

# Whose ‘Truth’ Matters? Problematizing the Epistemological Underpinnings of Social Policy Research

Michael Steven Fraschetti

*Policy Studies, Toronto Metropolitan University, Toronto, Canada*

Email: [mfraschetti@torontomu.ca](mailto:mfraschetti@torontomu.ca) Website: [www.fraschetti.net](http://www.fraschetti.net)

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## ABSTRACT

Despite many policies produced to mitigate racism and other forms of discrimination in the public education sector, the inability to implement these policies fall short. These policies may appear to address inequities by attempting to meet legal requirements, however, they do not always address the structural power dynamics grounded in white supremacy which continue to perpetuate systemic racism.

Drawing on examples from the Ontario public education sector such as employment equity policies, Afrocentric Alternative Schools in the TDSB and the Student Resource Officer program in Toronto schools, I illustrate how positivist inspired “evidence-based” policy processes fail at offering policy solutions for equity issues by ignoring those who do not fall into the purview of the economic and political interests of dominant stakeholders in the policy process.

Deploying an anti-racist/anti-colonial framework, I examine the superficial attempts to garner inclusivity through equity policies that continually fail to heal the wounds of exclusion by reproducing multiple band-aid policies rather than formulating a restructuring of public education in the Ontario public education system that will allow equity seeking groups a place at the table.

## KEY WORDS

Anti-Colonial, Anti-Racist, Education Policy, Policy Cycle, Social Policy, Systemic Oppression

## INTRODUCTION

The argument for equitable racial and ethnic representation in public organizations caught momentum in the early 1980's with the *Equality Now: Report on the Commission on Equality in Employment* written by judge Rosalea Abella (1984). Since then, community organizations, educational institutions and various scholars have made important arguments suggesting that increasing the number of racialized teachers will benefit Canada's growing diverse student body (Escayg, 2010; Ryan, Pollock, & Antonelli, 2009; Solomon, 1997). Many schoolboards in Ontario and other parts of Canada have since created policy that speaks directly to governing, pedagogical, curriculum and employment practices. For instance, the Toronto District School Board (TDSB) appears to have made many attempts to implement employment equity policies over the last twenty years. In June of 1999, the TDSB implemented *Policy P.037: Equity Foundation* (Toronto District School Board, 1999) which was part of a larger equity commitment in all units of the Board, to ensure bias-free hiring and promotion to better reflect the diversity of the student population within the school system. In June 2004, *Policy P.029: Employment Equity* (Toronto District School Board, 2004), a policy that is specific to implementing and promoting employment practices was adopted. This policy outlined the commitments to address systemic barriers to employment for racialized groups. This policy was revisited and re-implemented by the TDSB in spring of 2006 and again in 2012. Despite these attempts to ensure employment equity within its ranks, the TDSB has not published any official statistics regarding the racial makeup of its employees to evaluate whether these policies have been effective. The 2016 census data shows that out of approximately 28,440 secondary school teachers in the city of Toronto, 24.8% of identify as a visible minority ("Workforce Population by Designated Groups, Employment Equity Occupational Groups and National Occupational Classification Unit Groups - Open Government Portal," n.d.). Compared

to the 2011 census data, this number has increased by only 0.2% which is an insignificant increase (Employment and Social Development Canada, 2015). When compared to the overall 48.8% of racialized people that make up the population of Toronto, this number shows the lack of racial representation of educators in the secondary school panel. These statistics reveal that while the Toronto school boards have made attempts to establish employment equity, there continues to be a disconnect between the equity policies adopted and its outcome.

I want to begin by disclosing that I am currently an occasional teacher with the TDSB and identify as a white cisgender male. What brought me to research equity, diversity, and inclusion language in the policy process was that shortly after graduating with a Bachelor of Education in 2015, I had an interview for a teaching position with the TDSB. I was hired as an occasional teacher and asked to attend a new hire orientation with other successful candidates. At the orientation I noticed that out of the sixty successful candidates all appeared to be White or White passing except for two individuals. This was quite peculiar because the TDSB boasts about being “one of the largest and culturally diverse school boards in Canada, with nearly 246,000 students in 584 schools and approximately 40,000 employees” (Working at the Toronto District School Board, n.d., para. 2). Although the TDSB acknowledges the overall “cultural diversity” of students within its catchment area, it does not disclose nor recognize how “cultural diversity” translates to its teaching body. When I first applied, I did not think I would be hired, assuming that the TDSB had a strong commitment to employment equity and as a white male I would not be considered. The orientation session I attended could have been an anomaly, but was this lack of racial representation connected to hiring decisions? Further, what does this mean for racial diversity in leadership positions within these schools? Many educators of colour have claimed that they were passed up for opportunities to advance because of their racial makeup (Brown, 2015).

These narratives can also be corroborated with a report produced in 2015 by the Turner Consulting Group and the Ontario Alliance of Black School Educators that highlights the narratives of Black educators about their experiences in the public education system. This report offers an extensive account of the barriers that Black teachers face as it relates to unfair employment practices. Statistics only show an overall snapshot of a lack of racial representation in public education in relation to its student-to-teacher ratio, and I would argue that quantitative research is limited in outlining the nuances that can impact the further research, creation, adoption and implementation of equity policy that focuses on racial discrimination.

