

Equity and Inclusive Education in Ontario: How Diversity is Integrated in the Classroom through
the Curriculum: Executive Summary

Emma Hopkins
For the Laidlaw Scholars Foundation

Supervised by Professor Thom Dancer

September 10th, 2022



UNIVERSITY OF
TORONTO



Abstract

This research paper explores the issue of diversity and inclusivity in high school-level English, History, Law, and Equity Studies curriculums in Ontario, policies that support inclusive education, and the practical implementation of diversity and inclusion in classrooms, as well as where and why barriers to inclusive education arise. The outcome of this paper aims to explain why inclusive education is important, how it is currently present in Ontario, and how it may be improved upon.

Introduction

The implementation of equity and inclusion in Ontario's high schools is a valuable part of the learning experience for diverse children. Students who do not see themselves reflected in the materials they learn become disengaged with the educational process, and do not thrive in the learning environment.¹

Though noticeable strides have been made within Ontario's schools and school boards in terms of diverse education, improvements are always necessary to keep up with an ever-changing society. My paper aims to identify what initiatives are currently in place within the Ministry of Education, Ontario school boards, and curriculum documents, and to provide suggestions for any necessary improvements.

Research Question and Methodology

Throughout this paper, I will use the terms "inclusive education", "diverse education", "equitable education". These terms are all interchangeable, and effectively all describe a type of education wherein different racial, cultural, and ethnic groups are represented and respected.

My research seeks to answer this question: In Ontario's high school curriculums, diversity strategies, and individual initiatives, how is racial, cultural, and ethnic diversity represented, what barriers prevent inclusive education, and how can Ontario's education system improve?

¹ *Considerations for Program Planning*. Program Planning. (n.d.). Retrieved September 10, 2022, from <https://www.dcp.edu.gov.on.ca/en/program-planning/considerations-for-program-planning/human-rights-equity-and-inclusive-education>

My research process used qualitative data collection in the form of investigating government documents, consulting news articles, professional papers, and education-based websites, as well as interviewing individuals who currently work in Ontario's education system. This paper seeks to answer the research question through melding literature and formal documents with individual experiences. I will explain and evaluate Ontario's equity strategies, their curriculum documents, teacher education programs, and school board policies, while identifying any barriers to inclusive education, before presenting my findings and providing potential solutions.

Equity Strategies in Ontario

Since 2003, a variety of strategies, policies, and action plans dedicated to this goal have been implemented. The Ontario Human Rights Commission states that "all students have the right to an education that allows them to meet their full potential and contribute to society".² Equity strategies continue to be a vital component to the fight for a fully inclusive education.

Ontario's *Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy*, published in 2009, was a document that aimed to implement equity and inclusive education policies in every school with support from the Ministry of Education.³ The *Strategy* also made it mandatory for every school board to have in place some sort of equity and inclusive education strategy, and to identify systemic barriers present within their schools, as well as implemented continuous review of inclusive education strategies.⁴

Teaching Human Rights in Ontario is a comprehensive guide to implementing practical human rights learning in Ontario created by the OHRC. It provides activities to support learning about human rights, discrimination, and protection under the *Ontario Human Rights Code*, so that students may be able to identify experiences of discrimination and inequality.⁵

² OHRC submission regarding the Government consultation on the education system in Ontario. (2018, December 14). Retrieved September 10, 2022, from <https://www.ohrc.on.ca/en/ohrc-submission-regarding-government-consultation-education-system-ontario#Contents>.

³ Ministry of Education. (2009). (rep.). *Ontario's Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy* (pp. 6–26). Retrieved September 10, 2022, from <https://files.ontario.ca/edu-equity-inclusive-education-strategy-2009-en-2022-01-13.pdf>. (p.11)

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ontario Human Rights Commission. (2013). (rep.). *Teaching Human Rights in Ontario* (pp. 1–7). (p.1)

Achieving Excellence, published in 2014, details goals for a new model of education in Ontario focusing on acceptance and respect for diverse students.⁶ The Plan of Action lays out steps including teaching more about First Nations, Metis, and Inuit (also known as FNMI) history and culture, providing support for FNMI students, and providing professional development for teachers and students in relation to equity studies.⁷

Equity and Inclusive Education in Schools, also published in 2014, shares Ontario's renewed vision for equity and inclusive education to support students in achieving success in their schools. The guidelines to implementing an inclusive curriculum are as follows:

1. The curriculum should be regularly revised and adapted to the changing of student needs.⁸
2. Integration of diversity, including of First Nations, Metis, and Inuit peoples, should be part of the curriculum expectations, examples, and prompts.⁹
3. Schools must allow for students and staff to experience learning about diversity in history, culture, and peoples.¹⁰

