Bias-Free or Biased Hiring? Racialized Teachers' Perspectives on Educational Hiring Practices in Ontario

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Abstract

This paper argues that while Ontario has witnessed an onslaught of equity and inclusion educational policies aimed at diversifying teacher demographics via "bias-free" hiring practices, teachers across the province do not equitably reflect the identities and demographics of the student population. We, the authors, refer to this as the *teacher diversity gap* which refers to the discrepancy in the proportion of racialized teachers to racialized students (Hrabowski & Sanders, 2014; Turner, 2014, 2015). Through a literature review and the accompanying responses of 10 educators interviewed, this article critiques the dominant narrative associated with the benefits of "bias-free" hiring practices embedded in equity and inclusive policies (James & Turner, 2017; Ryan, Pollock, & Antonelli, 2009) arguing that the teacher workforce has remained predominantly White and unadaptive in terms of representation with the increasingly minoritized student population. The authors further argue that bias-free hiring is a prime example of colour-blind racism (Bonilla-Silva, 2006; Zembylas, 2003) claiming to select candidates based on their individual merit and ability, simultaneously dismissing discussions about systemic racism and other barriers embedded within existing hierarchical educational policies and practices.

Keywords: racialization, bias-free hiring, teacher diversity gap, colour-blind racism

Introduction

The City of Toronto's motto is "Diversity Our Strength" seeking to capitalize on the notion that, as a socio-spatial location, it is the most diverse city in the world having representation from over 100 countries and nearly 50 percent of the resident's first language(s) being something other than English (City of Toronto, 2019, para. 7). In this paper, we are exploring whether such strength in diversity is equitably represented within the teacher workforce when observing the teacher-to-student demographics in school settings. Beyond exclusively looking at outcomes in terms of representation, we seek to examine the complexities, contradictions, and nuances involved in trying to secure a permanent full-time teaching position with benefits. Hence, the question, "What are the experiences of Ontario teachers when seeking employment in publicly-funded school boards?" with a key focus on race as a key tenant of our study.

According to a United Way report (2019) *Rebalancing the Opportunity Equation* released in May 2019,

> Young people, immigrants, racialized people, and women are seeing that their circumstances—the things about themselves that they cannot control (such as their age, immigration status, whether or not they belong to a racialized group, their gender, and even their postal code)—are barriers to their success in today's GTA [Greater Toronto Area]. These groups have to work harder to achieve the income needed to thrive, and the situation is worse in the Toronto region than it is in the country as a whole. (p. 5)

Non-diverse hiring practices is a trend that has persisted, even now in 2019, "whereby immigrants and racialized groups are so clearly being left behind compared to white and Canadian-born groups,

demonstrat[ing] that contrary to our claims, we have made diversity a barrier" rather than a strength (United Way, 2019, para. 11). The Greater Toronto Area (GTA), particularly the City of Toronto, is currently ranked as the income inequality capital of Canada as income disparities between racialized and non-racialized people stand at 26% (Toronto Child and Family Poverty Report,2018; United Way, 2019). The findings from the aforementioned reports are based on micro-data released from the 2016 Canadian Census (Monsebraaten, 2019).

It is important to operationalize some of the terms that are constantly used throughout this paper to work within a similar framework of understanding. When referring to "racialized people" throughout the paper, we are discussing Ontarians and Canadians who are of non-European heritage, regardless of whether they are Canadian-born or not. According to Statistics Canada (2016),20.8% of racialized people in Canada live in poverty compared to only 12.2% of non-racialized Canadians. As well, a staggering 80% of Indigenous families live in poverty (Colour of Poverty, 2019). Studies consistently indicate that Indigenous and racialized Canadians encounter significant systematic and institutional barriers to accessing employment and other social services across numerous social sectors and fields.

Racialized and Indigenous people are overrepresented in unemployment, as well as low-paid and *precarious labour* throughout the province. Precarious employment/labour is categorized as employment, which is part-time, temporary, or contract work with low wages, limited or no benefits, on-call hours and/or uncertain periods of employment (Evans & Gibb, 2009, p.4). Precarious labour and income inequity has most detrimentally impacted racialized and Indigenous communities in Canada. The correlation between race, gender, and employment is evident as racialized males are 24% more likely to be unemployed than White males, and racialized women fare far worse and are 48% more likely to be unemployed than White men. Those racialized women who are employed earn a mere 55.6% of White male earnings (Block & Galabuzi, 2011).

Block and Galabuzi (2011) outline the racialization of poverty in Canada, indicating that racialized Canadians earn only 81.4 cents for every dollar earned by White Canadians. Thus, racialized and Indigenous peoples in Canada are overrepresented in the low-income precarious employment and underrepresented in the top-income earning echelon careers. The most recent United Way Report (2019) posits that the incomes of racialized people living in the GTA have not increased in over thirty-five years, while the discrepancies between racialized and white incomes have increased and intensified over time. Moreover, for every dollar earned by a White person in Toronto, a racialized person earns only 52.1 cents (United Way Report, 2019).