Understanding that much of policy research is entrenched in objectivist ontology that predominately draws on quantitative methods (Clemons & McBeth, 2015; Fischer, 1989; Frost & Ouellette, 2011; Kisby, 2011; Stone, 1988; Weiss, 1991), I raise questions with respect to shifting our understanding of policy research. In this paper I ask: Can we imagine a paradigm shift that validates critical approaches to evidence-informed policy practice? Specifically, how can policy research be influenced by transformative forms of research such as critical anti-racist and anti-colonial frameworks? Is it possible to have these critical approaches influence and/or share equal validity in relation to current dominant policy research ontology? This paper includes two key sections. The first section entitled “Who Gets to Define Truth” will engage with the dominant research methodologies that have traditionally influenced policy research. By deploying an anti-racist and anti-colonial framework, I will unpack how positivist paradigms are more valued and widely used even though they have been shown to fail when it comes to the creation of social and education policies. The next section entitled, “Multidimensional Critical Policy Analysis” will review literature on both critical anti-racist and anti-colonial theoretical frameworks to see how they can challenge the positivist paradigms that have shaped both historical and current policy

research. Using these frameworks, I will explore how policy makers can re-envision a more nuanced understanding of the creation and implementation of future social and education policy that positively impacts the lives it seeks to change. This paper is part of a larger body of research focuses on race and examines the creation and implementation of employment equity policies in public education in Ontario.

In what follows, I problematize the ontological framework based on the need for quantifiable evidence in the field of Policy Studies. During the latest federal election, one of the platforms that the Liberal Party of Canada ran on promoted a policy making process based on evidence-based research that would make "...decisions using the best data available and will invest only in programs proven to offer good value" ("Making decisions," n.d.). This approach implies that objective evidence will be used to inform policy; however, knowledge production generated using traditional theoretical concepts in this arena already dictates what topics are worthy enough to be created into public and social policy. The concept of "evidence based" research dictates the specificities of how 'truth' is generated as well as how 'truth' is defined and what ends up becoming a quantitatively measurable impact. This is problematic because the concept of evidence-based research, especially when it comes to educational policy can only be legitimized through measuring the achievement of students, teachers, and overall school's performance rather than taking into account individual experiences (Hoagwood & Johnson, 2003; Simons, Kushner, Jones, & James, 2003). Drawing on examples from the education sector such as the implementation of Afrocentric Alternative Schools<sup>1</sup> in the TDSB and the Student Resource Officer program in Toronto schools, I will illustrate how positivist inspired "evidence based" processes fail at offering policy solutions by ignoring those who do not fall into the purview of the economic and political interests of dominant stakeholders in the policy process. Furthermore, I also offer a proposal for

an alternative research discourse that purposefully centres the work of subaltern scholars in an attempt to disrupt the hegemonic power structure of policy making orthodoxy and, in turn, substantiate the value of qualitative research paradigms as evidence-based policy making. This will include making the argument that social policy, as it relates to labour in the public education system, should be implemented as an integrative process. Before this can happen, it will be important to tease out the trajectory of the dominant policy research discourse and the way it has neglected to effectively address issues pertaining to racial inequity in Ontario's public education sector.

## **WHO GETS TO DEFINE 'TRUTH'?**

The positivist paradigm conceives of a singular truth that already exists and is waiting to be uncovered by quantitative research methods that stem from objective inquiry. This perspective continues to dominate the field of social policy research (Clemons & McBeth, 2015; Fischer, 1989; Frost & Ouellette, 2011; Kisby, 2011; Stone, 1988; Weiss, 1991). This section will explore the landscape of policy research and the dominant evidence-based positivist research paradigm and how it translates into policy creation resulting in a single 'truth' that does not prioritize equity. Equity issues should not and cannot be quantified in a way that makes it a priority for the creation of social and public policy. Centering the power dynamics of evidence-based research and its use for policy creation, I attempt to outline how we can think about a paradigm shift that validates the voices and experiences of groups and individuals through qualitative forms of research that seek out multiple 'truths', as opposed to 'evidence-based' research that seeks one linear and definitive 'truth'.

## **Dominant Policy Research Methodologies**

Policy research has traditionally been grounded in a positivist epistemological orthodoxy based on objectivity that aims to remove all personal biases (Weiss, 1991). Housed under the umbrella of policy sciences, historically the concept of the policy process is framed as a technical tool consisting of five components as a guide for policy procedures (Laswell, 1970). After I briefly lay out Laswell's interpretation of the policy cycle, I use the case of Afrocentric Alternative Schools in the TDSB as an example to illustrate how the policy cycle is expected to work. Laswell suggests that these five components begin with the clarification of goals or values that challenge the normative dimensions of a social measure. The second dimension of Laswell's policy process considers historical trends as well as the impacts of past and present events. Third, a scientific 'intellectual task' uses empirical processes in an attempt to offer an objective analysis in discovering indeterminate relationships of actors involved. The fourth component projects any potential future possibilities of institutional value change. Finally, alternative strategies are created and implemented based on the evaluation of the previous components mentioned.

