caused: instability and inconsistency within the school community, disruption of school improvement efforts and change processes, resistance from students, and distrust and a lack of commitment from staff. Adam stated “I’ve been here for going on 15 years and I’ve had close to 10 principals

and upwards of three or four times that in terms of vice-principals.” These high rates of turnover made teachers feel that their school communities were not valued at the board-level. Adam framed the issue in relation to board-level politics: “administration has been a revolving door. . . [and] a lot of the reasons for that has been politically up above.” In the same vein, Rosemary commented on the presence of political maneuvering at the board-level:

I think they are using our school as a training ground and they are not respecting that it is a school and that it needs stability, and if it is really and truly that needy then you need to put somebody who is experienced and effective.

Rosemary continued by drawing attention to the fact that seasoned administrators are needed to lead disadvantaged and low-achieving schools in upward trajectories towards more equitable outcomes and accelerated achievement for minoritized student groups:

So the fact that, repeatedly, we keep getting inexperienced principals is a message to me that

there is at a much higher level [something] that is broken. . . I think they’ll try things at this school that they are not going to try at other schools . . . because they might not have the same outcry from parents, or the parents are disenfranchised. These are not parents with political power, these are not parents with status; therefore, why not?

Rosemary’s and Adam’s stories highlight the way that the cycle for disadvantaged students and schools perpetuates itself. Adam recounted:

This has been divulged to me from administrators that the word at the board-level for administrators is ‘okay, you come and do your time at [Wrightgate] and then you can have your choice of where you want to go or we will get you into a cushy [school]’. The message is by going to [Wrightgate] and being an administrator here, you’re doing us a

favour. You put in your time here because it's tough so now we owe you one. You come out of here and we'll ensure that you are on the path that you want to be in. . . . There is no doubt in my mind that [Wrightgate] has in many ways become a political pawn for the powers that be up above . . . I know that there is a lot of external pressure [to] manage, maintain, and improve the image of our school but I also see very clearly, in my eyes anyways, that there's been a lot more involved in terms of decision-making than just what is best for the students. I don't believe for a minute that that's been the driving force and the driving reason why decisions, administrative and otherwise, have been made. . . I think the powers that be, the structures that are in place, are actually not always working for you.

Adam highlighted the issues surrounding constant administrative changes:

The students got to the point where they were like "why should I even care who you are because you're probably going to be gone in a few months." Imagine being a student in that environment and imagine on a subconscious level the message that is being sent to you: "you're not important enough, you're not valuable enough for us to invest in you."

The effects of frequent principal turnover can often result in students becoming more cynical and distrustful about not only administrators' authority, but also about how much the system cares about their communities. Adam also revealed the negative effect this turnover has on teaching staff:

Staff become disengaged and disenfranchised too when they look at another new principal again and when we hear at the end of June that so-and-so is leaving again. . . Even as a teacher, it's difficult for us to buy-in and really invest and believe in the vision and the initiatives of a vice-principal or principal who comes in and wants to start something when

in the back of your mind you are thinking “well, I wonder how long you’re going to be here before you’re moved or before you go again too.”

The uncertainty and instability caused by the rapid succession of administrators contributes to a school culture of insecurity, ambiguity, and distrust, all of which can stifle any momentum in school improvement efforts towards a more equitable and socially just school system. Alongside the issue of administrative turnover, the need for ongoing, consistent, and committed leadership to ensure equity for all students through systemic school transformation was noted as a particular area of concern by the majority of interviewed teachers.

As the leaders of schools, administrators can be powerful agents for change; their hands becoming critical instruments for shaping the culture of a school (Theoharis, 2007). Accordingly, the majority of participants (n=4) commented on the importance of administrative leadership in their efforts to acknowledge and challenge the complex and controversial inequities present within society and their school communities. Many commented on the need for more consistent administrators who are committed to equity education in order for school improvement efforts to be more effective. For example, Vanya noted that “many school administrators don’t see the intersectionality between social justice work and [school] climate.” When asked if she could anchor her response in practice, she recalled a recent struggle with her administrator:

It’s a little bit mind boggling to me that administrators don’t see the connection between [school] climate and social justice work. So, for example, this committee I’m on I thought “great, we are going to talk about LGBTQ stuff, culture, sexism,” but no, no, it’s all about the survey and when can we administer the survey and let’s have a meeting to look at the data of the survey. The survey is 47 questions all in English or French and I’ve got 85%

ESL kids in my class. You want to talk about climate, how about 10 questions in their home language. It just seems [that] people are, kind of, missing the point.

This interview excerpt highlights the emphasis placed on standardized survey data as an accountability measure, which in a sense positions it as the governing principle within the school. Similarly, while working under “two Caucasian principals,” Gregory stated that “tolerance was not going to be something that was going to be great. I mean, you have a population of 85% non-Christmas celebrating people and what you do, you sing Christmas carols every morning for the month of December.” Precipitated in part by the White administrators, these examples draw attention to the issue of minoritization rippling below the surface of simple school routines through cultural incongruence, whereby the home cultures of students are completely ignored or devalued within the school culture. While Gregory recognized that this was an inequitable practice, he did not state whether he intervened or not. He did draw attention to the fact that some of his colleagues were afraid of the principal “because the principal does have the authority to move you wherever they want. If the principal doesn’t like you, they can do that.”

Moreover, as a learning coach working with a handful of schools throughout the GTA, Richard strives to improve student achievement by providing support to teachers and administrators seeking to strengthen their inclusive practices. During the interview, Richard commented on the resistance he had experienced from administrators citing instances where principals became angry and agitated or were completely absent during meetings. Particularly, he expressed concern about the overall lack of mentoring and support from administrators, which he had witnessed on numerous occasions while facilitating professional learning communities

(PLCs), saying “really the idea is that the principal should be the lead-learner or at least the co-learner,” but, unfortunately “there are times where we’re doing PLCs and the administrators [are] not there.” Richard continued by drawing attention to the impact this absence can have on staff, “how does that look to staff? So, I mean there are different challenges.” Richard’s concerns over the lack of follow-through on or support for school improvement efforts on the part of unresponsive administration makes a convincing case that some schools may only be paying lip-service to change initiatives, which not only impedes the development of an equitable education system built through capacity and collaboration, but can also negatively affect the morale of the teaching staff. Remarks from participants provide evidence that issues of unresponsive administration in relation to the lack of ongoing and sustained leadership negatively affected the culture of the school and, by extension, school improvement initiatives aimed at creating more equitable and inclusive school communities. While ineffective administration was cited as a structural issue impeding the actualization of equitable school reform initiatives, the Eurocentric nature of curricula was also raised as a particularly contentious issue by the majority of interviewees.

Eurocentric Curriculum

The predominantly Eurocentric-based curriculum circulating within the Ontario school system largely ignores the voices and narratives of minoritized identities and needs to be adapted to validate and honour the diverse experiences all students (Lopez, 2011; Morrison, Robbin, & Rose, 2008). Four participants referenced the need to reshape the Eurocentric curriculum in order to construct learning experiences that are relevant and engaging for the students in their classrooms. Vanya pointed out the lack of culturally responsive content in curriculum and

brought attention to the subliminal Eurocentric politics at play within textbooks. Vanya stated it was hard to integrate issues of social justice into the curriculum “because the textbook has the stupid pizza problem with the pepperoni and 80% of my kids are Halal and don’t even eat pepperoni, so you have to do a little bit of work with that.” Rosemary commented on a pilot project occurring within numerous alternative schools across the GTA that specifically addressed “issues related to the achievement gap [by] making sure . . . [the] curriculum [was] not Eurocentric.” This interview, and others, lends credence to the notion that Eurocentric curriculum persists in diverse GTA classrooms.

Comments from interviewed teachers provide confirmation that approaches to including minoritized identities in the curriculum are typically additive in nature and, more often than not, include textbooks with images of racialized, female, and disabled students or comprise of small subsections found frequently at the end of chapters displaying other diverse perspectives as isolated cultures. While four teachers commented on the challenging aspects of Eurocentric curriculum and the subsequent impact this lack of diversity played on not only their pedagogical practices but also the schooling experiences of minoritized youth, every teacher involved in the study was trying to address equity in her or his classroom practice.

Teachers working in diverse urban classrooms in the GTA identified many barriers within the structures of their school communities. Some of the issues described included the need for ongoing and sustained professional learning, the succession of administration and the need for committed and consistent leadership, and the Eurocentric nature of standard curricula. In order for educational reform to be sustainable, it requires not only quality leadership, but also the

adoption and continual assessment of policies and professional practice that address the social, political, and economic realities that engender exclusion and minoritization in the school system.