The rise of precarity has increased rates of illness, injury, and mental health issues correlating with employment instability (Cranson, Vosko, & Zukewich, 2003; Lewchuk et al., 2013). These findings reflect a social determinacy in health perspective(s) where economic factors influence the embodied experiences of racialized identities via accessibility to opportunities and social services. Although Ontario teacher education programs have been extended to two years rather than one to decrease the teaching surplus, the teaching profession in Ontario is becoming increasingly precarious and neoliberal (Mindzak, 2016), particularly at the current socio-political context where the newly elected Premier of Ontario, Doug Ford, has implemented major government funding cuts similar to the Mike Harris years in the late 1990s to early 2000s. For example, the Toronto District School Board is facing a $67.8 million shortfall in its budget for 2019-2020 school year (Westoll & Dhanraj, 2019). As well, contracts for education workers in Ontario have expired as of August 2019 and negotiations for new contracts with the government have not gone well. The negotiations have stalled due to lack of compromise from the government, leading to increased tensions and job action by teachers where various school boards at the high school level are on one day rotating strikes as a sign of solidarity and resistance to the proposed government cuts.

Focusing on the education sector with a focus on teacher representation in 2007, the Ontario Human Rights Commission (OHRC) contended that the lack of teacher and administrative representation of students is a barrier to accessible, equitable, and inclusive education (OHRC, 2007). The finding was noted following a human rights lawsuit against the Toronto District School Board (TDSB) and the Ontario Ministry of Education. The lawsuit ensued due to the overrepresentation of racialized youths being marginalized by school disciplinary practices via expulsions, suspensions, and exceedingly high drop-out rates. The discrepancies in statistics between racialized students and their White peers largely stemmed from increased discretionary powers awarded to teachers under the Ontario Safe Schools Act

of 2002 (Mindzak, 2016). Some of the implications of the Ontario Safe Schools Act included disproportionate streaming of Black and Indigenous students into non-academic secondary school programs. According to the TDSB, only 53% of Black students and 48% of Indigenous students were enrolled in academic programs in comparison to 81% of White students (TDSB, 2017). Moreover, disproportionate disciplinary action based on race was reported by the TDSB. While Black students comprise 12% of the TDSB's elementary and secondary school demographics, they accounted for 48% of all expulsions (TDSB, 2017). To further complicate matters, Ontario and Canada lag behind the United States in data collection at the K-12 and higher education levels (James, 2009; Siddiqui, 2015). Ontario school boards are not required to collect student, family and employee data, and currently only two Ontario school boards—the TDSB and the PDSB (Peel District School Board) —collect detailed demographic information (James, 2009).

While the call for a more equitable representation of Ontario's demographics in the education workforce is a commendable move in the right direction by the Ministry of Education, the new equity and inclusive education policies that emerged following the reports proved to be flawed. Two of theses flaws were: (1) no mandated requirements to collect teacher, administrator, student, and family demographics, (2) and a lack of oversight on how such policies, intended to close the teacher diversity gap, are be implemented (Abawi, 2018; Turner, 2014, 2015). Turner (2015) noted that Ontario, as a province, has a teacher diversity gap of 0.5 in value, and a value of 1.0 indicates that the teaching population fully represents and reflects the diversity of the population. There is room for improvement.

Conceptual Framework

This qualitative study takes on a discursive approach by drawing on Critical Race Theory (CRT) (Ladson-Billings, 1998; Matias & Zembylas 2014) and Critical Whiteness Studies (CWS) (Gillborn, 2005; Solomon, Portelli, Daniel, & Campbell, 2005). Conducting a literature review and supplementing it with themes that emerged from interviewing 10 Ontario teachers working in public school boards along differing social locations and ethno-racial identities, we explore the complexities, contradictions, and nuances of experiences encountered by Ontario teachers as they navigate the educational sector with the end goal of securing full-time permanent employment. This study can help fill in the gap in the research by identifying some of the systemic barriers experienced by racialized identities as they navigate through precarious labour in trying to secure permanent careers.

CWS and CRT effectively names whiteness as a social and racial group rather than normalizing whiteness as a social norm. CWS interrogates colour-blind (Bonilla-Silva, 2006) discursive practices that privilege meritocracy and draw on whiteness and White privilege as a multifaceted system that creates and sustains structural barriers and inequitable access to resources and social services. CRT emerged as a response to diminishing race relations in the United States following the Civil Rights Movement. Ladson-Billings (1998) highlights the four objectives of CRT as: (1) the normalization of racism in society, (2) story-telling as a counter-narrative to White dominance, (3) the critique of liberalism where systems of racism and racialization are silenced, and finally, (4) the emphasis on race realism. The importance of CRT in this study is its focus on destabilizing the norm of neutrality embedded in equity and inclusive education hiring policies by providing a transformative space for racialized participants to voice their experiences and encounters.