Speaking to the first component, Rizvi & Lingard (2010) suggest that, when framed as public policy, education policy is considered 'normative' because its specific design is to direct people's behaviours and actions. This becomes the centre of a site of struggle between different stakeholders such as parents and advocates of other pedagogical processes. For example, the introduction of Afrocentric Alternative schools in Toronto spawned out of a need for addressing the ongoing disadvantages faced by Black students in the dominant education system. The disadvantages Black students face becomes the issue or a 'problem' that future policy will attempt to address. To make the case, researchers and academics begin to lay out the historical conditions that have led to the current state of exclusion for Black students by using quantitative forms of

research to show ‘evidence’ that it is a worthwhile endeavour. Scholars such as George Dei (1996) made the case that Black students were not represented or reflected in the Ontario curriculum. He suggested that an Afrocentric school model that followed the methods that were used in the United States would be ideal to mitigate the disadvantages of Black students in public schools. This vision involved making the case for not only creating Black-focused schools but also changing the curriculum in the existing public-school system (Gulson & Webb, 2012). There were multiple stakeholders that both agreed and opposed the idea. I argue that there was a breakdown of the policy cycle because soon after the Progressive Conservative government was elected in the early 90’s, the push for Afrocentric schools hit a wall because of the new government’s agenda to move away from equity and focus on equality<sup>ii</sup>. I want to highlight how years of research and previous policy initiatives can come to an abrupt halt depending on who is in power. This conflicts with the rationality that is placed behind Laswell’s policy cycle that does not incorporate the power dynamics that are held by dominant stakeholders and governing bodies. Laswell’s framework has been adopted by many key prominent policy scientists where they offer a similar but slightly adapted framework of the policy process (Anderson, 2015; Dunn, 1981; Dye, 2008; Jones, 1984; Peters, 1996). Many of these policy cycle theories have been criticized by other policy scientists such as Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith (1993) who are considered to have a postpositivist approach with their ‘advocacy coalition framework’ (DeLeon, 1994). Despite their theories and critiques, they follow a similar objectivist ontology based heavily on quantitative research within the dominant policy research discourse which does not take into consideration discourses of power and how they operate.

Policy researchers for the most part have an investment in underlining the objectivity of their work. Whether they are government or academic policy researchers, the appearance of



objectivity allows the researcher to validate their positions (Weiss, 1991). This appearance of objectivity often acts as a façade because it is the only way the researcher can claim credibility within their occupational spheres. Weiss further suggests that the government worker needs to appear objective because their opportunity to be successful is contingent on them appearing to be fair and open, yet there is much pressure to eventually tow a particular line in order to stay employed. Further, the matters that come up as a policy issue and the answer to them depends on how it is constructed. In many cases, the policy process is not there to necessarily provide a solution, but rather to set the agenda and establish the problem (Kisby, 2011). In academia, there is much more room for policy research to take on less of an objective role and to push for advocacy but tends to not be held in as high esteem as their non-academic counterparts (Weiss, 1991). For example, The Student Resource Officer (SRO) program implemented in Toronto schools is a prime example of how this clearly plays out as an issue of student safety that may have been brought to the forefront to increase the Toronto Police Services (TPS) budget.

The SRO program was established in 2008 through the collaboration between the TPS, TDSB, and the Toronto Catholic District School Board (TCDSB). The demand for an immediate response to create safe environments in schools after a 15-year-old grade 9 student named Jordan Manners was shot and killed at a TDSB school named C.W. Jefferys in May of 2007. The purpose of the program was aimed to enhance school safety, community relations, and student mentorship. SROs were strategically stationed in particular schools that were deemed to be unsafe with the goal of addressing safety issues as well as facilitating positive interactions between law enforcement and students. Over time, the program came under much scrutiny because the increased police presence led to over-policing of Black and other racialized students (Madan,

2018). Advocacy groups and community members raised major objections leading to the SRO program eventually being eliminated from the TDSB in November of 2017.

To complicate the traditional use of the policy cycle, I evaluate the implementation of the 2008 SRO program in Toronto schools using James Anderson's (2015) conceptual framework of the policy process. The evaluation outlines a sequential analysis of events before, during and after the SRO policy that was implemented jointly by the TPS, TDSB, and the Toronto Catholic District School Board (TCDSB). Anderson's version of policy analysis is just one of the many variations of traditional forms of policy analysis that stem from the fundamentals of Laswell's policy framework mentioned earlier. Anderson's (2015) five key stages are: 1) Problem and Identification and Agenda Setting, 2) Policy Formulation, 3) Policy Adoption, 4) Policy Implementation, and 5) Policy Evaluation.