This section also highlights different resources that school boards, schools, and individuals may use to promote diversity in classrooms, such as the Aboriginal Education Office's "Teacher's Toolkit", which explains how to integrate FNMI perspectives into their curricula.¹¹

Ontario's Education Equity Action Plan, published in 2017, emphasizes the necessity for diversity in both the curriculum and the classroom. Racialized and non-racialized students should have the opportunity to experience other cultures through their interactions with one another in a safe and inclusive environment¹² and through learning about diversity within the curriculum in order to facilitate understanding and acceptance.¹³ The department of the Ministry of Education

⁶ Queen's Printer for Ontario. (2014). (rep.). *Achieving Excellence: A Renewed Vision for Education in Ontario* (pp.1–20). Retrieved from https://www.oise.utoronto.ca/atkinson/UserFiles/File/Policy_Monitor/ON_01_04_14_-_renewedVision.pdf. (p.8)

⁷ Ibid, p.13.

⁸ Ministry of Education. (2014). (rep.). *Equity and Inclusive Education in Ontario Schools* (pp. 5–48). Retrieved from <https://files.ontario.ca/edu-equity-inclusive-education-guidelines-policy-2014-en-2022-01-13.pdf>. (p.24)

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Queen's Printer for Ontario, Ontario's Education Equity Action Plan4–22 (2017). Retrieved September 10, 2022, from https://files.ontario.ca/edu-1_0/edu-Ontario-Education-Equity-Action-Plan-en-2021-08-04.pdf. (p.4).

¹³ Ibid.

who published the document, the Education Equity Secretariat, plans to support school boards in implementing diverse perspectives and learning into their curriculums.¹⁴

These policies and guidelines have helped the development and transition to a more inclusive and equitable school system in Ontario. However, the disconnect between policy and practicality is an important issue that the education system continues to struggle with, despite the numerous resources available.

Curriculum in Ontario

Ontario's English, History, Law, and Equity Studies curriculums are fundamental to the growth of equity and inclusive education as they are most flexible to the inclusion of diversity. Law and Equity Studies are not required courses in a high school education, however, every student in Ontario is required to take Grade 10 History, and Grades 9 to 12 English. Ensuring diversity is present in all curriculums is vital to teaching students about equity and inclusion.

Ontario's English curriculum states that learning materials in the class should be as diverse and inclusive as its students and Ontario's society.¹⁵ According to the Ministry of Education, "teachers routinely provide materials that reflect the diversity of Canadian and world cultures, including the cultures of Aboriginal peoples".¹⁶ Students should be aware of and able to recognize historical, cultural, and political contexts of themselves and others. The English curriculum's "Antidiscrimination Education" section details that students should be learning critical literacy skills to identify discrimination, understand biases, and learn about culture, identity, and power.¹⁷

Like English, the History curriculum emphasizes that materials should reflect the diversity of the classroom and society.¹⁸ In History courses, the curriculum provides prompts and learning expectations give teachers the freedom to choose the history they teach. The issue with open-ended curriculums such as History arises when teachers do not have to incorporate diversity into what they teach. There are many barriers that could prevent teachers from being

¹⁴ (Ontario's Education Equity Action Plan 2017 p.22.)

¹⁵ Ministry of Education. (2007) *The Ontario Curriculum Grades 9 and 10* [English]. <https://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/curriculum/secondary/english910currb.pdf#page=42> (p.14)

¹⁶ Ibid, 16.

¹⁷ Ministry of Education. (2007) *The Ontario Curriculum Grades 11 and 12*. [English]. <https://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/curriculum/secondary/english910currb.pdf#page=42> (p.33)

¹⁸ Ministry of Education. (2015) *The Ontario Curriculum Grades 11 and 12* [History]. <https://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/curriculum/secondary/english910currb.pdf#page=42> (p.54)

inclusive with their curriculums, but if it is not mandatory, diversity will not necessarily be taught. Additionally, when diversity is incorporated into the curriculum, it is crucial that it is being taught in an appropriate and sensitive way, where teachers must ensure that they are mindful in their teaching in order to have an inclusive and equitable space.