Teacher Identity

Teacher identity represents one facet of a larger social identity comprised of the personal narratives, beliefs, attitudes, and ideologies, which shapes educators' understanding about their individual roles as teachers, as well as impacts the lens through which they see their students and the world around them (Beijaard et al., 2004). More specifically, teacher identity refers to the “ways in which teachers achieve, maintain and develop their identity, their sense of self, in and through [the profession]” becoming “of vital significance in understanding the actions and commitments of teachers in their work” (Ball & Goodson, 2002, p. 18). In this study, teacher identity influenced participants' interpretations and understanding of their experiences within the school community. More specifically, participants tended to identify the most pressing equity concerns in relation to the minoritized areas of their own identities. For instance, two of the three participants who predominantly discussed racial-based inequities self-identified as being Asian and Black; whereas the openly gay participant cited LGBTQ concerns as the most prevalent issue needing to be addressed in schools. One female participant briefly cited instances of racism, but primarily discussed sexism and gender equity issues. Here the impact of participants' personal life experiences as minoritized ‘Others’ appeared to affect how they viewed their role within a specific context, which by extension shapes their educational practices when working with minoritized youth in a diverse urban setting.

Lack of Diversity in the Teaching Corps.

Ontario classrooms have undergone tremendous demographic shifts in recent times; however, the composition of the province's teaching corps remains predominantly White. This homogeneity has negative consequences for both minoritized students and youth from the more dominant Euro-Canadian group (Carr & Klassen, 1997; Dlamini & Martinovic, 2007; Escayg, 2010). Five of the six interviewed teachers commented on the lack of diversity in the teaching profession and discussed the possible challenges this lack presented for minoritized students and their families. Describing the homogeneity of the teaching force, Vanya noted that, in her current school, "like many of the others I have taught at, has a White principal and a majority of White Anglo-Saxon teachers, which does not reflect the cultural diversity of the students." She proceeded by outlining her initial reactions to the racial composition of the teaching staff at her current school:

The first thing I noticed when I walked in the school is "wow, everybody on staff is White." We've got two Black people on staff and they're not teachers, they're teacher assistants, you know, like the irony is just mind boggling right? Then, you look in my classroom and I've got two White kids so it's an inverse. I am not saying White teachers can't teach Black kids, but there's just a cultural mismatch here.

Pointing to the fundamental problem with the growing cultural mismatch between teachers and students in the GTA, Vanya's response also functions to raise a twofold question: why is the relative absence of minoritized teachers problematic and how does this lack of diversity in the teaching profession impact all students within the school community?

Three of the four racialized participants were able to articulate a shared perception in response to the questions deduced from Vanya's earlier remark in relation to how the homogeneity of the teaching corps impacted minoritized students. For example, Daniel believed that as "an African-Canadian teacher, I've been able to empathize with the students in the classroom and understand some of the situations that they've been going through in life"; he continued by asserting that "sometimes I think a lot of racialized students feel like they can't speak to some teachers in the way that they're able to speak to racialized teachers." Daniel's comment suggests that minoritized students have unique life experiences and might relate better to educators who have a similar background based on their shared group affiliation because both have likely experienced various forms of oppression and discrimination based on their race. Participants cited issues of White privilege alongside the lack of diversity among teaching staff and educational leaders.

Issues of Power and Privilege

White privilege is widely cited throughout the literature as problematic for equity. For Rosemary, "most of the educational community, teachers, administrators, [and] board people are White. So, it's been very interesting engaging in conversations about equity and diversity when you are dealing with people who often don't understand it, have not lived it, [and] can't share the life experiences of those who have been more marginalized." On another note, the word 'privilege' was cited 12 times across the interview transcripts; however, the only White female participant utilized the term most frequently representing 5 of the 12 instances.

Similarly, Vanya spoke to the complexity of identity and privilege and the implications White privilege has for equity-focused school improvement efforts. Reflecting back on the last school where she taught, Vanya stated:

They were all White upper-middle class people with university educations and the world was working for them and they were all straight. . . Now some of them were women, but maybe they weren't even aware of their own internalized misogyny. But, it was all good, things were working for them so they didn't really see the need for equity and social justice work.

Vanya's and Rosemary's comments contend, based on their experiences, that those in more privileged positions are, at times, reluctant to engage in equity-focused work because they either have not experienced being 'othered' or, as Vanya articulated, "the world [is] working for them."

Some participants drew attention to the fact that addressing equity issues often was uncomfortable for people. Vanya stated "it's the political correctness conundrum. . . We don't want to offend anybody, but in doing so, we actually end up offending all kinds of people."

Richard pointed out:

There's a lot of factors related to things happening in the classroom where some people might not feel comfortable talking about certain things. Some people talk about fear of challenging a controversial issue. . . you have other teachers who are like "I don't feel comfortable dealing with that particular issue," some who [say] "not my area of comfort and I'm also not willing to take those steps."

Here Richard's statement draws attention to the issue of discomfort when engaging in dialogues surrounding controversial socio-political issues as they relate to equity. In fact, Vanya and

Gregory also described the difficulties of engaging in conversations about issues of power, discrimination, and oppression, which they felt might cause discomforts or disagreements amongst teachers, students, and other educational stakeholders.

Culturally Responsive Pedagogy

Teachers from this study were using culturally responsive pedagogy. Examples of participants' approaches included developing an equity-focused curriculum that represented and validated the diverse experiences and identities of all students, as well as developing meaningful and authentic student-teacher relationships by holding high expectations for all students.

Validating and Honouring Students' Lived Experiences

A critical component to equity-oriented pedagogy is being able to listen to the diverse voices of students and infuse their experiences into the classroom curriculum (Lopez, 2011). Through culturally responsive practices, every participant in this study reported integrating students' background knowledge and personal narratives into the curriculum, as well as the teaching and learning experiences within the classroom. Rosemary emphasized the importance of selecting texts that reflected students' lived experiences and social identities, which she felt was a particular strength at her school:

From Grade 9 through 12, our kids read a very diverse curriculum in terms of texts. We had a Vietnamese core text for Grade 9's, we had a Native core text for Grade 10's, we had an African American core text for Grade 11's, we had a West African text for Grade 12's. . . So we always had a nice diversity [of texts, but] we did those along with some of the more Eurocentric texts like Shakespeare.

Here Rosemary highlights the importance of acknowledging students' identities and incorporating these narratives into classroom practices to allow for a more meaningful and relevant learning experience for all students. Recalling an interesting interaction with a parent, she stated, "I remember once a parent coming in and they were . . . registering their kid for Grade 9 and one of the questions they asked . . . [was] 'do you do Shakespeare' and when I said 'yes'," the parent replied to her "'okay, then it's okay for my kid to come here'." Rosemary continued, "you have to understand, our community is one of the first points of immigration for the country [and] one of the things that is interesting is [parents are] all coming from colonized countries." She proceeded by explaining that parents "are coming from countries that have a far stricter adherence, in some ways, to a British curriculum . . . and [they] actually see that as a sign of academic rigour . . . because that is what they experienced." Underscoring the complexity of cultural power dynamics at play within the curriculum of the Canadian literary canon, Rosemary was cautious to not limit minoritized students' access to the dominant social and cultural capital: "Shakespeare is part of our cultural space . . . there are . . . jokes about it in plays, in TV, and in commercials, in comics," she explained "and I don't want my kids not to be able to get the joke, so I think we do [a] double duty." Rather than omitting these texts completely from the English curriculum or enforcing a rigid hierarchy, Rosemary believed in striking a balance between text types because "we want to honour and let [students] experience more authentic voices . . . but we also don't want to deny them opportunities to tap into some of the more traditional texts."

Like Rosemary, Richard highlighted the importance of tailoring instructional content to incorporate students' historical narratives and present realities to ensure the curriculum is engaging and relevant. When I asked what equity in education looked like in the lived

curriculum, Richard replied “in terms of the equity piece, it’s about honouring what [students] do bring to the table” and it’s about asking the questions:

Do you pull from them, do you start with where they are in terms of their learning and that social capital that they bring in the classroom? Do you entertain their opinions? Do they see themselves in the school, in the classroom? Do they not only see visual images reflecting who they are and reflected in a respectful way, but [also] do they see their work being honoured?