Using Anderson's policy process, the SRO program came out of identifying the need for making schools safer by quelling violent crimes. The particular framing of this issue allowed it to gain agenda status. By convening various stakeholders through a School Community Safety Advisory Panel to contribute to policy formulation, to jointly adopting and implementing the SRO program as a solution to the identified issue involving the collaborative efforts of the TPS, TDSB, and TCDSB, ultimately by evaluating the SRO program to assess the necessity for adjustments or the potential discontinuation due to its perceived irrelevance, we observe a comprehensive cycle of actions. . Although the policy process addresses the nuances of the political sphere, we can see how democratic dialogue concerning a policy can ultimately occur, identifying the numbers such as cost and how quickly as a percentage the rate of violence would decrease as we can see in the case of the SRO program. After the months of consultation through the School Community Safety

Advisory Panel<sup>iii</sup> involving the multiple viewpoints from students, parents, teachers and community groups, we are still witnessing a hijacking of this democratic process by the players with the most political clout and gatekeepers of financial resources who base their decisions on an economic cost/benefit and exercise of power that can only be substantiated by quantifiable means. The seriousness with which validity is given to qualitative forms of research is very evident in this particular situation, because although the School Community Safety Advisory Panel took months to gather all the views and narratives of those most invested in finding a solution to school safety, in the end, the process appeared to be futile.

## **Power and Policy**

The scientific paradigm that underpins traditional policy research does not allow the critical assessment of policies at a structural level. When used for measuring and understanding the natural world it may make sense, but it falls short when used to make sense of the social world. Policies that are instituted through a scientific evidence-based paradigm will only go as far as creating policy that will appeal to those who yield the most power in society. There is no question that quantitative measures in agriculture, medicine and robotics have made many scientific breakthroughs that have helped increase the living standards for human beings. The ability to create randomized clinical trials allows researchers to replicate studies over and over and by other researchers that can establish effectiveness beyond a reasonable doubt (Slavin, 2002). When dealing with social environments we are not able to replicate social interactions as one would be able to isolate bacterial cultures in a petri dish. Evidence-based policy analysis has failed to acknowledge that the participants and stakeholders centered in policymaking are political and dominated by economics and the marketization of society (Fischer, 1989; Stone, 1988). Just like scientific research, social research is only pursued if there is a vested interest by those who are in

a position of economic and political power to make such decisions. This evidence-based framework further assumes that all parties involved in creating policy are rational and have equal influence at the table (Clemons & McBeth, 2015). Similar to the policy that ensued from the research regarding the SRO program, we see a usurping of the implementation of a heavy handed ‘solution’ that focuses on resources that already exist, such as increasing funding to the police, rather than explore options such as an increase of social workers that may offer more effective solutions to mitigate issues of violence in schools. By framing it as a “violence in schools” issue, it essentially comes down to allotting resources to offer an immediate ‘fix’ to a specific ‘problem’ by placing police officers in schools. As Olssen (2006) draws on Michel Foucault: “... we should direct our research on power not toward the judicial edifice of sovereignty, or the state apparatus, or the ideologies that accompany them but towards the material operations of power, and specific aspects of domination and subjection as they operate in localized systems and apparatuses” (p. 21). One can argue that the issue could have been framed as an issue not directed towards school violence, but rather focus on what were the conditions that led to Jordan Manners being killed at C.W. Jefferys in 2007. The results of the *School Community Safety Advisory Panel* indicated that students felt that racism played a major role in contributing to the grading and disciplinary practices, specifically among Black students which alienated them from properly engaging in school activities. In this instance, if we focus on the material operations of power, the issue of school safety could have outlined the power dynamics causing the alienation of specific students by teachers and administration.

A critical policy research paradigm will explore how the cultural, economic, ethnic, gendered, political, social values shape socially constructed realities. This challenges the normative scientific paradigm because critical forms of policy research bring into question the

actual framing of the policy issue. It also examines how meaning is coded in language by dominant discourses and how this empowers some while weakening others (Hall, 1997). Kuntz (2010) suggests that by considering the layered processes behind policy research we question how meaning is created and how representation becomes an extension of what is considered 'objective truth'. He further suggests that it is dually important for the researcher to also be cognizant of how their own research can sometimes unconsciously reproduce unbalanced power structures. Sandra Taylor (1997) makes a case that policy research has taken language and meaning for granted thus making these policy studies methodologically unsophisticated. She further goes on to discuss how changing economic and political context heavily impact the way equity issues have been framed. Taylor suggests the use of a critical approach to social policy moves from seeing the state as a simple set of institutions to accentuating the complex historical processes within this space. This critical approach as it relates to education or social policy would be able to outline the power dynamics that exist in social-political process of creating such policy, thus offering an alternative to the current dominant positivist forms of policy development.

I think it is fair to say that the mainstream positivist paradigms associated with policy research is not going to be replaced overnight. This is evident because many of the early adopted policy processes created in the 1980's and slightly modified up until the early 2000's are still prominent in Canadian public institutions at different levels of government. Public education is no exception, making it ever more important to challenge this orthodoxy for those interested in equitable social change. By outlining the qualities of the existing dominant research paradigm in policy research in education programs in Canada, in addition to providing the critical alternatives, I argue that there needs to be an ideological push beyond the current norms. This will allow for an analysis of the hegemonic power relations that currently inform the creation of social and public

policy, and in doing so over time engage and implement more critical forms of inquiry that offer more equitable solutions for the lives these policies intent to impact the most. In sum, a critical policy research paradigm strives to examine structural inequities which does not curry favor with existing policy makers who influence knowledge production by legitimizing positivist forms of inquiry.