The curriculum for the Law courses offered in Ontario includes a full unit on human rights and inclusivity in Canada and abroad.¹⁹ The learning expectations for these courses emphasize that students should learn to understand issues with human rights in Canada and internationally.²⁰ The human rights unit is critical to bringing diversity into the curriculum, as the topic of human rights is broad enough to include all cultures, races, and ethnicities. This unit is also particularly important to the discussion of equity and inclusion, as it allows students to learn about their legal rights and the laws in place to protect them. Moreover, the courses require students to understand law from different types of legal perspectives such as the critical race theory, or different Indigenous legal theories to represent laws of various cultures.²¹

Equity Studies courses are those that teach students about different diverse groups in Canada and globally, to promote a culture of acceptance and understanding.²² There is a heavy emphasis on the practice of social justice, so often human rights issues that affect minority groups in the world are discussed. The curriculum documents for Equity Studies stress the idea that for an education system to be fully inclusive, students should be reflected in the curriculum, and their physical environments, so that they can properly engage in learning.²³ As diverse students and peoples are the focus of Equity studies curriculums, teachers must make a conscious effort to understand and properly represent marginalized groups, rather than focusing on stereotypical representations of people.

One of the foremost barriers that teachers face when trying to implement a diverse curriculum is the question of whether they are capable of teaching about diverse peoples. In an interview with a Head of Canadian and World Studies, the educator expressed that some teachers in their department were concerned when asked to incorporate different cultural groups in their

¹⁹ Ministry of Education. (2015) *The Ontario Curriculum Grades 11 and 12* [Law]. <https://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/curriculum/secondary/english910currb.pdf#page=42> (p.450, 478).

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid, p.482.

²² Ministry of Education. (2013) *The Ontario Curriculum Grades 9 to 12* [Equity Studies]. <https://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/curriculum/secondary/english910currb.pdf#page=42> (p.57)

²³ Ibid, p.43.

curriculum, or when asked to teach specifically black or Indigenous history courses.²⁴ This teacher explained that people who are not part of these groups aren't necessarily comfortable with teaching about these groups, as they feel that educating about different cultural groups should be done by someone who is a part of them.²⁵

Two other interview subjects, both Heads of English at their respective Greater Toronto schools, expressed the restraint of budgets on diverse education. Both educators explained that, in the English program, the budget they are given cannot keep up with the changing nature of diverse education.²⁶ While they may want to include more diverse novels or texts in their curriculums, the school simply may not have the money to buy new materials each year. The teachers have to work with what they have until they are given a new budget or attempt to incorporate online texts with diversity instead.

Culturally Responsive and Relevant Pedagogy

Culturally Relevant and Responsive Pedagogy is a culmination of Gloria Ladson-Billings' Culturally Relevant Pedagogy, and Geneva Gay's Culturally Responsive Pedagogy, both of which argued that racialized students in the United States regularly failed in the school system because of systemic issues that denied the culture that students brought into the classroom.²⁷ When these theories were applied to Canadian schools by Nicole West-Burns and Jeff Kugler, they combined the two pedagogies to create a new approach called Culturally Responsive and Relevant Pedagogy.²⁸

The practical application of CRRP in the classroom can appear in many ways. Using cultural competence in the classroom is a method of applying CRRP that allows students to learn both about their own cultures, and about the cultures of other groups.²⁹ Cultural competence involves expanding to teach outside of the dominant classroom culture, checking for bias and stereotypes when teaching, and avoiding assumptions about cultural groups.³⁰ CRRP in the

²⁴ (Personal communication, July 28, 2022).

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ (Personal communications, August 5, 2022, & August 11, 2022).

²⁷ Hurley, S. (2019, September 18). Culturally Responsive and Relevant Pedagogy. Retrieved September 10, 2022, from <https://www.edcan.ca/articles/culturally-responsive/>.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Macauley, S. (2018). Culturally Relevant and Responsive Pedagogy in the Early Years: It's Never Too Early! Retrieved September 10, 2022, from <https://etfvoice.ca/feature/culturally-relevant-and-responsive-pedagogy-early-years-its-never-too-early>.

³⁰ Ibid.

classroom should see children of all backgrounds and their lives represented in their learning materials, as well as exposure to various and differentiated cultures.³¹ Social justice is a large component of CRRP, where teachers are asked to think critically about dominant narratives in society, how they are applying this to their teaching, and to teach their students the same critical consciousness so they can engage meaningfully with social justice practices.³² Teachers should be engaging in practices of unlearning the unconscious bias and stereotypes with which they grew up, and to be considering the “classic” textbooks and lessons they use in education to ensure they are not harmful to students.³³

CRRP is a practice that has been introduced into some teacher education programs in Canada in order to equip new teachers with the critical consciousness. These pedagogies are taught through content, using lectures, texts, and case-based learning focused on teaching knowledge and skills related to educational inclusivity, and process, where pre-service teachers engage in critical reflection of themselves, and the teaching practices and systems in which they operate.³⁴ However, some pre-service teachers present barriers to CRRP as their lack of knowledge about diversity³⁵ and concern of teaching stereotypes.³⁶ Other teachers fear that introducing multiple cultural perspectives into the classroom can lead to opposing, harmful views between students.³⁷ Other pre-service teachers have their own internal prejudices leading to a refusal to learn about diversity.³⁸

Another barrier to the implementation of CRRP is the lack of uniformity across Ontario. In a statement made in a 2017 volume, the International Journal of Educational Management says, “culturally relevant pedagogy and social justice education remain largely add-on training for educators in Ontario unless they happen to end up in one of the few institutions that have

³¹ Kugler, J., & West-Burns, N. (2010, Spring). The CUS Framework for Culturally Responsive and Relevant Pedagogy. *Our Schools, our Selves*, 19, 215-223.