While this interview excerpt illustrates his commitment to providing a platform for student voice, Richard’s questions or rather his internal dialogue also can be understood as an example of reflective practice, which is a foundational aspect of the personal dimension in my conceptual framework for equity and inclusive education. Another critical component in my conceptual framework considers the culturally responsive pedagogy and practices of teachers, which includes destabilizing and deconstructing social inequities present in the classroom and society at large. Subsequently, all interviewed participants reported imbedding social justice issues into classroom lesson plans and classroom activities.

Infusing Social Justice into the Curriculum

The integration of social justice issues into the curriculum raises students’ awareness about the social inequities around them by providing them with opportunities to exercise their critical thinking skills as they share their experiences, identify social inequities, and take action as advocates for change. Every single teacher articulated a continuous commitment to embedding issues of social justice into the curriculum and her or his professional practice. Responding to my first question about what helped her address the diversity of her classroom, Vanya noted that “I

think a really practical way is to integrate issues of social justice into the curriculum.” When I prompted her to anchor her response in a classroom experience, she proclaimed, “for example, if we are doing data management in math, let’s look at graphs and data from immigration statistics and talk about that. How does that change over time and what are some of the factors [causing] poverty levels?” Similarly, Richard highlighted a culminating activity he had facilitated where students were required to “to take products and make them more gender-neutral or more gender-inclusive and then we had a ‘Dragons’ Den’.” This project heightened students’ awareness about gendered identities through a “spectrum of understanding” allowing them to interrogate the politics of exclusion within manufacturing companies through the culminating action-oriented task.

In his Kindergarten class, Gregory cited numerous instances in which he had specifically woven issues of social justice into his instructional practices, some of which included taking his entire Kindergarten class to the Pride flag raising ceremony in Toronto, using children’s books depicting diverse identities, and co-hosting various cultural and religious celebrations with parents or guardians.

Gregory described one lesson that emphasized the importance of critical inquiry and involved the students determining issues of fairness as they related to the topics of water conservation and First Nations rights. Students were shown various images, such as a water advisory boil from Constance Lake and an image of a child in Namibia using a key fob to access fresh water. After students determined that the drinking water advisories in First Nations communities were not fair, they sent:

A letter to Olivia Chow and to Harper and the kids all wrote it out. Then we walked it over to the post box, but I had two of the mothers who had been in my classroom already doing a whole bunch of Aboriginal music and so they brought their drums with them and we had this whole drumming session going into the mail box office.

Gregory provided his students with a space to better understand and address issues of fairness and societal inequities by encouraging even the youngest of students to engage in political acts of social justice and, by doing so, modelled political advocacy and agency.

Responses from participants revealed a dedication and commitment to cultivating authentic learning experiences for their students by adopting a culturally responsive teaching framework that infused the narratives of social justice into the curriculum. While engaging in social justice work is critical for creating more equitable urban school communities, participants also highlighted the importance of meaningful and authentic student-teacher relationships and the impact they have on equitable learning experiences.

Authentic and Meaningful Student: Teacher Relationships

Strong student-teacher relationships are a vital component of effective teaching. Equity-minded educators establish positive relationships with youth as a means to connect with students in meaningful ways to better understand not only their individual needs, but also the various social locations from which they speak and that make up their identities. Ferguson (2002) argues that “when teachers have strong content knowledge and are willing to adapt their pedagogies to meet student needs, adding good teacher-student relationships and strong encouragement to the mix may be key” (p. 1). All of the teachers involved in this study emphasized the importance of

establishing positive relationships with students by seeing the individual in each student and holding high expectations, as well as being a mentor and positive role model.

Throughout her interview, Rosemary reiterated the significance of teacher relationships and the importance of holding high expectations by stating that teachers need to “see [students]” and help them to grow “by having high standards.” However, Rosemary pointed out that:

Sometimes you have teachers who have very low standards for kids in certain places because that’s that unconscious bias creeping in. You are not helping them because they are going into the same world as the other kids. You’ve set the standards low, you haven’t helped them to grow, you haven’t helped them to build, you didn’t believe they actually could, you didn’t push them because you expected less of them, and now they are in the world and you are responsible for what they have and don’t have at this point.

Minoritized students, disenfranchised youth, are arguably most in need of authentic and caring relationships with teachers as many have experienced consistently low expectations or have been badly advised or treated by other teachers while at school. For Rosemary, “for it to be a caring school community, for it to be a functioning school community, for real learning and engagement and real relationships between staff and students, for all those things to happen you have to have an equitable framework.”

Echoing Rosemary’s socio-emotional awareness of her students and advocacy for her school community, Daniel illustrated a genuine care and commitment towards supporting his students both inside and outside the school. He felt that teachers needed to “try to understand the kids, understand what they’re interested in, understand their cultural backgrounds, and some of the issues they may be facing at home.” He continued by pointing out that “ultimately, it’s not all

about the teacher, there are so many other issues around teaching that you have to be aware of. As an educator, if you're going to ignore those kinds of things, there is no way you can be effective." Central to achieving greater equity in schools is fostering supportive relationships between teachers and students, based on a paradigm of high expectations and care, which can lead to effective teaching and positive experiences, both academically and personally, for all students.

Seeing himself as a positive role model for minoritized students or more specifically Black students, Richard explained that he would sometimes be wearing his suit during his physical education program: "Well, I wouldn't change because I work with a lot of Black men and I wanted them to look at me and see that you can be more than a rapper or a basketball player or some other athlete." Richard wanted them "to see that there are other things out there. There is that whole mentorship and role model piece." As role models and leaders in the school community, teachers have the ability to directly impact students' lives. Richard's comments draw attention to the positive impact racial minoritized teachers can have on validating the lived experiences around race for students who also occupy racialized identities. Anecdotal evidence from teachers indicated that adapting instructional practices to include the contextual experiences of diverse students and developing meaningful student-teacher relationships created the conditions necessary to foster empowering learning communities built on a shared commitment towards achieving educational equity for all students.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

This research began with a focus on the perspectives, experiences, and pedagogical practices of six urban educators working in diverse contexts in the Greater Toronto Area (GTA). In an attempt to understand how these teachers navigated issues of equity and diversity while working with diverse student populations, the main purpose of this research was to understand how these teachers adapted their pedagogies and classroom practices to respond to diverse student identities, as well as to outline the types of professional development or supports that have facilitated their endeavours to work more successfully with minoritized youth. Through conversations with participants in this study, I used the narratives of each teacher to highlight common understandings and areas of concerns, each of which has important implications for teachers working in diversified urban communities and the broader educational community.

This chapter provides a more nuanced analysis of the main findings presented in Chapter 4 and is divided according to the three central themes that emerged out of the data: Barriers and Resistance within the School Structure; Identity Politics in the Classroom; Teaching and Learning for Equity through Culturally Responsive Pedagogy.

Barriers and Resistance within the School Structure

Despite the MOE's (2009b) well-intentioned equity policy, *Realizing the Promise of Diversity: Ontario's Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy*, most participants had no awareness of the policy. The very fact that most participants did not reference the policy document at all, even after being prompted, poses the question as to whether or not this policy document has really infiltrated discussions on equitable practice in a substantive way.

Piecemeal Approaches to School Initiatives and Community Outreach

A comprehensive tri-level school reform model focuses on integrating school-wide improvement efforts throughout the entire structure of the school system by implementing curricular changes, creating sustained professional development opportunities, and supporting school initiatives and community outreach programs designed to enhance parental and community involvement (Fullan, 2009). The current equity policy has required schools to develop equity policies and was intended to increase activities around equity in schools (MOE, 2009a; 2009b). However, participants' responses reveal limited substantive activity at the school, community, and district levels. While Richard did list numerous equity initiatives occurring in various school communities, most participants only briefly noted the existence of a few community programs or initiatives even after being prompted to provide more detail. The fact that interview questions did not elicit concrete examples or detailed descriptions of school initiatives in and of itself is an indicator that school-based equity projects have been piecemeal and lack a systematic board-wide approach. These findings are further corroborated by Portelli, Shields, and Vibert (2007) in their four-year study of six schools in British Columbia, Ontario, and Nova Scotia. Similar to the findings in my study, they found that "for the most part, instead of offering systemic support to schools serving high-risk populations, school system bureaucracies in all three provinces actually posed obstacles for the work" (p. 50). Some of the systemic challenges they outlined included: "cuts to ESL programs, Black history, peer tutoring, and initiatives like Race, Culture and Human Rights development and equity programs" (p. 50). Given the systemic challenges embodied in school board politics and procedures outlined by Portelli, Shields, and Vibert (2007), school-wide efforts or initiatives that prioritize equity in

education may be destined to be met with partial and fragmented success. If the goal of equity in education is to ensure that all students experience success at learning by validating their identities and histories within the school community, then system policies and procedures need to ensure that there are coordinated efforts at various levels of the system and processes to explore whether or not progress is actually occurring.