## **Truth and Validity**

The appeal of objective forms of evidence-based policy research remains evident. Although qualitative forms of research have gained momentum in the areas of health and social sciences, quantitative research still dominates the social policy making realm (Frost & Ouellette, 2011). Referred to as the “positivist trinity”, Kvale (1995) suggests that traditional positivist discourse will critique qualitative forms of research for lacking validity, reliability, and generalization. However, he counters that qualitative research, if crafted in a way that results in knowledge claims that are powerful and convincing that, will carry a sense of validation. As appealing as this may sound to a qualitative researcher, in relation to informing policy this alone may not be able to challenge objectivist orthodoxy.

So, what does a qualitative researcher who is trying to make positive social change to do? The concept of mixed methods that can combine both qualitative and quantitative forms of inquiry become very appealing. In my own research endeavours, I feel this pressure to justify the qualitative research projects I undertake with quantifiable data, as a way to attempt to legitimize it as valid policy analysis by speaking the language of objectivist orthodoxy. Others such as Audrey Lorde (2003) would suggest that current policies in education operate as part of an ongoing colonial framework because there has not been enough transformative change to make public

education spaces more racially inclusive. This speaks to the dominant discourse in policy analysis of how evidence-based policy research excludes an awareness in the ability to tackle oppressive structures that cultivate exclusion. The field of policy studies needs to seriously consider, if social change is desired, "...a reconceptualised validity that is grounded in theorizing our practice" (Lather, 1993, p. 674).

The use of evidence-based research for policy creation can often result in policy outcomes that do not prioritize equity and social justice. Moreover, the appearance of objectivity in policy research often masks the biases and agendas of researchers and policymakers. The question of who gets to define 'truth' in policy research is complex and multifaceted. Moving towards a more inclusive and equitable approach to policy research and creation requires a shift away from the dominant positivist paradigm towards qualitative research methods, critical reflexivity, and recognition of power dynamics. By acknowledging the limitations of traditional policy cycle models and prioritizing equity in policy outcomes, we can strive towards more just and inclusive policy processes that address the diverse needs and experiences of all individuals and groups in society. Is it possible for critical and anti-oppressive forms of inquiry to be seen as legitimate? if so, how? These are some of the central questions I address in the following section.

## **MULTIDIMENSIONAL CRITICAL POLICY ANALYSIS**

In this section, I explore how anti-racist and anti-colonial frameworks lend themselves to social and public policy intervention. I choose to use a combination of these frameworks because they compliment each other and offer a unique mapping of systemic oppression. While the two frameworks overlap, each are distinctive in their own ways. This section will explain the tenets of

each theory and demonstrate how they can be used together to challenge dominant forms of positivist ‘evidence based’ policy research.

### **Anti-Racist Methodology**

The anti-racist lens stems from a critical transformative approach which draws out the links between race and social difference on the one hand, and relations of power on the other. This lens allows for the analysis of how different levels of power (grounded in race, gender, sexuality, ability etc.) intersect with one another and provide a more detailed understanding of oppressive relations (Dei & Johal, 2005). This framework offers a wide spectrum that allows movement between different scales that can range from local interpersonal relationships to larger systemic structures that are involved in the progression of these issues. An anti-racist framework examines how historical and social factors rooted in racist relationships of power have been reinforced. This is central to understanding how racism operates at both the individual and structural levels of society. Veninga (2009), drawing on Judith Butler’s theory of performativity, lays out how the material body matters in relation to how racial categories are constructed and reproduced at a structural level. These categories are “produced through the repetition of performative acts which are embedded in discursive regimes of power and knowledge” (p.116). On an educational, institutional level, anti-racist research reveals the contradictions of how places of education that are intended to empower students can at the same time oppress and marginalize them. Anti-racist methodologies also outline the multidimensional levels of how oppression and discrimination are resisted in many ways (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). For example, there are well established connections of scholarly advantages when there is a shared race/ethnicity between teachers and students. Teachers can serve as positive advocates, mentors, and role models (Pitts, 2007; Villegas & Irvine, 2010).



Dei's (2008) understanding of anti-racist practice captures and critiques "...the 'real/everyday' politics, socio-material realities and the formal and the informal institutional practices and resistances engaged by subjects. Our methodological approaches must look simultaneously at forms of external and internal colonial and oppressive relations and practices" (p.143). An anti-racist framework offers an analysis that will trace and theorize the spaces of whiteness that exist in dominant policy processes and will enable the linking of hegemonic relations of power in the undertaking of traditional forms of 'objective' policy research.