<http://myaccess.library.utoronto.ca/login?url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.proquest.com%2Fmagazines%2Fcus-framework-culturally-responsive-relevant%2Fdocview%2F872776200%2Fse-2%3Faccountid%3D14771>

³² [CRECS uOttawa]. (2019, January, 8). *Culturally Responsive and Relevant Pedagogy: The Foundation and Core Components* Video. YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mySy5dC4IWs>

³³ [Tedx Talks]. (2020, February, 12). *Building Critical Consciousness of Educational Equity*/Nicole West-Burns, Ph.D./TEDxOshawaED Video. YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=evndCfQ92s4>

³⁴ DeLuca, C. (2012). Promoting inclusivity through and within teacher education programmes. *Journal of Education for Teaching*, 38(5), 551–569. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02607476.2013.739792>

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Ibid.

programmes with a social justice focus”.³⁹ Ontario’s teacher education systems face a shortage in resources that prevent them from hiring trained professionals to implement and teach diversity programs.⁴⁰

CRRP is important to the discussion of an inclusive curriculum because of the way it introduces cultural competence and critical consciousness into the classroom. Its model of inclusion allows students to feel recognized and accepted in their education, but due to barriers and restrictions, is not regularly practiced.

Ontario’s Education System

The discussion of Ontario’s equitable and diverse education policies is not relevant if it is not transferred to the different tiers of the education system. It is vital for inclusive education that these policies be used as school boards, schools, and teachers create their own plans for diverse education. This section will analyze four school boards in the Greater Toronto Area, then four school boards in Northern Ontario, to compare whether inclusive education plans differ across the province, and why this may occur. This section should not be read as a criticism of any school boards, however, should draw attention to similarities and differences across the province.

Toronto District School Board’s inclusive education policy states that the curriculum must balance multiple diverse perspectives to ensure every student is being represented.⁴¹ Furthermore, the TDSB strives to include Anti-Oppressive Education practices in their curriculums so students will learn tolerance and acceptance.⁴² Teachers must take part in workshops to learn diverse teaching practices, and all TDSB policies are assessed using the Equity Policy Assessment Tool to ensure equity, diversity, and inclusion are at the forefront of all equity policies.⁴³

York Region District School Board holds a yearly Equity Symposium to help educators learn to implement equitable and inclusive education, a student-led Equity and Inclusivity Conferences with workshops promoting these practices in the classroom, and an Equity Steering

³⁹ Tuterts, S., & Portelli, J. (2017). Ontario school principals and diversity: Are they prepared to lead for equity? *International Journal of Educational Management*, 31(5), 598–611. <https://doi.org/10.1108/ijem-10-2016-0228>

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ *Equity & Inclusion*. Toronto District School Board. (n.d.). Retrieved September 10, 2022, from <https://www.tdsb.on.ca/Elementary-School/The-Classroom/Equity-Inclusion>

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Ibid.

Strategy to ensure schools and curriculums are inclusive for all students.⁴⁴They also house an Equity and Inclusivity Advisory Committee that oversees the development and implementation of Equity and Inclusivity Strategies, as well as an Indigenous Education and Equity Strategy to amplify Indigenous voices and promote acceptance.⁴⁵

Peel District School Board's policies include the Plan for Student Success, with various policies and agendas relating to equity and inclusive education, and Policy 54, their board-wide goal for establishing culturally responsive classrooms and inclusive, representative curriculums.⁴⁶ PDSB also has a Black Student Success Strategy recognizing that black students do not have equal experiences in PDSB schools, so aims to identify curriculum materials that do not reflect black students, and to integrate the black Canadian experience and anti-black racism into the curriculum.⁴⁷

Durham District School Board's Equity and Diversity Strategic Plan works with curriculum development for the integration of CRRP into classes, as well as the consultation of students in inclusive curriculum planning and programming.⁴⁸ DDSB's Compendium for Black Student Success acknowledges that black students are more likely to feel disengaged in educational settings, therefore works to implement inclusive curriculum by integrating black history and performing an Equity Audit to ensure that curriculums are reflective of all students.⁴⁹