A Call for Ongoing and Sustained Professional Development

In order to engage in the difficult practice of challenging social inequities in education, professional development (PD) has the potential to be an integral component to this process. However, teachers working in diverse urban contexts in the GTA felt that short-term one-off sessions were typically superficial and largely ineffective. Participants also felt that, when there was non-compulsory training, the teachers most in need of such training did not opt in; rather, it was educators already committed deeply to equity who attended the training. Participants in my study felt more substantive work was needed in this area in both compulsory PD and in relation to more opportunities for voluntary PD to better equip teachers to address equity issues by integrating culturally responsive pedagogy into their classrooms.

Research on existing professional development programs has repeatedly indicated that PD in the area of equity education needs to be ongoing and must include specific information about appropriate language, issues of identity, narratives about the school experiences of minoritized youth, and opportunities to deconstruct one's biases and prejudices (Capper et al., 2006; Lawrence, 2005; McCabe & Rubinson, 2008; Schniedewind, 2005; Szalache, 2004).

Aligned with the findings cited in Lawrence's (2005) study, participants expressed disdain over the PD they had received in the area of equity education and articulated a need for more

substantive approaches to addressing difficult and, often controversial, work. Participants felt that single-day workshops do not provide educators with the space and time necessary to engage in open dialogues about their own positionality and reflect upon the intricacies of social inequities that impact not only their own personal lives, but also the lives of their students.

Vanya described the PD she had received as glitzy, while Gregory referred to professional learning communities (PLCs) as “personal learning crap.” This type of negative language becomes quite telling—offering a window of insight into teachers’ positionality and the meaning they draw from their experiences with PD. Superficial approaches to equity PD may be indicative of the contempt, fear, and discomfort surrounding issues of powers, privilege, and identity. As Vanya explained, “We know that in society people in general are very uncomfortable talking about issues of social justice and everyone is afraid of making a political blunder.” Vanya’s comment about the “political correctness conundrum” and its subsequent effect on the depth and quality of equity-focused PD was also cited in Aujla-Bhullar’s (2011) study, which found that many participants remained silent out of discomfort or fear of potentially disrupting the learning environment. Consequently, this concept of silence housed within a discourse of political correctness becomes especially problematic as certain belief systems remain unchallenged, which raises the question of how to address the complex issues of power, discrimination, and oppression when those who maintain such beliefs and perpetuate the status quo are often unwilling to engage in meaningful conversations. Rosemary and Richard also noted that teacher “buy-in” to PD efforts was at times contingent upon the relationship between the administrators and the staff—emphasizing administrators’ importance, as either a positive or a negative influence on teachers’ willingness to engage with school-level equity efforts.

Trust arose as a critical component to engaging in substantive discussions around equity, and the need for a skilled facilitator was raised by participants as an important way to address issues of silence and political correctness. Further confounding the issue is the fact that optional equity PD tended to only attract practitioners who were already embedding issues of social justice and equity into their pedagogical practices. Change is by nature difficult for educational institutions and teacher practitioners alike (Fullan, 2007), and engaging reluctant educators is a pressing challenge for not only equitable change initiatives in education, but any and all system-wide reform efforts.

The Need for Committed and Consistent Leadership

While teachers undoubtedly have an important part to play in addressing equity in schools, so too do principals and vice-principals. In fact, one might argue that leadership is the most important role (Armstrong et al., 2013) in guiding efforts to make schools more inclusive and responsive for minoritized students and their families by setting the tone of the school culture and addressing discriminatory practices (Bell et al., 2008; Brown, 2004, 2006; Cambron-McCabe, & McCarthy, 2005; Marshall, 2004; Shields, 2004; Theoharis, 2007). Without support from administrators, school-wide improvement efforts to ensure equitable and inclusive school communities may be met with limited success. In this research, teachers cited an overall lack of ongoing and committed leadership in the most challenging schools exacerbated by high turnover of administration. Paralleling Carr's (1997) findings, teachers in this study indicated that, without administrators "buying-in" to equity and social justice education, it was unlikely to be successful. Without deep commitment to equity on the part of educational leaders, it becomes more difficult to galvanize the will, necessary training, and resources to support change.

Not only is good leadership needed, but bad leadership can incite negative effects on the school culture. A lack of sensitivity to the kinds of students being served in diverse communities can further alienate students and their parents as their beliefs are not reflected in the school—as exemplified in Gregory’s account wherein Christmas carols were sung every morning for the month of December when the majority of the schools population was comprised of “85% non-Christmas celebrating people.”

While school climate surveys were being used in Vanya’s school to collect data on equity issues, which Stone (2012) argues is demonstrative of an institutional priority, Vanya continued by highlighting that collecting data is not enough if meetings focused primarily on the use of survey data as an accountability measure rather than on “LGTBQ stuff, culture [and] sexism.” So, hiring and retaining leaders who are committed to equity and responsive to the communities they serve is important if the equity policies and efforts in schools are to have an instrumental effect.

Resistance to equity or lack of awareness about school communities may not solely be attributed to administrators’ reluctance to engage in equity dialogues; rather, as Armstrong et al. (2013) found in their study, many school leaders who are committed to social justice and equity work experience resistance from colleagues. So even when leaders are committed to equity, making improvements in these areas is challenging and slow work. Similar to the issues of fear, discomfort, and the “political correctness conundrum” reported by participants in my study in relation to PD, Armstrong and colleagues found that school leaders in Ontario experienced “staff resistance to social justice ideals [which] was attributed to discomfort with difference, conceptual confusion regarding difference between equity and equality, fear of conflict with

colleagues and community members, and a ‘desire for an easy solution’ ” (p. 128). In order for equity initiatives, policies, and programs to be successfully implemented, all educational stakeholders need to find ways to “work together to bridge the gaps between social justice theory, policy and practice” by placing equity needs “at the centre of educational decision making” (Armstrong et al., 2013, p. 134). System-wide improvement requires coordinated efforts by all stakeholders including teachers, leaders, staff, and other educational professionals working within school communities.

The needs of minoritized students are not always placed at the top of the priority list when it comes to educational decision making. In fact, the needs of those with power (White, middle-class) often dominate. Findings from my study confirm that many of the most challenging schools (those with low-achieving, disadvantaged, and high poverty student populations) face alarmingly high rates of principal turnover, which is well supported and documented in the literature (Béteille, Kalogrides, & Loeb, 2012; Loeb et al., 2010).

Board-level leadership was also cited as an important factor contributing to inequities in the most needy schools. As Adam pointed out, “there’s been a lot more involved in terms of decision-making than just what is best for our students. I don’t believe for a minute that that’s been the driving force and the driving reason why decisions, administrative and otherwise, have been made.” Rosemary also mentioned that high rates of administrative turnover in her school community showed “real inequitable practice that [she saw] happening from the board.” My study adds to the body of literature that highlights the negative effects of principal turnover, that creates a sense of distrust and shows a lack of commitment from school boards (Bruggink, 2001; Macmillan, 2000; Reynolds et al., 2008). As evidenced by participants’ responses, the perpetual

shifting of administrators can create a climate of uncertainty in the school culture that not only has negative consequences for minoritized students and teachers alike, but can undermine the organizational stability necessary to effectively implement equitable reform initiatives. School improvement efforts and reform initiatives can neither be effective nor successful without consistent and committed leadership—once again emphasizing the fact that whole-system reform is needed to create more equitable and inclusive school communities (Fullan, 2009).

Identity Politics in the Classroom

Navigating Hallway Inequities: Discriminatory Language

Teachers in diverse schools in the GTA reported having to address many racial slurs and discriminatory epithets that students used including “FOB (fresh off the boat),” “whining like a girl,” and saying “that’s gay,” among others. Language plays a considerable role in the perpetuation of stereotypes, which are transmitted and maintained through words, phrases, and symbols that operate to essentialize and fix minoritized identities into rigid categories (hooks, 1994; Riggins, 1997). Through a process of naturalization, stereotypes become engrained into popular vernacular and the social stock of knowledge (Berger & Luckmann, 1991) passed on both explicitly and implicitly from generation to generation, in many cases, through parents, peers, teachers, and the media. Participants became acutely aware of commonly held biases and stereotypical attitudes circulating within their school communities evidenced through students’ usage of discriminatory language.