An example of how anti-racist methodologies are deployed can be seen in an ethnographic examination that explored teachers' opinions regarding race, racism and white privilege when responding to anti-bias training in two urban districts conducted in the US. The researchers used an anti-racist framework to help understand teachers' perspectives of race and racism and what they reveal about these dimensions in education. They concluded that the racial attitudes of teachers exemplified the larger structural forms of racism that continuously inform and reinforce these attitudes and how they are manifested in teaching (Vaught & Castagno, 2008). In the framing of the research at hand with the two previous cases, we can see how rather than placing blame on the students for issues faced at the school or poor academic performance, there is an alternative focus on how the power structures based on racial attitudes towards students allow for a dissemination of the hegemonic power relations that can attribute to student performance. Through a traditional, positivist approach, the research would have most likely placed the blame of poor student performance directly on the students. An anti-racist framework would, in contrast, take into account the influence of teachers' perpetuation of an oppressive environment for students. Further, it is also important to go beyond an anti-racist analysis to include an anti-colonial one. As Lawrence and Dua (2005) suggest, "Antiracist and postcolonial theorists have not integrated an

understanding of Canada as a colonialist state into their frameworks. It is therefore important to begin by elaborating on the means through which colonization in Canada as a settler society has been implemented and is being maintained” (p. 123). Incorporate an anti-colonial framework with an anti-racist framework engages with the idea that Canada, and its established public and private institutions, are a result of ongoing colonial relations, its connection to racism and in turn how these relations of power get reproduced and permeate employment practices within these institutions.

### **Anti-Colonial Methodology**

Anti-colonial discourse stems from a critical postcolonial paradigm which links research to European colonialism and imperialism (Dei & Kempf, 2006; Smith, 1999). Current research practices arguably still employ methods that are considered value neutral but have historically and still presently refute the legitimacy of indigenous peoples’ claims to their own existence and ways of living (Smith, 1999). Anti-colonial research focuses on the perspectives of the colonized ‘Other’ with the goal that they comprehend themselves through their own suppositions and recognitions. Decolonization is a procedure of directing examination such that the perspectives of the individuals who endured a long history of oppression and marginalization are offered space to impart from their edges of reference. It includes a critical analysis of dominant literature and research methodologies that reinforce hegemonic structures based on Western ideals (Lawrence & Dua, 2005). Employing an anti-colonial analytical framework, Riyad Shahjahan (2011) endeavors to unveil latent colonial undertones within educational policy and research. Similar to Taylor (1997), he contends that the ostensibly impartial discourse of evidence-based research, purporting to enhance educational systems, instead encapsulates tumultuous occurrences stemming from its implementation of an evidentiary basis. If we refer to the SRO program example presented earlier,

we can see how the issue was framed as violence in schools/school safety rather than looking at the systemic forms of violence that create barriers for racialized students at school and in the community. He further suggests that evidence-based research informed by a colonial discourse may appear to have good intentions endeavouring to bring direction to the practice of teaching, however, it reinforces current social and political hierarchies. Using a critical anti-colonial framework would allow for the examination of these hierarchal structures and consider them in framing future policy research.

There are multiple ways to compare and contrast different theoretical frameworks for interpreting issues of race. Through these interpretations, it is important to make a distinction between how racism is structurally embedded versus how it is embodied in social structures of society. Through the use of an anti-colonial framework, it is important to examine how the Canadian colonial state has contributed to racism and exclusion. Scholars who have led the charge in implicating the state in racist and/or exclusionary acts (Bannerji, 2000; Galabuzi, 2006; Razack, 2002; Thobani, 2007) offer valuable insights to this research endeavour. Their contributions facilitate the delineations of colonial connections between the state and racial exclusions, thereby elucidating the intricate interplay with contemporary educational institutions. How these connections manifest conceptually, theoretically, materially and spatially is exemplified through the employment practices of the TDSB illustrated below. Price (2010) addresses the intersection between embedded structures of whiteness through anti-racist theory and how whiteness is embodied within these structures. She asks us to be mindful of the differences between the two schools of thought and how they intersect with one another. Before we can attempt to negate racialized discourses, we must understand how deeply structured and embedded white supremacy

is in our colonial histories, economic institutions and political structures that continue to have a bearing on the present within educational institutions.

One of the mechanisms of an anti-colonial framework is to acknowledge and examine the colonial underpinnings of present forms of oppression. Several scholars have traced the existence of racism in Canadian society to different historical events involving racialized groups in its colonial roots. They further theorize and connect how these encounters with racism operate in the contemporary moment (Agnew, 2007; Bannerji, 2000; Li, 2003; Mensah, 2010, Razack, 2002). Himani Bannerji (2000) argues that the labour market acts as a barrier for racialized individuals because Canada itself is constructed as a ‘white’ nation thereby discriminating against racialized bodies in its social, political and economic spheres. A major aspect of an anti-colonial framework acknowledges the role of Canada as a colonial settler state that reproduces racism, which permeates the public education system such that its own pedagogy teaches little about the Canadian state’s systematic policy to enslave Black people and the orchestrated genocide of Indigenous nations through the ‘publicly’ funded Residential School system. It is important to incorporate both anti-colonial and anti-racist frameworks because it allows us to acknowledge the violent historical legacies of uneven relationships imposed by the Canadian state on Indigenous peoples and at the same time acknowledging the prominence of the saliency of racialization throughout this history (Dei, 2007). Integrating these frameworks can help challenge heteronormative structures that exist in public education institutions and the reinforcing policies. This aids in outlining historical oppressions, setting the stage for creating transformative change as recommended in the Truth and Reconciliation Commission’s report (2015)<sup>iv</sup>. This change is not solely for the benefit of Indigenous peoples, but also for all historically oppressed groups within the Canadian state.