CRT and CWS converge to examine and problematize colour-blind narratives of bias-free hiring, a hiring strategy that Ontario school boards emphasize. The two theories intertwine to trouble the normativity of White privilege in teacher hiring, as whiteness must be centred to deconstruct power relations embedded in education (Abawi, 2018; Vinnik, n.d.). The dismantling of race-neutral discourses is central to teacher hiring practices, as the majority of educational administrators in Ontario making these hiring decisions are White (Turner, 2015).

Methodology

Data collection for this study utilized two qualitative approaches: semi-structured interviews and document analysis. The semi-structured interviews documented the responses of 10 educators working in different roles and capacities in elementary or secondary schools. The interviews provide perspectives of current Ontario teachers in relation to their encounters of equity and inclusive education policy en-

actment, hiring practices, and teacher and administrative representation within the profession. The interviews were conducted in person. Participants were recruited via purposeful sampling via the author's community connections. This recruitment was done with intentionality, as we wanted various perspectives to reflect various employment trajectories. The interviews were conducted through the 2016-2017 school year. Out of the 10 participants, three were male and seven were female, two identified as White, and eight were racialized self-identifying as belonging to a visible minority group. The participants represented a myriad of social locations so that we were able to contextualize their experiences in relation to race. Participants were at varying stages of their careers, with three being *Occasional Teachers*, two *permanent*, and five as *Long-Term Occasional Teachers*. One of the major limitations of the study is that none of the participants interviewed self-identified as Indigenous, therefore, we were unable to understand some of the unique barriers facing Indigenous educators in Ontario.

The interviews ranged from 30 to 45 minutes and included a range of topics related to teacher recruitment, such as education level, location of education (whether in Canada or abroad), and additional teaching qualifications. The interview also asked participants to describe their experiences seeking employment in the teaching profession, perceptions of equity and inclusive education policies, how they relate to bias-free hiring, and their views on teacher diversity within their school or board. Interviews were conducted at various public places throughout the GTA. The interviews provided insights into the perspectives and experiences of teachers in relation to equity and inclusive education policies enactment and the teacher diversity gap. Interview transcripts were transcribed using NVIVO software and subsequently analyzed to establish emerging themes.

The document analysis highlighted the social, political, and ideological underpinnings and contexts from which equity and inclusive education policies in Ontario emerged, as policy is discourse (Ball, 1994). The document analysis entailed the collection of some 52 public documents such as Ontario Ministry of Education documents and specific Ontario school board policies. Document analysis provides an understanding of the mechanisms of how and why policies are created by the state on behalf of the public (Bowen, 2009). In this case, the Ontario K-12 education system is a site of policy enactment. Overall, semi-structured interviews and document analysis complemented each other in this study in order to provide a holistic and more complex understanding of the lived experiences of Ontario racialized teachers and how they are impacted by hiring policies and practices.

Findings

Findings from the semi-structured interviews draw attention to the differentiated experiences encountered by participants in accordance with social location. The emerging themes from the interviews include:

     a.   beliefs about the importance of teacher representation;
     b.   perspectives of teacher and administrative representation;
     c.   processes of racialization throughout teacher hiring applications;
     d.   experiences of racism in the hiring process;
     e.   nepotism and favouritism;
     f.   and the effectiveness of equity and inclusive education polices in relation to teacher hiring.

Participants held varying beliefs about the validity of teacher diversity as a vehicle to mobilize student engagement and minimize achievement gaps. Steven, who identified as Latinx, explained:

> Teacher diversity is very important to me and the learners in our community and society as a whole, because, without saying it with words, it allows [students] to see the potential that they have. It allows them to see that if they can apply themselves at school, they too can be at the front of the classroom someday. It lets them know that it isn't only white people who can be teachers.

Steven's conception of teacher diversity aligns more with representational politics (Lingard, Martino, & Rezai-Rashti, 2013; Morris, 2016) rather than with decentring White privilege in Ontario's teaching profession. The neoliberal trend of quota-meeting conceptualizes diversity as a commodity, which ought to be marketed in order to ensure accountability to an increasingly diverse and privatized clientele, so long as such diverse bodies ascribe to dominant paradigms and epistemologies (Jack, 2016). Within this neoliberal approach, equity is simply applied from a representational axis without questioning the

power dynamics that normalize and make complicit certain inequitable practices within a teaching and learning environment.