Algoma District School Board has an Equity and Inclusive Education Policy that is mainly based on Ontario's Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy. ADSB strives to create a learning environment where all students and staff feel included, students are represented in the curriculum, and staff provide opportunities for students to learn about diverse peoples.⁵⁰ ADSB says on the topic of diverse education, "we are committed to providing learning and working

⁴⁴ *Equity and inclusive education*. York Region District School Board. (2022, June 15). Retrieved September 10, 2022, from <https://www2.yrdsb.ca/student-support/equity-and-inclusive-education>

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ *Equity and Inclusion*. PDSB. (n.d.). Retrieved September 10, 2022, from <https://www.peelschools.org/about/inclusion/Pages/default.aspx>

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ *Equity & Inclusive Education*. DDSB. (n.d.). Retrieved September 10, 2022, from <https://www.ddsb.ca/en/about-ddsb/equity-inclusive-education.aspx>

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ *Equity & inclusivity*. – Community – Algoma District School Board. (n.d.). Retrieved September 10, 2022, from https://www.adsb.on.ca/apps/pages/index.jsp?uREC_ID=1086013&type=d&pREC_ID=1364736

environments and student learning opportunities that are reflective of the diverse identities found within our ADSB communities”.⁵¹

Keewatin-Patricia District School Board’s Equity Action Plan also aligns closely with Ontario’s Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy, specifically in the notion that all students should see themselves reflected in their learning. They have put a focus on inclusivity towards Indigenous students, including working with Indigenous communities to respond to the Truth and Reconciliation Calls to Action, and having specially designed Indigenous programs.⁵² Their Policy 326 is their “students first” policy that involves curriculum development that acknowledges student diversity and brings Culturally Responsive and Relevant Pedagogy into the classroom.⁵³

Superior-Greenstone District School Board’s Equity and Inclusive Education Policy aims to have an equal learning environment for all students, and to protect them from discrimination based on race, ethnicity, culture, and more.⁵⁴ SGDSB works to incorporate the policies of equity and inclusive education outlined in Ontario’s Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy. They will also partner with diverse communities to meet the needs of all students in the board, and plan to implement an inclusive curriculum that undergoes regular review to prevent discrimination and ensure inclusivity.⁵⁵

The District School Board of Ontario North East is committed to equity and inclusive education, which will be reflected in all board operations. They plan to implement an inclusive curriculum through the development and review of resources, delivery of instruction, and assessment and evaluation practices.⁵⁶ They want to establish the framework of the Equity and Inclusive Education Policy in their school board, to review existing policies of equity in

⁵¹ (Algoma District School Board, *Equity & inclusivity*)

⁵² Keewatin-Patricia District School Board. (n.d.). (rep.). *Keewatin-Patricia District School Board Equity Action Plan*. Retrieved September 10, 2022, from <http://www.kpdsb.on.ca/pages/view/equity-and-inclusive-education>.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Superior-Greenstone District School Board. (2009). (rep.). *Equity and Inclusive Education*. Retrieved September 10, 2022, from <https://www.sgdsb.on.ca/upload/documents/536---mgmt-guide-equity-and-inclusive-education-dec-8-09.pdf>.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ District School Board Ontario North East. (n.d.). (rep.). *Board Improvement Plan for Student Achievement and Well-Being*. Retrieved September 10, 2022, from <https://22.files.edl.io/35bb/03/01/22/190106-bbe3e4c8-11aa-47c4-ad9f-a446d04f1595.pdf>.

education, and to provide respectful, inclusive, non-stereotypical, and unbiased learning materials for students.⁵⁷

Every school board selected to be analyzed in this paper has policies and strategies in place for providing an inclusive education to students, and they all draw upon Ontario's Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy. However, there are noticeable differences between the policies created by schools in Southern versus Northern Ontario, primarily in the way Southern schools build upon Ontario's strategy. Toronto, Peel, Durham, and York have all created student-specific programs such as York's Equity Symposium, or Durham's Black Student Success Compendium. Though Keewatin-Patricia does extensive work with Indigenous communities, why other Northern school boards have not adopted specific strategies. It is possible that there are not enough diverse students to support these programs, or the financial aspect of the creation of these policies. Much of the funding given to school boards in Ontario comes from student enrolment,⁵⁸ so school boards with fewer students are designated less money. Furthermore, some school boards follow a student-first ideology, where the diversity in their curriculum is based on the diversity of students in classrooms, so other diverse groups may not be taken into consideration and thereby not included in the inclusive education strategies.