Participants’ reports of discriminatory language stratified by race, ethnicity, sexuality, and gender are well supported by a growing body of research that has focused on the subject of school bullying and verbal harassment, as well as the devastating impact bullying can have on its

pool of victims (Graham, Bellmore, Nishina, & Juvonen, 2009; Hanish & Guerra, 2000; Peguero, 2009; Peguero, Popp, & Koo, 2011; Poteat & Espelage, 2005). Wessler and De Andrade (2006), in a study on the content, forms, and motivations behind school bullying and verbal harassment, found that students described a broad range of sociocultural and physical characteristics that were the subject of degrading and discriminatory language. Similar to those cited by the participants in my study, Wessler and De Andrade (2006) found that race, gender, sexual orientation, and religion were the most intensely targeted identity categories and were used with disturbing consistency in schools. When derogatory language is not directly addressed, the consequences for schools and students run deep. According to Haynie et al. (2001) and Nansel et al. (2001), student victims are more likely to find school more challenging and experience long-term emotional damage. Discriminatory language articulated through acts of bullying has also been found to create hostile school communities plagued with fear and intimidation (Carney, Hazler, & Higgins, 2002; Cobia & Carney, 2002). However, Wessler and De Andrade (2006) highlight the positive effect anti-bias education programs can have on addressing disturbing patterns of degrading language by building positive intergroup relations. Hence, as stated previously, targeted training and programs are needed to enact the equity policy around creating inclusive school communities. While participants did not reference anti-bias programs during interviews, both Vanya and Gregory challenged students' deeply rooted prejudicial language by locating themselves within the minoritized identity category, in order to explain the detrimental effects this type of language had on their identity.

Although not generalizable due to the small sample in my study, having teachers who occupied minoritized spaces (e.g. Rosemary being Black, Gregory being openly gay) seemed

important to destabilizing and addressing students' inequitable stereotypes and language. For instance, a male student reacted apologetically to Gregory following his use of the term 'that's gay' because the student knew Gregory was an openly gay teacher and he had a close relationship with Gregory. Similarly, Vanya located herself within the minoritized gender category in an effort to illustrate the discriminatory effects of the student's colloquial use of the saying "whining like a girl." Vanya later equated the term "whining like a girl" with the N-word, but the student remained antagonistic, causing her to enlist the help of another educator who was Black. When the same parallel was used by the Black female educator, the student shifted his response. Consequently, it appeared that, in some cases, teachers who occupied the space of 'Other' seemed to have more credibility to the students that they were trying to convince to change their behaviour, language, or views about a given equity topic— becoming especially important when considering the lack of representation of diversity in the teaching corps.

Cultural Mismatch: A Homogenous Teaching Corps

Participants noted the imbalance between a relatively homogenous teaching corps (White, middle-class) that bore little resemblance to school communities (often up to 80% non-White students) in the GTA. Consistent with the research literature, teachers working in the diverse urban communities identified an overall lack of teacher diversity in their school communities and discussed the plausible challenges this lack created for not only minoritized students and their families, but all students in the school community (Carr & Klassen, 1997; Dlamini & Martinovic, 2007; Escayg, 2010; Gebhard & Hopson, 2012; Meiners, 2002; Raible & Irizarry, 2010; Ryan, Pollock, & Antonelli, 2009; Solomon, 1997). For example, Vanya discussed the preponderant homogeneity of White teachers and administrators at her school by describing her

initial reactions to the lack of representation of teachers from diverse backgrounds. Vanya felt that this disparity represented a complete “cultural mismatch [that] did not reflect the cultural diversity” of the students and families her school community serves. While Vanya recognized that she was not saying that “White teachers [couldn’t] teach Black kids,” her identification of this “cultural mismatch” illustrates another barrier to equitable school communities. Daniel similarly felt that the mismatch between the diversity of the student population in the GTA and the homogeneity of the teaching force was doing a disservice to minoritized students because “a lot of racialized students feel like they can’t speak to some teachers in the way that they’re able to speak to racialized teachers.” He continued by explaining that, as an African-Canadian teacher, he’s “been able to empathize with the students in the classroom and understand some of the situations that they’ve been going through in life”— this sentiment was also expressed by Rosemary and Richard. Daniel’s, Rosemary’s, and Richard’s comments suggest that minoritized students may relate better to educators who share similar life experiences, because they too have not only experienced systems of oppression, but have also learned how to effectively navigate the power relationships found within society and the school system — becoming powerful role models for all students, but especially minoritized youth. Without the representation of minoritized teachers like Daniel, Rosemary, and Richard, this lack of diversity within the teaching corps becomes part of a self-fulfilling prophecy where, because there are few minoritized teachers or administrators in visible leadership positions, many underrepresented youth may, subconsciously, internalize not only societal prejudice and derogatory stereotypes about themselves but also the negative message that they are not likely to succeed (Eder, 2000; Villegas & Davis, 2008).

The need for diverse role models articulated by participants in my study is well substantiated in the literature, which suggests that minoritized educators can contribute positively to equity in education in a variety of ways, some of which include: (a) enhancing cultural compatibility; (b) delivering responsive pedagogy; (c) preparing students of colour for a world that marginalizes them; (d) demystifying the hidden curriculum; (e) developing positive attitudes towards persons from a variety of backgrounds; (f) expressing lived experiences; and (g) offering positive role models (Klassen & Carr, 1997; Ryan, Pollock, & Antonelli, 2009; Solomon, 1997; Villegas & Irvine, 2010). All students should be given the opportunity to experience teachers from diversified backgrounds as they can create opportunities to construct meaningful dialogues around difference “as opposed to the prevailing stereotypes grounded in assertions of Eurocentric superiority” (Escayg, 2010, p. 3). The transformative potential of minoritized educators has also been refuted by many scholars who claim that there is no substantial empirical evidence to support the correlation between students’ achievement and the presence of minoritized teachers (Cizek, 1995; Dee, 2004; Villegas & Davis, 2007). More work is needed in this area, but even without empirical evidence that minoritized teachers improve student achievement, it is still important to reflect the changing composition of Canada.

While the divergence between increasing student diversity in the GTA and the corresponding lack of diversity in the teaching corps brings into question the role of teacher identity and its effects on minoritized students’ school experiences, the homogeneity of the teaching force is also a symptom of a deeper structural issue. The incongruence between the teaching corps relative to the community is arguably demonstrative of larger systemic barriers for minoritized professionals— especially in relation to leadership positions. The lack of

representation of minoritized identities in the teaching corps is especially problematic as it is often individual experiences with systems of oppression that typically incite minoritized teachers and leaders to remedy existing power imbalances (Dei, 2000; Milner & Hoy, 2003; Torres et al., 2004; Quartz et al., 2003).

Teaching and Learning for Equity through Culturally Responsive Pedagogy

Teachers in diverse classrooms in the GTA were developing an equity-focused curriculum that represented and validated the diverse experiences and identities of all students, as well as developing meaningful and authentic student-teacher relationships by holding high expectations for all students. Participants' pedagogical practices aligned with some of those reported by teachers in Lopez's (2011) study, as well as those identified by Morrison, Robbins, and Rose (2008) in their analysis of peer-reviewed journals on culturally responsive pedagogy. The following eight components of culturally responsive pedagogy were identified as dominant themes throughout the literature: (a) reshaping curriculum; (b) cultural competence; (c) building on students' funds of knowledge; (d) encouraging relationships between schools and communities; (e) critical consciousness; (f) engaging students in social justice work; (g) making explicit the power dynamics of mainstream society; and (h) power sharing in the classroom (Lopez, 2011; Morrison, Robbin, & Rose, 2008). Participants in my study all emphasized the importance of reshaping the Eurocentric nature of traditional curriculum to be more equitable and inclusive of the lived experiences of minoritized students by honouring and validating their personal and historical narratives. For instance, Rosemary referenced the importance of diversifying the English curriculum by selecting texts that reflect students' social identities, which she felt was a particular strength at her school. In a similar vein, Adam stressed the

necessity of teaching “authentic history” that moves beyond “teaching the narrative of the victor” to include “women’s issues . . . [and] the treatment of minority groups . . . and not simply as an add-on at the end of the unit [but] as a predominant thread in the course.” Here Adam’s approach to teaching history evinces an awareness of the pitfalls of additive approaches (Banks & Banks, 2009) to inclusion where “inviting difference” (Harper, 1997, p.199) into the curriculum positions minoritized groups on the margins of mainstream curriculum and becomes “more about tolerance than about change” (Gérin-Lajoie, 2008, p. 15).