Amal, who identifies as a West Indian woman, also echoed Steven's belief of the importance of a diverse teacher workforce, but importantly notes that just because a teacher may represent the identities of their students, this does not necessarily indicate that the teacher will be socially just and engaging. She explained:

> Teacher representation is so important, but I also applaud the white teachers who are willing to integrate into their student's culture. But that isn't always enough; teachers need to also embody their student's identities and culture. We need to model for our students, diverse students need to see a physical body that represents them. They need to see a successful person who represents their diversity so they too can know they have the opportunity to be successful and work in a decent job in this country.

Two self-identified White teachers felt that the quality of the teacher superseded the importance of the teacher's social location. Jennifer explained:

> I think teacher diversity is important, but I don't think that a teacher's quality should be overlooked. At the end of the day, the best teacher needs to be hired for the job and if you are a great teacher then everyone will do well in your class. If you have a diverse teacher, but they can't set up positive learning experience for the kids, it's kind of irrelevant.

In this excerpt, it is important to bring in a CWS critique to understand the ways in which Jennifer and Thomas employ a colour-blind lens by minimizing White privilege. This minimization is accompanied by an emphasis on merit, by which diversity should not take precedence of one's merit. As Crowley (2016) outlined, meritocracy effectively permits "white individuals to explain social inequalities as the result of individual ability and effort rather than due to historical and contemporary racism" (p. 5).

When asking participants about teacher representation, the teacher diversity gap was apparent to 9 out of 10 participants, regardless of how they rated the importance of teacher diversity. Christine, who is a Black woman and a permanent teacher, noted that throughout her experience she had only encountered one Black administrator. Ronald, who is Black and male felt distinctly tokenized when he was hired, noting the following:

> Race definitely has something to do with hiring, I'm a Black male, they needed to meet quotas, so that's why I was hired.

Tokenization emerged as a theme on numerous occasions and with various participants and is a process that must be interrogated and problematized as often it can perpetuate racism. The privileging of whiteness, whereby successes of White identities are attributed to merit, individuality, and work ethic are minimally questioned or written off as *reverse racism* (Bonilla-Silva, 2006), whereas the successes of racialized and Indigenous bodies are often dismissed and at times attributed exclusively to tokenism.

CRT is integral to examining the dynamic interlay and dominance of objectivity, meritocracy, and race neutrality in terms of teacher recruitment. When discussing barriers in trying to secure permanent teaching positions, some racialized interviewees drew on their experiences of encountering racism. Three of the participants, one being South Asian, one East Asian, and one West Indian had reported that they had encountered racism such as demands for assessment of their language proficiency and proof of credentials. Steven and Ronald, both male, one who identified as Black and one who identified as Latinx, had both been asked to show their identification and Ontario Certified Teacher (OCT) cards upon arrival for daily occasional teaching work. Although Jennifer, the White female teacher, had mentioned previously that the individual teacher's ability should take precedence over race, she did acknowledge some barriers that internationally educated teachers experience when attempting to secure employment. Jennifer expressed:

> Systemic racism is a big barrier to employment because only certain kinds of experiences and certain kinds of education and life experience and backgrounds are valued and others are not validated or ranked as important. I remember when I was in teachers' college; there was a woman from Pakistan who always supplied for my mentor teacher when she was away. I was hired as an LTO at that same school shortly after I graduated and she was still supplying. I felt bad because I heard she had been supplying for something like seven years and couldn't get on the LTO list or get anything but supply jobs.

Jennifer's embodied privilege is a contributing factor to her relative ease of obtaining employment

as a teacher and although she reflects on her experience working with a racialized colleague during teacher's college, this does not necessarily translate into an awareness of how White privilege operates at a systemic level embedded within hiring practices (Applebaum, 2011).

Many of the participants were avid social justice educators who were passionate about their student's well-being and lifelong success. Several believed that although the policy initiatives were important, they did not necessarily translate into action or praxis. Olivia, who is a West Asian female, commended the policies and their enactment, stating:

> I know about the policies, I have not really read all of them, but I think my board is at least trying to put the policies into motion and be more reflective of the community. No school is going to do it perfectly, but I think my board is doing a pretty good job.

Olivia, who identifies as a racialized Muslim woman who wears a hijab, stated that she had not encountered racism in her experiences with her board and felt that the policies had, in fact, contributed to her success in securing employment. Her views of equity and inclusive education policies—although she admitted to not reading them thoroughly—are based on a positive affinity with multiculturalism as an equalizer for immigrants in Canada who work hard and contribute to society regardless of race. Two other racialized female participants held opposing views to Olivia concerning educational policies. Tania, who is an East Asian woman, critiqued the policies noting:

> The policies don't do anything, they really are just there so that the public can feel better, but nothing changes. I looked over them and thought to myself who even wrote these? I really wonder who is in charge of these policies and who decides how to even address these kinds of issues?