## **What does an Anti-Racist and Anti-Colonial Framework Methodology Look Like?**

Dominant forms of positivist ‘evidence based’ policy research as being the only source of objective ‘truth’ is a fallacy. The claim of objectivity is deceptive because there is no objectivity when specific stakeholders can decide which corroborated information and facts are considered relevant. Many of the variables and perceived issues at hand that are constructed are heavily influenced by the purview of the policy analyst or research paradigm they are accustomed to (Kisby, 2011). Using an anti-racist framework interrupts the fallacy of objectivity by demonstrating there are multiple ‘truths’ that need to be accounted for when establishing new policy. By also incorporating an anti-colonial framework the original policy in place is also interrogated and deconstructed. When anti-racist and anti-colonial frameworks intersect, they offer a multi-dimensional and holistic approach to understanding and addressing the intertwined issues of racism and colonialism. Both frameworks also recognize the ways in which racism and colonialism are interconnected and mutually reinforcing, and they emphasize the importance of intersectional analyses that account for the multiple layers of oppression that marginalized communities face (Tadiar, 2015). They both prioritize the voices and perspectives of marginalized communities and highlight the need for systemic change to address the root causes of racism and colonialism. At the same time, anti-racist and anti-colonial frameworks also have different lenses and tools for analysis. An anti-racist methodology often focuses on legal and policy frameworks, while anti-colonial methodologies centers on the historical and ongoing struggles of Indigenous peoples and other colonized groups. An anti-colonial framework also centers on issues of land, culture, and sovereignty, which may not always be central to an anti-racism framework. However, both share the goal of challenging and transforming oppressive systems and structures to create more equitable and just societies. It is only then we can begin to imagine the reconfiguration of

oppressive structures to truly be more equitable, diverse, and inclusive – by allowing all stakeholders an opportunity to contribute to the decision-making process thus giving true voice and autonomy to those who are continuously excluded.

Using an anti-racist and anti-colonial framework in conjunction with a qualitative analysis plays a crucial role in examining the complex and multifaceted issues of race, equity, and schooling. It offers unique contributions to social and educational policy making by providing a nuanced understanding of the lived experiences, perspectives, and voices of those directly impacted by these issues. Qualitative analysis allows researchers to capture the rich and diverse narratives of individuals and communities, shedding light on the intricacies and nuances of race, equity, and schooling that may not be easily captured through quantitative methods alone.

I would like to use the experience of adult day school teachers in the TDSB as a way to briefly explore how an anti-racist and anti-colonial framework can analyze a particular issue in education. The pathway for immigrant teachers is not as rigorous as other professions such as the immigrant recertification process in the Canadian medical sector, which will more than likely leads applicants to change professions because the process is too arduous (Boyd & Schellenberg, 2007; Wong & Lohfeld, 2008). In Ontario, if their credentials are not accepted, immigrant teachers must take the two-year enhanced education program at an Ontario university (Ontario College of Teachers, n.d.). As an occasional teacher working at multiple schools within the TDSB over the last few years, I noticed an interesting trend as it relates to immigrant racialized teachers. Many immigrant teachers that are hired by the TDSB as well as racialized Canadian born teachers that do manage to get hired, appear to take up the more precarious positions within the Board such as occasional teachers or adult day school teachers. Neither position offers the same fulltime stability

as a contract teaching position. In both cases, an individual must constantly reapply for the same position either every semester or academic school year. These precarious employment conditions are yet another aspect that further invokes a hierarchal colonial structure through the racial ethnic segmentation of labour within the public education sector. A labour market segmentation approach allows for a critique that identifies racialized patterns in the labour market. Racialized groups are disproportionately represented in precarious and lower paid jobs that are considered the low end of the labour force. They tend to be the most expendable with little protection from negative market driven factors (Galabuzi, 2006).

Using anti-racist and anti-colonial frameworks to analyze the market segmentation can measure and addresses the way family and friend networks keep the flow of specific jobs within cultural clusters further perpetuating the racialized representations between industry sectors and in company compositions. An anti-racist analysis examines the power dynamics that exist due to race on one hand while an anti-colonial framework looks at the imbedded historical legacies of colonialism that continue to perpetuate these systems of oppression. By understanding how the systems of oppression work and how they have been historically imbedded, we can then reconsider transformative recommendations to change the discourse to one that is more equitable. This is valuable in looking into the public education realm because a large number of racialized women make up most of the education assistants, social workers, other non-teaching roles and elementary teaching positions (Holbrook, 1991). When you scale towards the elementary teaching panel, there appears to be a more ethnic and racially diverse pool of teachers that appears more representative of the Toronto landscape. However, if you move further into the secondary teaching panel, it is highly dominated by White male teachers. From an intersectional lens, existing structures based on colonial legacies segment labour through multiple identities which continuously work together

to keep these oppressive structures in place. The way labour is segmented in public places of education such as the metropolitan Toronto area is important to acknowledge because hierarchies that allow white teachers to excel while Black and other racialized educators are given less access to what are considered more prominent and higher paying positions are still very apparent after 20 years of employment equity policy implemented by school boards such as the TDSB. Applying an anti-racist and anti-colonial framework to policy research and creation is extremely important to break down the very hierarchal structures that continue to exclude and oppress those from racialized groups and other equity seeking groups.