Participants reported embedding issues of social justice into their classroom practice to help students develop the critical lens necessary to identify and challenge social inequities in the school system and society at large and take action as youth advocates for change. For example, Richard cited many inquiry-based projects on social issues, one of which centered upon gender-neutral products. Similarly, Vanya described a data management math unit plan that integrated immigration statistics and poverty levels. Even at the Kindergarten level, Gregory reported on numerous instances where he wove in issues of social justice into his professional practices, some of which included taking his Kindergarten class to the Gay Pride flag raising ceremony in Toronto and a critical inquiry lesson that involved the students reflecting upon issues of fairness as it related to drinking water advisories in First Nations communities. In teaching for social justice, participants in my study created the conditions necessary for students to consider multiple perspectives through various markers of difference, thereby enabling them to engage in critical thinking, through collaborative decision making and inquiry.

In addition, Gregory was the only participant in my study who specifically cited instances where he solicited parents’ involvement. If a central tenet of culturally responsive pedagogy is

ensuring that students see themselves reflected in the curriculum by relating content to students' cultural backgrounds and the cultural capital they bring to the classroom, then building pathways between parents and the school by inviting them to share their knowledge and expertise becomes all the more critical.

In the same way that strong relationships built between parents and the school are essential for developing culturally responsive and equitable school communities, establishing positive student-teacher relationships creates a classroom climate built upon trust and care, which becomes the very landscape necessary to foster culturally responsive pedagogy (Gay, 2010). For example, Daniel demonstrated a genuine care for his students and a commitment towards supporting them both inside and outside the classroom; he explained that teachers need to “understand the kids, understand what they are interested in, understand their cultural background and some of the issues they may be facing at home.” Similarly, Richard explained that he would sometimes wear a suit during his REC program because he wanted his Black male students to “see that [they could] be more than a rapper or a basketball player or some other athlete”; he continued by highlighting that “there is that whole mentorship and role model piece” to teaching. Extending upon Richard’s conversation around the importance of being a positive role model, Rosemary explained that many minoritized students have confronted negative or low teacher expectations and, as a result, are arguably most in need of authentic and caring relationships in order to help them develop a more positive sense of self-worth and competence, which has implications for not only their academic trajectories, but also their emotion well-being. Anecdotal responses from participants revealed that, only through a positive and respectful rapport between teachers and students, can genuine teaching and learning occur.

Implications and Recommendations

The findings of this research carry several implications for various educational stakeholders including policymakers, administrators, and educators.

For Policymakers

While the Ontario Ministry of Education (MOE) has earned national and international attention for its 2009 policy document *Realizing the Promise of Diversity: Ontario's Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy*, the impact of this policy does not appear to have brought change in the school communities where my participants taught nor does it appear to have had any impact whatsoever on their own pedagogical practices, which may be an indicator of its more symbolic rather than instrumental role. Educational policies, without clear directives on how to tangibly achieve their initiatives or how to effectively monitor, assess, and evaluate their implementation, put educational practitioners at all stakeholder levels in an impossible situation (Peck, Sears, & Donaldson, 2008). In order for equity policies to be effective, directives need to be formulated in ways that are easy to follow and produce genuine results. In addition, we need to devise more productive processes to evaluate and monitor the extent to which these policies are being implemented and actually impacting decisions and actions in school communities across Ontario. Focus on implementing, monitoring, and evaluating the current equity policy could be facilitated by adopting internal equity audits and plans with specific guidelines for all stakeholders within the tri-level systems reform model.

For Administrators

Central to achieving greater educational equity for all students is strong and committed leadership. Educational leaders who are committed to equity and issues of social justice “have to

develop a complex repertoire of technical and interpersonal competencies in order to create equitable schools”; some of these necessary competencies include “understanding their school and district hierarchical power structures and their place in them; learning the cultural dynamics of their school; determining district politics and power and balancing a vast range of stakeholder interest” (Armstrong et al., 2013; p. 122). Given this lengthy laundry list of complex to-do items with which administrators are tasked, educational leaders need to be given additional professional development specific to the area of leadership for equity education if they are to effectively lead and build strong foundations within the school community.

For Educators

Teachers working in diverse urban contexts require more substantive and ongoing professional development to assist them in coping with some of the challenges that arise from working with minoritized youth in diversified classrooms. As evidenced from participant responses in this research study, more professional development and learning opportunities are needed to authentically address equity in education. Training teachers in Faculties of Education before they enter into the school system presents a viable avenue to improve the professional practices of teachers in Ontario when grappling with controversial issues in all school communities and classrooms.

Limitations

With respect to participant recruitment, it is possible that participants’ opinions may not be representative of the viewpoints of the entire teaching community as teachers may have had a vested interest in equity and diversity issues as they volunteered to partake in this research. In addition, this research primarily focused on the lived experiences of six urban teachers working

in southern Ontario, which limits the geographical scope. Accordingly, research findings are not generalizable across wider populations or rural locations. Given the exploratory nature of the research, generalizability was not a specific goal; rather, the focus was to hear the stories of how the participants made meaning of equity and diversity through their lived experiences in diverse urban classrooms.

Another limitation to the study is researcher bias, which Merriam (2002) suggests has the potential to threaten the validity and reliability of qualitative inquiries as a result of the researcher being the “primary instrument for data collection and analysis” (p. 5). Bias occurs when the researcher’s subjective experiences interfere with data collection and influence the interpretation of data during analysis. In an effort to manage this potential limitation, I maintained a reflective research journal for recording my decision-making processes, maintained accounts of what transpired during interviews, and problematized and questioned my perceptions and beliefs throughout the research process. Member checks, which Robson (2002) argues can reduce the threat of researcher bias, were also carried out in this study to offer participants the opportunity to contest and correct any interpretations.

The differential representation of participant voices is another limitation to this study. Vanya, Gregory, and Rosemary are quoted most often; however, I continuously problematized my own biases and positionality, as previously mentioned, by using a reflective research journal.

Therefore, I cannot ascertain whether this over-representation was mediated by issues of race or gender; rather, it may have resulted from the fact that these participants’ interviews lasted substantially longer and they had more year of experiences, which might have contributed to more robust anecdotes and narratives.

Participant self-reporting is the final limitation of this study. Most of the interview questions focused on eliciting participants' understandings of diversity and equity, anchored through self-reported descriptions of their classroom practices. Recognizing the discrepancies between what people report and what they actually practice, on-site observations at each participant's school would be necessary to substantiate her or his reported perceptions in relation to actual classroom practices and behaviour; however, this method was not possible due to the scope of the master's thesis.

Future Research

In accordance with the tri-level approach to equitable school reform, this research focused primarily on educators' practices in diverse urban contexts as they directly influence both minoritized and non-minoritized students. Additional research exploring the power dynamics at play within the meso/institutional level may provide a clearer understanding of some of the institutional and structural barriers reported by teachers in this research. Furthermore, additional research surrounding students' perspectives and experiences in diverse urban classrooms would furnish the necessary data to draw a comparison between what participants reported to be practicing to what was actually occurring in schools. Additional research into how pre-service programs at Faculties of Education in Ontario prepare students to deal with equity issues, in conjunction with studying equity-focused professional development workshops for in-service teachers, could illuminate areas of strength and weakness, which could provide concrete suggestions on how we can better prepare Ontario teachers to meet the needs of increasingly diversified learning communities.

Concluding Thoughts

While educators are tasked with the responsibility of responding to concerns about diversity and equity, many encounter challenges that inhibit their abilities to tackle issues of equity in the classroom. Responses from interviewees emphasized how these structural challenges and barriers became powerful catalysts for devising more innovative solutions to addressing issues of equity through culturally responsive teaching practices that placed the student at the centre of the learning experience. If the goal of educational leaders and reform initiatives is to transform the learning outcomes for minoritized groups by building a more equitable school system, as outlined in the Ontario Ministry of Education's (2009b) *Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy*, then teachers need to be supported in their endeavours to create transformative learning spaces that engage students in their own learning in authentic ways and also challenge social inequities both inside and outside the classroom. While there is still a substantial amount of work to be done in meeting the needs of minoritized youth, the rich experiences and narratives of the six teachers in my study highlight their dedication to fostering empowering learning communities built on a commitment towards achieving educational equity for all students.