Tania's concerns echo Gillborn (2005), who argued that educational policy is never constructed from an objective, neutral standpoint, but that dominant groups in power inform policy priorities. Hence, educational policies are theoretically represented as neutral and colour-blind within public discourse, yet within enactment, they privilege certain identities at the expense of marginalization and oppression to racialized and minoritized identities.

When it came to the notion of bias-free hiring, three teachers interviewed felt that administrators should completely remove all biases from the interview room and focus on the quality, credentials, and qualifications of each candidate. The majority of the participants felt that an individual's personal bias or preconceived views of a particular group should not deter them from hiring a qualified candidate. However, when the question was posed as to whether they believed it was possible for anyone to be completely neutral and bias-free, 9 out of 10 felt that this was not possible. Although Thomas, who is a White male, felt that it was impossible to be one hundred percent bias-free, he also felt that it should still be strived for. He expressed:

> Boards should be bias-free when they hire teachers; they shouldn't look at race or gender or anything else other that whether or not that person is a good teacher and a good fit in the school.

Another participant felt it was an altruistic approach and stated:

> You can strive to be bias-free, but no one can actually be without bias, because you are always going to be influenced by your experiences and values.

Lastly, the theme of nepotism and favouritism emerged throughout several interviews. Regulation 274/12 was introduced in 2012 by Premier of Ontario at the time, Kathleen Wynne, and her Liberal leadership, with the purpose of putting a halt to endemic nepotism in Ontario school board recruitment practices, such as widespread allegations of favouritism in hiring practices. Of the 10 participants interviewed, eight believed nepotism to be a problem, citing various ways that administrators bend rules to get out of sanctions by Regulation 274/12. Steven and Amal both noted that their boards did not need to post long-term assignments on the central teacher employment site and would often just select a candidate they "liked." The Regulation mandates that all boards must have two rosters, an Occasional and Long-Term Occasional list, and, for long-term postings, preference to be given to those on the LTO list (Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario, 2015). However, as Amal explained:

> They do not really need to post the job, they can just choose someone they like and then fill the position, who is really going to be regulating whether or not each job is posted. I've also seen so many LTOs go to teachers who aren't even on the list [LTO list].

Steven mirrored Amal's response, stating:

> I don't really know that the point of the Regulation is to be honest, because I've seen lots of OTs get LTOs and people on the LTO list cannot even get an LTO.

Moreover, Turner's (2015) study also corroborates these views on nepotism. Turner points out:

> Hiring based on personal connections means that all qualified educators are not able to compete for job openings equally and, as a result, the best and brightest teachers are not being hired…hiring based on personal connections limits the racial diversity of the teacher workforce and therefore, reproduces the status quo. (p. 21)

Although Regulation 274/12 requires all LTO positions to be posted, the findings from the participants and extant literature revealed that this is not always the case. The current elected Conservative government lead by new Premier Doug Ford has stated that they are likely to cancel Regulation 274/12.

The findings from the study suggest that racial identity directly correlates with experiences and encounters in seeking and obtaining employment as a teacher in publicly funded school boards. While the participants represented varying ethno-racial identities, most agreed that the teacher diversity gap was evident, most evidently among permanent teachers and educational leaders. Additionally, nine out of 10 participants believed that "bias-free" hiring was an unrealistic expectation based on the perception that one cannot be completely divorced of their biases—conscious and unconscious. However, most felt that it was a positive approach to take toward hiring teachers. The interview results furthermore revealed that White participants had never been asked to produce identification when reporting to work as a daily OT, nor was their command of the English language questioned or doubted. The assumption that one's first language is not English due to their race is problematic as it implies that non-Western, non-Northern countries have variants of English that are sub-par to Canadian, American, or British English dialects. The data also suggests skepticism, most notably skepticism of racialized identities holding professional qualifications, differential treatment by colleagues, and longer time periods in securing permanent teaching status.

Discussion

The Federal Employment Equity Act was commissioned in 1986 to address employment inequities between White Canadians and designated minority groups. The designated groups identified included: racialized people, Indigenous people, persons with a disability, and women (Agocs, 2002). The Equity Act was loosely based on American Affirmative Action legislation and required employers to remove barriers and biases that may impede the gainful employment of the aforementioned designated groups. In 1993, under the leadership of New Democratic Party (NDP) leader, Bob Rae, the Ontario Ministry of Education drafted the Antiracism and Ethnocultural Equity in School Boards known as PPM 119. The document was the earliest equity and inclusive education policy in Ontario as it mandated that all schools develop and enact an antiracist education policy. Some scholars have suggested that PPM 119 was enacted as a response to the 1992 Toronto Race Riots (Rezai-Rashti, Segeren, Martino, 2017). PPM 119 acknowledges the increasingly diverse racial and Indigenous demographic composition of Ontario and further indicates the prevalence of Eurocentric norms, curriculum, and culture entrenched in Ontario's publicly-funded education system (Eizadirad, 2019). In 1995, under the leadership of Conservative Mike Harris, the Federal Employment Equity Act was repealed in Ontario, and employment equity began falling under the jurisdiction of the Ontario Human Rights Code.