Piling on policy after policy on a core system that is based on securing a specific group's dominance and the oppression of others will not lead to equitable circumstances. It is as if diversity and its mechanisms, as Sara Ahmed (2012) argues, become more about changing the façade of whiteness rather than changing how whiteness is embedded in an organization. Many organizations both private and public have committed resources to the adoption or creation of policies directed towards equity, diversity, and inclusion, but the way these policies are administered needs to be reassessed. When these policies are adapted on to existing structures I argue that they merely act as pressure valves that only temporarily dilute inequities in these organizations. This can be further damaging to racialized individuals because it can divert them from participating from more mainstream leadership opportunities. For example, the Ontario Secondary School Teacher's Federation (OSSTF) offers multiple committees for members to participate in. There are both provincial and district committees such as Political Action Committee, Constitution Committee, Finance Committee, Collective Bargaining Committee, Status of Women Committee, Human Rights Committee, and Black, Indigenous, and Workers of Colour Committee. Being part of a committee involves a large time commitment, so it is very rare



that one person will participate in more than one committee. If most of the women, Black, Indigenous, and other racialized members commit their time and efforts to committees such as the Status of Women, Human Rights, and Black, Indigenous, and Workers of Colour Committees, these individuals will most likely not join or have any influence in the other committees that focus on the governance and the direction of the organization. When this happens, the needs and expectations of equity seeking groups get sealed in an equity vacuum that is still associated with and boasted by the organization but does not have much influence in making any changes to the governing structure. Rather, we need to see those who are familiar and strongly passionate about social justice to be part of the governing body so when new policies are being discussed, there is someone with an equity lens that can scrutinize and new policies and existing policies that can be harmful to equity seeking groups are brought to the forefront rather than affixing well meant and neatly packaged policies to the current oppressive structures that exist. I purposefully used this example with the OSSTF because I acknowledge inequitable conditions within school boards are not solely constructed and perpetuated internally. It is important to acknowledge that multiple stakeholders contribute to the continuation of white dominant colonial structures in public education that also need to incorporate both anti-racist and anti-colonial frameworks when creating and implementing equity, diversity, and inclusion policies in all institutions in the sphere of public education.

## **CONCLUSION**

By challenging knowledge production in existing education policy formation, it is imperative to expand the parameters of inclusivity and critically examine the implications of

existing policies and their execution. This article prompts us to embrace a broader perspective in policy research which is crucial in order to reflect our diverse population. It is imperative that our approaches to shaping and executing social policies in education undergo a transformation that is different from the superficial, band-aid solutions that do not offer the necessary change required for meaningful diversity and inclusion.

Applying an anti-racist and anti-colonial framework to policy research is central to break down the dominant hierarchal structures that continue to exclude and oppress those from racialized and other equity seeking groups. This approach will challenge normative positivist forms of policy research methodologies by centering the voices often missing from educational policy initiatives. This will allow for a more nuanced understanding of how racist tendencies and encounters still exist by peeling off layer by layer allowing me to map the how and why oppressive hierarchal structures continue to exist in multiple Canadian public institutions, as well as offer a deeper examination of how existing policies regarding employment equity allow for racism and other forms of oppression to linger in these institutions.

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<sup>i</sup> The establishment of Afrocentric Alternative Schools in Toronto was a response to the educational needs of the of the Afro-Canadian community, aiming to provide culturally relevant education for Black students. Advocated by community activism, these schools prioritize acknowledging and celebrating the African diaspora's heritage. They address student engagement, identity affirmation, and academic achievement using Afrocentric pedagogies and curriculum.

<sup>ii</sup> Espinoza (2007) explores the ongoing debates and definitions of how the differences between equity and equality underscore their complexities, particularly when striving to balance excellence and fairness in educational systems and broader social contexts. For the purpose of this paper, I draw on Espinoza's definitions that 'equality' focuses on uniform distribution without necessarily addressing existing disparities, 'equity' emphasizes fairness and justice by considering individual circumstances and historical disadvantages, aiming to provide everyone with an equal opportunity to succeed.

<sup>iii</sup> In 2007 Julian Falconer, a human rights lawyer lead a School Community Safety Advisory Panel to examine the increase of violent incidences at schools and to offer the TDSB advice on how to 'fix' 'unsafe' schools across the Toronto region. Multiple consultations occurred with groups such as parents, professional organizations, administrators, superintendents, trustees, social service providers, the Ontario Human Rights Commission and community groups that were included in the final report. For further discussion about the report see: School Community Safety Advisory Panel (Toronto, Ont.), Falconer, J., Edwards, P., & MacKinnon, L. (2008). *The road to health: A final report on school safety*. Toronto District School Board.

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<sup>iv</sup> The Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) was established in Canada with the goal of addressing the historical injustices and systemic impacts of the residential school system on Indigenous peoples. The TRC's final report, extensively documented the experiences of survivors, their families, and communities affected by the residential school system. It made comprehensive recommendations to address the legacy of the schools and promote reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples. The report highlighted urgent need for transformative change in various aspects of Canadian society, including education, to rectify the historical wrongdoings and work towards a more just and equitable future.