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APPENDIX A: ONTARIO'S EQUITY AND INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

STRATEGY: FOUR-YEAR IMPLEMENTATION PLAN

YEAR 1: 2008-2009 (MOE, 2009a)

The Ministry of Education will:

- support the development, implementation, and monitoring of equitable and inclusive education policies, programs, and practices in the ministry, school boards, and schools through the Inclusive Education Branch;
- provide \$4 million to school boards to support and promote equity and inclusive education and school safety, and to address harassment in schools;
- issue a Policy/Program Memorandum (PPM) to provide direction to boards on the development, implementation, and monitoring of equity and inclusive education policies. This memorandum will focus on board policies, programs, guidelines, and practices, as well as on shared and committed leadership, inclusive curriculum and assessment practices, school–community relationships, religious accommodation, school climate and the prevention of discrimination and harassment, professional learning, and accountability and transparency;
- release guidelines to assist boards in the development, implementation, and monitoring of equity and inclusive education policies, with a focus on addressing gaps in student achievement;
- expand the school climate surveys for students, parents, and school staff on the ministry website to help identify issues and inform actions to promote equity and inclusive education;
- develop courses related to equity and inclusive education as part of the revision to the social sciences and humanities curriculum;

- promote the involvement and engagement of parents with their boards and schools to encourage them to share their ideas and provide advice on enhancing equity and inclusive education (e.g., through parent involvement committees, special education advisory committees, school councils);
- work with faculties of education and the Ontario College of Teachers to incorporate content pertaining to equity and inclusive education in pre-service and in-service teacher education programs and to increase access for members of underrepresented groups;
- encourage and empower students to share their ideas, get involved, and take part in activities and groups that honour diversity and promote equity and inclusive education, such as student-led projects, the Minister's Student Advisory Council, and regional student forums.

School boards will:

- review existing equity and inclusive education policies and/or develop or extend such policies;
- identify a contact person to liaise with the ministry and other boards to share challenges, promising practices, and resources;
- report on progress in the Director of Education's annual report.

YEAR 2: 2009-2010

The Ministry of Education will:

- work with stakeholders to facilitate the sharing of resources by a variety of methods, including a website and e-network;
- support professional learning on equity and inclusive education for staff working in schools, boards, and the ministry;

- support school board implementation of equity and inclusive education strategies through initiatives, such as Managing Information for Student Achievement (MISA), that produce data to help inform policies, programs, and planning;
- incorporate the principles of equity and inclusive education in the Parents Reaching Out grant program;
- communicate progress to educators, parents, and the public.

School boards will:

- develop or revise policies on equity and inclusive education for implementation by September 2010;
- review existing community partnerships to support the principles of equity and inclusive education and to reflect the diversity of the broader community;
- implement strategies to identify and remove discriminatory barriers that limit engagement by students, parents, and the community, so that diverse groups and the broader community have better board-level representation and greater access to board initiatives;
- have religious accommodation guidelines in place, and communicate these guidelines to the school community;
- review student assessment and evaluation policies and practices to identify and address systemic bias that may exist in the way students' work is assessed and evaluated;
- put procedures in place that will enable students and staff to report incidents of discrimination and harassment safely and that will also enable boards to respond in a timely manner.

Schools will:

- develop and implement strategies to engage students, parents, and the broader community actively in the review, development, and implementation of initiatives to support and promote equity and inclusive education;
- implement strategies to review existing community partnerships so that they reflect the diversity of the broader community;
- work towards representation of diverse groups on school committees;
- report progress annually to the school board.

YEAR 3: 2010-2011

School boards will:

- implement equity and inclusive education policies;
- embed equity and inclusive education principles in board and school improvement plans;
- support the schools' review of classroom strategies that promote school-wide equity and inclusive education policies and practices;
- provide information about equity and inclusive education policies, procedures, and practices to students, administrators, teachers, parents, school staff, school councils, and volunteers, and make efforts to assist parents who do not understand the language of the board.

Schools will:

- develop school improvement plans that are aligned with Ontario's equity and inclusive education strategy;
- review classroom strategies and revise them as needed to ensure they are aligned with and reflect school-wide equity and inclusive education policies.

YEAR 4: 2011-2012

School boards will:

- implement positive employment practices that support equitable hiring, mentoring, retention, promotion, and succession planning;
- provide opportunities for students, administrators, teachers, support staff, and trustees to participate in equity and inclusive education training and leadership initiatives;
- establish processes that include performance indicators to monitor progress and assess the effectiveness of policies, programs, and procedures.

Schools will:

- implement board equity and inclusive education policies, programs, and action plans that reflect the needs of their diverse school communities;
- review and establish self-assessment processes to determine the effectiveness of the school's equity and inclusive education plans and procedures.

APPENDIX B: RECRUITMENT EMAIL

Subject: Participants needed for research on equity and inclusive education

Amy Daoust is looking for participants for her Master's research study. The proposed study is entitled: **“Education without Margins: An Exploration of Six Teachers’ Understanding and Enactment of Equity and Inclusive Education in Diverse Urban Classrooms.”** The purpose of this qualitative study is to explore how in-service teachers’ identity impacts their practice in diverse classrooms, as well as to identify what types of professional development and school initiatives, if any, are occurring to address equity issues. that have been made available or could be made available in the future to support the enactment of equitable and inclusive practices.

For the purposes of this study, I am looking for research participants who are currently in-service full-time teachers working at a school in the Greater Toronto Area (GTA). If you are currently a teacher in the GTA, and self-identify as working in a diverse school community, I would like to invite you to participate in this research.

If you agree, you will be asked to complete an individual interview, which will be conducted at a site most convenient to you. The total time requirement for participating in this study will be no longer than one hour. Your participation is completely voluntary and every effort will be made to protect your anonymity through the use of pseudonyms.

Through your involvement with this study, you will have the opportunity to voice your opinions about teaching and learning in diverse urban contexts. Participation in studies, such as this one, has often been seen as forms of professional development, creating an enriching opportunity for you to reflect on your pedagogy and enhance your professional practice.

Please find attached both the Letter of Information for the study, as well as a sample consent form. These should answer any additional questions you may have. However, if they do not, or you wish to ask me (the principal investigator) any additional questions, please do not hesitate to call me on my cell phone at 613-790-5141 or email me at 13ad18@queensu.ca. If you wish to contact my supervisor, Dr. Amanda Cooper, she may be reached at (613)-533-6000 ext. 77286 or amanda.cooper@queensu.ca.

[If you know of any other teachers who are currently working in diverse classrooms in the GTA and would be interested in participating in this research, please forward them my recruitment email.](#)

Please let me know by [insert date] whether you would like to participate in this study.

Thank you for your time. I hope to hear from you soon.

Amy Daoust

APPENDIX C: LETTER OF INFORMATION

This research is being conducted by Amy Daoust (Master of Education, Candidate) under the supervision of Dr. Amanda Cooper in the Faculty of Education at Queen's University in Kingston, Ontario. This study has been granted clearance according to the recommended principles of Canadian ethics guidelines and Queen's policies.

What is this study about? The changing face of Ontario's diversity is also reflected within its schools, which has presented both unique challenges and opportunities for educators who are teaching within increasingly diverse contexts. The challenge confronting teachers is how best to address the high dropout rates and achievement disparities for students who are members of particular a socio-economic class, or racial, ethnic, cultural, religious, or gendered group. While the Ontario Ministry of Education has released its policy document, *Realizing the Promise of Diversity: Ontario's Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy* to address these achievement discrepancies, gaps continue to persist among various groups of students. Accordingly, the purpose of this qualitative study is to explore how in-service teachers' identity impacts their practice in diverse classrooms, as well as to identify what types of professional development and school initiatives, if any, are occurring to address equity issues.

What will this study require? If you agree to participate in this research you will be asked to complete an individual interview, which will be conducted at a site most convenient to you. The interview will last a maximum of one hour and will be recorded in digital audio files.

Potential Harms, Risks or Discomforts? The risks involved in participating in this study are minimal. However, discussions centring on equity, race, and discrimination may evoke discomforting feelings.

Is participation voluntary? Your participation is completely voluntary and choosing not to participate will not result in any adverse consequences. Further, you are free to choose, without reason or consequence, to refuse to answer any questions. You may withdraw from this study at any time with no negative consequences. If you withdraw from the study, you may choose to have your data removed.