Following the Yonge Street Uprisings, the Premier at the time, Bob Rae, assigned Stephen Lewis as his advisor on race relations, and delegated him to consult local communities and produce a report with recommendations to work towards race solutions in Ontario. The following month in June 1992, Stephen Lewis produced a report titled *Report of the Advisor on Race Relations to the Premier of Ontario, Bob Rae*. As one of his key observations, Lewis (1992) states,

> First, what we are dealing with, at root, and fundamentally, is anti-Black racism. While it is obviously true that every visible minority community experiences the indignities and wounds of systemic discrimination throughout Southern Ontario, it is the Black community which is the focus. It is Blacks who are being shot, it is Black youth that is unemployed in excessive numbers, it is Black students who are being inappropriately streamed in schools, it is Black kids who are disproportionately dropping-out, it is housing communities with large

concentrations of Black residents where the sense of vulnerability and disadvantage is most acute, and it is Black employees, professional and non-professional, on whom the doors of upward equity slam shut. Just as the soothing balm of "multiculturalism" cannot mask racism, so racism cannot mask its primary target. (p. 2)

Lewis describes how systemic discrimination, specifically anti-Black racism, within institutions trickles down to impact the daily lives of racialized identities and communities leading to inequality of opportunity and outcome in various settings, including the education system. The various examples mentioned in the report demonstrate that race plays a key role in accessing opportunities and social services.

Since the 1993 version of PPM 119 was rescinded, equity and inclusive education policy implementation remained dormant until its recent rise following the Ministry of Education's Policy Program Memorandum (PPM 119) of 2009, which included *Realizing the Promise of Diversity: Ontario's Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy* and *Ontario's Education Equity Action Plan* (2017a). Policy Program Memorandums (PPM) are numbered policy initiatives issued to publicly-funded school boards, which "outline the Ministry of Education's expectations regarding the implementation of ministry programs and policies" (PPM, Ontario Ministry of Education, 2017b). As a strategy to close the teacher diversity gap, PPM 119 (2009) first detailed its commitment to bias-free hiring under "Section 1: Board Policies, Programs, Guidelines and Practices," as follows:

Boards should make every effort to identify and remove discriminatory biases and systemic barriers that may limit the opportunities of individuals from diverse communities for employment, mentoring, retention, promotion, and succession planning in all board and school positions. The board's work force should reflect the diversity within the community so that students, parents, and community members are able to see themselves represented. (p. 5)

Overall, in the last decade, equity and inclusive education policies have recently surged across the province to address the lack of teacher representation in Ontario's publicly funded schools. While the implementation of these policies is commendable, the policies reinforce surface level, recognition-based, celebratory conceptions of equity and inclusive hiring policies. As some authors have suggested, the policies are discursively appeasing, as, arguably, the discourse of diversity is just being given lip service (Ahmed, 2012). Moreover, the emphasis on bias-free hiring as equitable and inclusive practice omits the importance of naming race and racism, among other systemic institutional barriers, within teacher recruitment practices (Abawi, 2018).

While overt biases, such as segregation in the form of residential schools or schools that Black children were barred from attending in the earlier half of the 20th Century, have diminished, unconscious bias continues to thrive. It is also imperative to be mindful of how colour-blind educational policies (Bonilla-Silva, 2006; Eizadirad,2018), such as the 2002 Ontario Safe Schools Act, have had devastating consequences on racialized and Indigenous youth. The Act, which enacted a one-size fits all approach, meant that all students were to be treated the same without regard for their individual circumstances, histories, and social locations. This neutral decontextualized approach towards disciplinary action in schools under "zero tolerance" slogans resulted in severely disproportionate expulsion, suspension, and drop-out rates for racialized identities compared to their White counterparts.

Bias-free hiring assumes a colour-blind approach to diversifying the teacher population by treating all applicants equally and thus focusing on their skills, knowledge, experience, and merit (Ahmed, 2012; Bonilla-Silva, 2006; Kobayashi, 2009). Although both provincial and board level policies draw on bias-free hiring as the best practice to recruit a diverse workforce that reflects Ontario students, there are no references as to the research, the methods, and ways in which such practices will be enacted and result in closing the teacher diversity gap. By calling for bias-free hiring, equity and inclusive education policies effectively omit the necessity of acknowledging and troubling the centrality of race in teacher hiring and its fundamental importance for curriculum delivery, mentorship, community engagement, and overall student well-being.

Various contextual factors continue to contribute to the prevention of racialized and Indigenous candidates from accessing permanent employment in the teaching profession in Ontario (Ryan, Pollock, & Antonelli, 2009; Sharma & Portelli, 2014). Based on the literature review conducted and the responses of teachers interviewed, we identify the following factors as influencing the inequitable access to the

teaching profession: the rise of precarious employment and racialization of poverty, neoliberal understandings of equity, and lack of racialized candidates in teacher education programs.