Outcomes and Suggestions

Ontario currently has many strategies in place for promoting inclusive education in the classroom. All these strategies either put programs in place for creating an inclusive curriculum, or are documents made to support its implementation. These documents are available to every school board, school, and teacher in Ontario, but one must question the uniformity of their use across the province. Every school board has an equity and inclusive action plan in place, but not every school adheres to ensuring their curriculums are diverse. A former student of a Southern Ontario school noted that they graduated as recently as 2020 and cannot recall an inclusive curriculum in their courses.⁵⁹ The school was in a predominantly white area, meaning that the

⁵⁷ (District School Board Ontario North East, *Board Improvement Plan for Student Achievement and Well-Being*)

⁵⁸ *How Ontario's education system works: Publicly funded education*. People for Education. (2020, September 24). Retrieved September 10, 2022, from <https://peopleforeducation.ca/public-education-in-ontario/>

⁵⁹ (Personal communication, August 9, 2022).

curriculum was reflective of most of the population; however, the student expressed that they did not feel they were exposed to non-white cultures and histories in their curriculum.⁶⁰

Current curriculum documents have been adapted to be equitable and inclusive, however there are still some underlying issues which need to be addressed, primarily that every curriculum document used the word “Aboriginal” to refer to an Indigenous person. Many Indigenous Canadians have expressed that this term is outdated and disrespectful, instead asking people to use the term Indigenous or FNMI.⁶¹ While the curriculum documents may pre-date the transition from Aboriginal to Indigenous, by keeping an offensive word in their curriculum documents, they may be perpetrating a harmful environment for Indigenous students and teachers.

Other barriers to inclusivity may be lack of budget or hesitancy to teach diversity. Regardless, the advent of technology in the classroom may be a solution to this problem. For English classes, most books are available for purchase or borrowing online, meaning students could read on their personal devices, or devices provided by the school. However, considering that not every student or teacher will have access to these devices, teachers may be able to change the way they present outdated books to their classes. One of the teachers interviewed noted that by the time their school could purchase all the diverse novels they required, the books were already outdated. Part of the English curriculum asks students to use their critical thinking skills to identify any bias, stereotypes, or discrimination present in their learning materials. This may allow teachers to help students build their critical consciousness although the learning materials may be slightly outdated.

Another potential solution may come in the form of implementing cultural arts curriculums. Educators across the Greater Toronto area have identified challenges to culturally responsive teaching that comes in the forms of anti-black racism, cultural appropriation, and institutional unpreparedness.⁶² Applying cultural arts into the curriculum would integrate learning about new cultures in diverse ways to make the learning experience fun and valuable. Potentially integrating full-time jobs for cultural arts educators into schools to apply this type of

⁶⁰ (Personal communication, August 9, 2022).

⁶¹ *Why we say "indigenous" instead of "Aboriginal"*. - Animikii Indigenous Technology. (2020, June 17). Retrieved September 10, 2022, from <https://animikii.com/news/why-we-say-indigenous-instead-of-aboriginal>

⁶² Davidson, K. (2022, March 10). *Anti-black racism pervades cultural arts curricula in Ontario Schools, research finds*. YFile. Retrieved September 10, 2022, from <https://yfile.news.yorku.ca/2022/03/10/anti-black-racism-pervades-cultural-arts-curricula-in-ontario-schools-research-finds/>

learning into the curriculum would provide culturally diverse and inclusive education for students across the province.

Applying Culturally Responsive and Relevant Pedagogy to teaching can be extremely positive for inclusive and diverse education if it is done in the correct way. To see a shift in culturally responsive education across the province, school boards, as well as the Ministry of Education, may consider implementing professional development specifically focused on CRRP or diversity training. One teacher who was interviewed said they experienced some diversity-focused professional development training, but it is unclear if this is uniform across the province.⁶³ All pre-service teachers should be exposed to diversity training and CRRP in their time at teacher's college to ensure that they enter the classroom equipped to teach diverse students. It is important for all teachers, regardless of their backgrounds, to enter the workforce equipped to teach students of all diversities, and to be able to teach a myriad of different diversities, every if their students are not always reflective of them.

As a final suggestion, I would like to call to attention the Ontario Human Rights Commission's submission regarding the Government consultation on the education system in Ontario. The OHRC outlines ways that the Ministry of Education, along with all levels of the education system, can ensure a more equitable experience for Ontario students. Some of their initiatives relevant to inclusive curriculum include adopting a uniform, province-wide design to make the curriculum accessible to all students in Ontario, teaching human rights learning in the curricula, with content on historical human rights violations in Canada and their prolonged impact, as well as teaching human rights from a tolerance and acceptance standpoint.⁶⁴ The OHRC stipulates that teachers should be required to teach human rights using appropriate methods, and that they should be adequately trained to teach these topics.⁶⁵ The curriculum materials should be reflective of Canada's diverse society, but specifically should teach Indigenous history and promote reconciliation with the First Nations, Metis, and Inuit people of Canada. The OHRC guarantees that every person is equal under the school system, and thus provides these suggestions to keep that promise.⁶⁶

⁶³ (Personal communication, August 5, 2022).