What will happen to my responses? The interview recording will be transcribed and then the recording will be destroyed. Only the principal investigator will have access to the data. All electronic files will be password protected. Paper and audio data will be secured in a locked cabinet. I will maintain copies of the transcripts for a minimum of 8 years and may use the data (with named removed) in subsequent research. Confidentiality will be protected to the extent possible. None of the data will contain your name or the identity of your place of work. To protect your identity, a pseudonym will replace your name on all data files and in any dissemination of findings. Interviews questions may revolve around specific school initiatives or professional development you've seen or encountered. All school initiatives or professional development that you mention will be described generically in all products arising from this thesis; no identifying characteristics will be used. It is important that you be given the opportunity to discuss specific initiatives that anchor your responses in practice; as such, I will anonymize the initiatives. Furthermore, due to the multiplicity of equity initiatives occurring across the Greater Toronto Area, these initiatives, once anonymized, will be difficult to identify in relation to your particular school or school board. This research may result in publications of various types, including journal articles or other professional publications.

What if I have concerns? Any questions about study participation or a request to withdraw from the study may be directed to Amy Daoust at 13ad18@queensu.ca or the supervisor Dr. Amanda Cooper at (613)-533-6000 ext. 77286 or amanda.cooper@queensu.ca. Any ethical concerns about the study may be directed to the Chair of the General Research Ethics Board at (613) 533-6081 or chair.GREB@queensu.ca

APPENDIX D: CONSENT FORM

Name (please print clearly): _____

1. I have read and retained the Letter of Information and have had any questions answered to my satisfaction.

I understand that I will be participating in this study called **Education without Margins: An Exploration of Six Teachers' Understanding and Enactment of Equity and Inclusive Education in Diverse Urban Classrooms**. I understand the purpose of this research is to explore the ways in which in-service teachers' identity impacts their practice in diverse classrooms, as well as to identify what types of professional development and school initiatives, if any, are occurring to address equity issues.

2. I understand the risks involved in participation, and have had any questions about them answered to my satisfaction.
3. I understand that my participation in this study is voluntary and I may withdraw at any time without adverse consequences. I understand that if I withdraw from the study, I may choose to have my data removed. I understand that the data may also be published in professional journals or presented at academic conferences. I understand that every effort will be made to maintain confidentiality to the extent possible now and in the future.
4. I understand that interview questions may revolve around specific school initiatives or professional development that I have seen or encountered. I understand that the every effort will be made to anonymize the names of these initiatives.
5. I understand that my responses from the interview session will be audio recorded.
6. I am aware that any questions about study participation or a request to withdraw from the study may be directed to Amy Daoust at 13ad18@queensu.ca or my supervisor Dr. Amanda Cooper at (613)-533-6000 ext. 77286 or amanda.cooper@queensu.ca. Any ethical concerns about the study may be directed to the Chair of the General Research Ethics Board at (613) 533-6081 or chair.GREB@queensu.ca

Please check the appropriate box or boxes:

I would like to review the transcript of my data after the interview

I would like to receive a copy of the findings from this study

Please sign one copy of this Consent Form and return to the researcher.

Retain a second copy for your records.

I have read the above statements and had any questions answered. I freely consent to participate in this study.

Participant's Signature: _____

Date: _____ E-mail address: _____

APPENDIX E: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS AND PROBES

Interview Questions

Probes

Background Questions

1. How long have you been teaching?
 - a) What is your current position?

2. How would you describe the diversity of the student populations you have worked with?

3. How do you think your background and identity have affected your experiences and understandings of diversity and equity in schools?

4. In your time teaching, have you seen an increased focus on equity issues in schools?

- a) How familiar are you with the Ontario Ministry of Education's Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy?

That's very interesting because you mentioned 'X', which is actually one of the items listed in the policy document.

Teacher-Student

5. On a daily basis, what helps you address the diversity of your classroom?

6. Could you talk about a recent event in which you adapted your practice due to student diversity?
 - a) Why did you decide to do this?

Do you seek out additional information or look for support from others?

Can you describe any recent lessons or activities that explicitly addressed issues related to equity?

Student-Student

7. Have you seen issues of equity arise between students during times of disagreement? For example, have you noticed a bullying issue in the hallways, cafeteria, outside?
- a) How did you respond to the situation?
 - b) Why did you decide to respond in this manner?
 - c) How did you feel about the topic of the disagreement or the situation?

Teacher-Colleague

8. I know from past conversations with teachers that sometimes issues arise amongst colleagues. Have you faced any specific challenges from colleagues when trying to address equity issues? What types of difficulties did you encounter? How did the situation make you feel? What do you think could help resolve this issue?

Teacher Administration

9. In a similar vein, have you experienced any specific challenges or resistance from administration in your efforts to enact equitable practices? Can you think of any instances when you felt like the administration undermined you? Why do you think they responded in this way? Are there any alternatives that you feel could have been more productive? As an "X" educator, have you experienced differential treatment by administrator, your colleagues, or community members?

Teacher-Community

10. What kinds of school initiatives or community partnership programs have you seen or heard of that you feel have contributed to creating an equitable and inclusive school community? Can you provide an example? What were these initiatives supporting? Are these initiatives still in action today?
- a) How have these initiatives supported you in addressing the diversity in your classrooms?
 - b) What school initiatives or programs do you feel would be beneficial for creating an equitable school?

Teacher Training

- | | |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------|
| 11. When considering the decisions you make about equity and inclusive education, who or what influences them, and how? | What is the first source you turn to? |
| a) What teaching material, resources, documents, or individuals have helped you when you are taking into account student diversity in your work? | Do you refer to any documents or resources? |
| | Are there certain individuals with whom you may speak? |
| | Can you recall any courses or workshops? |
| | |
| 12. What training or professional development in equity and inclusive education or on how to effectively work with diverse students have you had? | How helpful were they? |
| a) During PD, how much do you feel comfortable to speak openly about diversity, equity, and discrimination? | What made them more or less helpful? |
| | |
| 13. What kinds of professional development would you like to receive in order to work better with diverse student populations? | |
-

APPENDIX F: ETHICAL CLEARANCE



October 02, 2014

Ms. Amy Daoust
Master's Student
Faculty of Education
Queen's University
Duncan McArthur Hall
511 Union Street West
Kingston, ON, K7M 5R7

GREB Ref #: GEDUC-754-14; Romeo # 6013749
Title: "GEDUC-754-14 Education without Margins: A Critical Exploration of Ten Urban Teachers' Understanding of Equity and Inclusive Education in Diverse Classrooms"

Dear Ms. Daoust:

The General Research Ethics Board (GREB), by means of a delegated board review, has cleared your proposal entitled "GEDUC-754-14 Education without Margins: A Critical Exploration of Ten Urban Teachers' Understanding of Equity and Inclusive Education in Diverse Classrooms" for ethical compliance with the Tri-Council Guidelines (TCPS) and Queen's ethics policies. In accordance with the Tri-Council Guidelines (article D.1.6) and Senate Terms of Reference (article G), your project has been cleared for one year. At the end of each year, the GREB will ask if your project has been completed and if not, what changes have occurred or will occur in the next year.

You are reminded of your obligation to advise the GREB, with a copy to your unit REB, of any adverse event(s) that occur during this one year period (access this form at https://eservices.queensu.ca/romeo_researcher/ and click Events - GREB Adverse Event Report). An adverse event includes, but is not limited to, a complaint, a change or unexpected event that alters the level of risk for the researcher or participants or situation that requires a substantial change in approach to a participant(s). You are also advised that all adverse events must be reported to the GREB within 48 hours.

You are also reminded that all changes that might affect human participants must be cleared by the GREB. For example you must report changes to the level of risk, applicant characteristics, and implementation of new procedures. To make an amendment, access the application at https://eservices.queensu.ca/romeo_researcher/ and click Events - GREB Amendment to Approved Study Form. These changes will automatically be sent to the Ethics Coordinator, Gail Irving, at the Office of Research Services or irvingg@queensu.ca for further review and clearance by the GREB or GREB Chair.

On behalf of the General Research Ethics Board, I wish you continued success in your research.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Joan Stevenson".

Joan Stevenson, Ph.D.
Chair
General Research Ethics Board

c: Dr. Amanda Cooper, Faculty Supervisor
Dr. Chris DeLuca, Chair, Unit REB
Ms. Stacey Boulton, c/o Graduate Studies and Bureau of Research