Racialized teachers who do not receive their teacher education in Canada face additional obstacles in securing teaching employment. Premji, Shakya, Spasevski, Merolli, and Athar (2014) articulated various factors that bar racialized immigrant women from entering the teaching profession: the lack of recognition of foreign credentials, the lack of Canadian employment experience, language barriers, and their limited professional network. Studies suggest that, regardless of how long an immigrant has resided in Canada, as a whole, immigrants become poorer over time (United Way, 2019). In an oversaturated teaching job market, internationally educated teachers suffer the brunt of racist hiring and promotion processes, which clearly contradict the dominant discourse about "bias/barrier-free" hiring and promotion policies. Often employers deny them by emphasizing that they do not have relevant Canadian experiences.

Neoliberalism's agenda to privatize the education system has segregated schools and created a two-tiered schooling model that is highly racialized. Schools in more affluent areas with wealthier families and corporate connections operate based on lucrative fundraising incentives and donations; parents and families in low-income neighbourhoods lack the disposable income to provide such funds. A strong tenant of neoliberalism is the commodification of social and public goods. In this case, the neoliberalization of education has effectively commodified diversity in Ontario by reformulating equity and inclusive education policies to represent students and families as clients to ensure that racialized and Indigenous students conform and ascribe to White normativity in education under the discourse saturated with reference to accountability and choice (Morris, 2016; Eizadirad & Portelli, 2018).

Equity and inclusive education in Ontario cannot be analyzed without being mindful of the neoliberal underpinnings that foreground such policies. Neoliberal equity initiatives stemming from former multicultural education to current equity and inclusive education conceptualize equity in education as correlated to student performance and outcomes (Eizadirad, 2019; Rezai-Rashti et al., 2017). Moreover, the international praise of the Ontario education system as a model for student achievement, social cohesion, and diversity conjures a fallacy by silencing the historical and continued inequities experienced by racialized and Indigenous populations (Lingard et al., 2013). Neoliberal ideologies have trickled into educational practices; subtle practices, such as celebratory multicultural practices including Black History Month or Asian Heritage Month that provide racialized students with a superficial representation of their heritage without disrupting Eurocentric power relations as the status quo, are normative practices in many schools (Abawi, 2018; Eizadirad, 2019). However, some other practices inflict violence on racialized identities such as the practices of school resource officers, disproportionate expulsion rates, and drop-out rates due to, in particular, the pushing out of racialized males (Mindzak, 2016).

Racial inequities in accessing teacher education programs have been a defining component of the overrepresentation of White teachers. Such racial inequities were first documented in a 1988 survey undertaken by the Ontario Ministry of Education which revealed that nearly 90% of all pre-service teachers were White and predominantly Anglo-Saxon (Childs, Broad, Mackay-Gallagher, Escayg, & McGrath, 2010). The Ministry responded by facilitating discussions to strategize ways to recruit more "visible minorities" into teacher education programs. One of the mechanisms the Ministry incorporated was creating racial or Indigeneity self-identification categories in teacher education applications in Ontario. In 2011, for the upcoming 2012 academic year, the Ontario University Application Centre compiled a list of eight teacher education faculties, which indicated racial identity as a factor in admission decisions (Abawi, 2018). The majority of the applications included an option for candidates to "self-identify" as a minority. Although it is commendable that students could choose to self-identify in their applications, the problem lies within the lack of data on the demographics of those admitted into each program. As Childs et al. (2010) suggests,

> Faculties do not publish information about the racial identities of their applicants or those they admit, so it is not possible to determine whether all applicants-and those who are offered admission and who chose to attend-are representative of the racial and ethnic diversity of students in the schools. (p. 180)

The lack of race-based data collection within Ontario post-secondary institutions makes it difficult to determine whether faculties of education are adhering to their commitments to diversity in admissions. Therefore, although data collection is important, it is just as important for institutions to further

share and explain how they used the race-based data they collected to make their policies and practices more equitable, including have student to staff ratio representations and in relation to hiring practices.