⁶⁴ *OHRC submission regarding the Government consultation on the education system in Ontario 2018*

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

While this section may provide some possible suggestions to break barriers preventing inclusive education across Ontario, there is still much work to be done on the subject. Further consultation of students in the education system should be undertaken to consider the perspectives of diverse groups and their experiences within the education system. Discussion with teachers may be considered to understand how the government can best support them in implementing inclusive curriculums, or to gain knowledge about the kinds of professional development is necessary to expand diversity education. Teacher education programs may expand their equity and inclusive education training as a mandatory component of the programs so that every incoming teacher is equipped with the tools to teach for and about diverse groups. Finally, though the Ministry of Education declined a request for a formal interview for this project, further consultation with this organization is required if more work is undertaken in the field of equity and inclusive education. The branches in the Ministry that provide support to schools and school boards in implementing inclusive education are crucial to securing budgets and support in professional development.

Concluding Statements

The implementation of inclusive education in Ontario's education system has not always been a linear process but is fundamental to teaching all students. It is important for students to see themselves reflected in their learning materials, so they feel as though they are welcome and accepted in their schools. Students will also see others who may not share the same features or background as them in their learning materials, which promotes tolerance and acceptance of other groups. Prejudice is a learned behaviour, and the advent of inclusive education in schools can only strengthen Ontario's multiculturalism and diverse population.

Acknowledgements

This research project would not be possible without the support of the Laidlaw Scholars Foundation, for which I am extremely grateful. I am extremely passionate about the topic of inclusive education in schools, and the positive effects derived from it, so I am incredibly thankful to have been given the chance to perform this research and write about it. Many thanks to the people interviewed for this project for their willingness and assistance. Thank you to Professor Thom Dancer for his help and advice as I worked through this research summer.

Finally, thank you to the Laidlaw Scholars Foundation and the University of Toronto Laidlaw Scholars program for this opportunity.

Bibliography

- Campbell, C. (n.d.). Educational equity in Canada: The case of Ontario's strategies and actions to advance excellence and equity for students. *School Leadership & Management*, 41(4-5), 409–428. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13632434.2019.1709165>
- Cole, M., Tulk, C., & Grzincic, N. (2017, November 8). *Toronto is now majority visible minority. what about your neighbourhood?* thestar.com. Retrieved September 10, 2022, from https://www.thestar.com/news/gta/2017/11/08/toronto-is-now-majority-visible-minority-what-about-your-neighbourhood.html?li_source=LI&li_medium=star_web_ymbii
- CRECS uOttawa]. (2019, January, 8). *Culturally Responsive and Relevant Pedagogy: The Foundation and Core Components* Video. YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mySy5dC4lWs>
- Davidson, K. (2022, March 10). *Anti-black racism pervades cultural arts curricula in Ontario Schools, research finds*. YFile. Retrieved September 10, 2022, from <https://yfile.news.yorku.ca/2022/03/10/anti-black-racism-pervades-cultural-arts-curricula-in-ontario-schools-research-finds/>
- DeLuca, C. (2012). Promoting inclusivity through and within teacher education programmes. *Journal of Education for Teaching*, 38(5), 551–569. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02607476.2013.739792>
- District School Board Ontario North East. (n.d.). (rep.). *Board Improvement Plan for Student Achievement and Well-Being*. Retrieved September 10, 2022, from <https://22.files.edl.io/35bb/03/01/22/190106-bbe3e4c8-11aa-47c4-ad9f-a446d04f1595.pdf>.
- Equity & Inclusion*. Toronto District School Board. (n.d.). Retrieved September 10, 2022, from <https://www.tdsb.on.ca/Elementary-School/The-Classroom/Equity-Inclusion>
- Equity & Inclusive Education*. DDSB. (n.d.). Retrieved September 10, 2022, from <https://www.ddsb.ca/en/about-ddsb/equity-inclusive-education.aspx>
- Equity & inclusivity*. – Community – Algoma District School Board. (n.d.). Retrieved September 10, 2022, from https://www.adsb.on.ca/apps/pages/index.jsp?uREC_ID=1086013&type=d&pREC_ID=1364736
- Equity and Inclusion*. PDSB. (n.d.). Retrieved September 10, 2022, from <https://www.peelschools.org/about/inclusion/Pages/default.aspx>
- Equity and inclusive education*. York Region District School Board. (2022, June 15). Retrieved September 10, 2022, from <https://www2.yrdsb.ca/student-support/equity-and-inclusive-education>