Furthermore, normative processes of racialization may contribute to the pushing out of racialized and Indigenous bodies from the education system indicating that many of these potential candidates never had an equal footing to access a bachelor's degree, the basic prerequisite to enter a teacher education program. These factors include: streaming, disciplinary measures, Eurocentric curriculum(s), and school norms that silence non-European epistemologies (Eizadirad, 2019; Dei, 2006, 2007; James, 2012). According to the TDSB, race is strongly linked to graduation rates. Black and Latinx students are substantially less likely to graduate from high school. Black graduation rates stand at 50.8% and Latinx student graduation rates are at 69.2%, in comparison to the overall graduation rate of 83% (TDSB, 2015). Black, Indigenous, Latinx, and Middle Eastern students are also more likely to be suspended and expelled; there is a strong correlation between school suspensions and the criminal justice system (James, 2012). Additionally, racialized students, especially Black students, are less inclined to perceive that schools are safe and welcoming spaces (Ruck & Wortley, 2002). The push of racialized and Indigenous bodies out of schooling is indicative of the underrepresentation of marginalized bodies in teacher education programs and in permanent teacher positions. Racialized and Indigenous candidates, who do enter pre-service education programs, are often isolated and face hostility by White teacher candidates who dominate teacher education programs (Escayg, 2008).

Conclusion

The findings of the study demonstrate that participant responses varied in accordance with social location and, in particular, race. The findings from the semi-structured interviews denote several themes among the majority of the racialized participants including: the tokenization of racialized bodies within urban schools, the dominance of White administrators, as well as overt experiences of racism such as having to prove one's professional identity as a teacher, as well as the questioning of participants command of the English language. In general, regardless of racial identification, 90% of participants felt the concept of "bias-free" hiring was problematic, based on the rationale that most felt that one could not be completely bias-free, however, most felt that it was a positive approach to take towards hiring teachers. Furthermore, the data suggests that the racialized identities interviewed experienced differentiated treatment in hiring, differentiated treatment by colleagues and staff, as well as skepticism when addressing the validity, actors, and power relations that led to the enactment of PPM 119 and the surge of equity and inclusion education policies.

While equity and inclusive education policies in Ontario have undergone what Segeren (2016) describes as a *discursive shift*, from multicultural and equality based educational discourse to more critical equity-based discourses surrounding race, power relations and access to opportunities, the effectiveness and validity of the policies in terms of their enactment and resulting outcome has remain redundant and predominantly similar. This shift is evident on the reinforcement of bias-free narratives, which adheres to the multiculturalist focus on equality or sameness without regard for one's social location. Thus, the relationship between the social location of those responsible for hiring (namely administrators) in relation to that of the applicant must be acknowledged, discussed, and contested in order to effectively engage in a constructive dialogue to unpack the distinct barriers, including historical and ongoing biases an applicant may face during the recruitment, promotion, and retention process (Abawi, 2018). So long as the hegemonic discourse of bias-free hiring as a strategy for closing the teacher diversity gap and promoting a diverse teacher workforce is intact without a candid dialogue on race, power relations, and ongoing legacies of Canada's settler-colonial past and present, the teacher diversity gap will persist through the guise of meritocracy and its neoliberal discourse with constant reference to saturated terminology such as accountability and choice (Eizadirad & Portelli, 2018).

In order to take the next steps to close the teacher diversity gap in Ontario, we suggest the following three actions: *First*, the implementation of mandatory data-collection including race-based data which is starting to take place at many Ontario school boards, most notably within the GTA. This implementation can be extended to include post-secondary institutions, particularly within Faculty of Education departments. As stated earlier, although race-based data collection is important, it is just as important for institutions to further share and explain how they used the race-based data they collected to make their

policies and practices more equitable, including their considerations of student to staff ratio representations and in relation to hiring practices. *Second*, the re-articulation of equity and inclusive education policies is required so that race and racism are named and centred from a critical race perspective, rather than silenced and placed on the margins from a multicultural lens. This step requires consultations and collaborations with various key stakeholders in education, such as students, parents, teachers, school administrators, and community members to capture voices of the marginalized and to allow their experiences to map and outline systemic barriers impacting the school-community interface within the spatial boundaries of the community relative to its unique needs. *Finally*, we recommend that Ontario school administrators engage in critical reflective praxis and self-examination, both individually and collectively as a school and on a larger scale as a school board, to determine how administrator's social locations impact their recruitment decisions. In order for this step to take place, further research is required to explore two significant areas: *First*, Ontario administrator's understanding of conceptions of equity and inclusion in relation to hiring a diverse teacher workforce. *Second*, to document the experiences of Ontario administrators who self-identify as racialized and/or Indigenous to understand some of the specific barriers and challenges encountered in their leadership roles. A starting point can be a dialogue between various school boards about their "best practices" relative to the unique needs and demographics of their staff (both teachers and administrators) and students. This inter-dialogue should take place at the local, provincial, national, and international levels to gain ideas about how to be most effective when it comes to hiring practices relative to the unique needs of the students, families, and communities we serve. The findings and implications from exploring these new avenues can be used to plan a more socio-culturally relevant and responsive teacher education curriculum in training of future teacher candidates and create a more fair equitable pathway for securing permanent employment within a teaching career in the K-12 sector, particularly for racialized identities who, historically and currently, are being marginalized and oppressed by neoliberal discourses saturated with colour-blind neutral policies and practices.

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