- How Ontario's education system works: Publicly funded education*. People for Education. (2020, September 24). Retrieved September 10, 2022, from <https://peopleforeducation.ca/public-education-in-ontario/>
- Hurley, S. (2019, September 18). Culturally Responsive and Relevant Pedagogy. Retrieved September 10, 2022, from <https://www.edcan.ca/articles/culturally-responsive/>.
- Joned, P. (2015). Bringing insider perspectives into inclusive teacher learning: Potentials and challenges for educational professionals . *Journal of Research in Special Educational Needs*, 15(1), 71–168. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1471-3802.12091>
- Keewatin-Patricia District School Board. (n.d.). (rep.). *Keewatin-Patricia District School Board Equity Action Plan*. Retrieved September 10, 2022, from <http://www.kpdsb.on.ca/pages/view/equity-and-inclusive-education>.
- Macauley, S. (2018). Culturally Relevant and Responsive Pedagogy in the Early Years: It's Never Too Early! Retrieved September 10, 2022, from <https://etfvoice.ca/feature/culturally-relevant-and-responsive-pedagogy-early-years-its-never-too-early>.
- Ministry of Education. (2007) *The Ontario Curriculum Grades 9 and 10* [English]. <https://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/curriculum/secondary/english910curr.pdf#page=42>
- Ministry of Education. (2007) *The Ontario Curriculum Grades 11 and 12*. [English]. <https://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/curriculum/secondary/english910curr.pdf#page=42>
- Ministry of Education. (2009). (rep.). *Ontario's Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy* (pp. 6–26). Retrieved September 10, 2022, from <https://files.ontario.ca/edu-equity-inclusive-education-strategy-2009-en-2022-01-13.pdf>.
- Ministry of Education. (2013) *The Ontario Curriculum Grades 9 to 12* [Equity Studies]. <https://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/curriculum/secondary/english910curr.pdf#page=42>
- Ministry of Education. (2014). (rep.). *Equity and Inclusive Education in Ontario Schools* (pp. 5–48). Retrieved from <https://files.ontario.ca/edu-equity-inclusive-education-guidelines-policy-2014-en-2022-01-13.pdf>.
- Ministry of Education. (2015) *The Ontario Curriculum Grades 11 and 12* [History]. <https://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/curriculum/secondary/english910curr.pdf#page=42>
- Ministry of Education. (2015) *The Ontario Curriculum Grades 11 and 12* [Law]. <https://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/curriculum/secondary/english910curr.pdf#page=42>
- OHRC submission regarding the Government consultation on the education system in Ontario. (2018, December 14). Retrieved September 10, 2022, from

<https://www.ohrc.on.ca/en/ohrc-submission-regarding-government-consultation-education-system-ontario#Contents>.

Ontario Human Rights Commission. (2013). (rep.). *Teaching Human Rights in Ontario* (pp. 1–7).

Queen's Printer for Ontario, Ontario's Education Equity Action Plan 4–22 (2017). Retrieved September 10, 2022, from https://files.ontario.ca/edu-1_0/edu-Ontario-Education-Equity-Action-Plan-en-2021-08-04.pdf.

Queen's Printer for Ontario. (2014). (rep.). *Achieving Excellence A Renewed Vision for Education in Ontario* (pp. 1–20). Retrieved from https://www.oise.utoronto.ca/atkinson/UserFiles/File/Policy_Monitor/ON_01_04_14_-_renewedVision.pdf.

Superior-Greenstone District School Board. (2009). (rep.). *Equity and Inclusive Education*. Retrieved September 10, 2022, from <https://www.sgdsb.on.ca/upload/documents/536---mgmt-guide-equity-and-inclusive-education-dec-8-09.pdf>.

[Tedx Talks]. (2020, February, 12). *Building Critical Consciousness of Educational Equity/Nicole West-Burns, Ph.D./TEDxOshawaED* Video. YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=evndCfQ92s4>

Tuters, S., & Portelli, J. (2017). Ontario school principals and diversity: Are they prepared to lead for equity? *International Journal of Educational Management*, 31(5), 598–611. <https://doi.org/10.1108/ijem-10-2016-0228>

Why we say "indigenous" instead of "Aboriginal". - Animikii Indigenous Technology. (2020, June 17). Retrieved September 10, 2022, from <https://animikii.com/news/why-we-say-indigenous-instead-of-aboriginal>