

Equity and Human Rights in Special Education: Critical Reflective Practice Guide

Released by

York University

2022



Table of Contents

<b>Setting the Context.....</b>	<b>3</b>
How to Use This Guide .....	3
Thinking Critically About Disability.....	4
Ableism .....	5
Disability as an Intersectional Experience.....	5
Critical Considerations in Special Education .....	6
Who Are We Talking About? .....	8
Giftedness: Where Does It Fit? .....	8
What Does the Data Tell Us? .....	9
Future Implications .....	14
<b>Human Rights in Special Education.....</b>	<b>14</b>
Disputes Over Accommodations .....	16
Additional Human Rights Obligations Related to Race and Disability .....	16
Best Practices to Meet Your Obligations Under the Code .....	17
<b>Critical Reflective Practice Guide.....</b>	<b>18</b>
<b>Thinking through Systems: Critical Reflective Practice and Culturally Relevant and Responsive Pedagogy .....</b>	<b>18</b>
The Early Years.....	20
Core Tenets of Inclusive Instruction Across K–12 Classrooms .....	22
Universal Design for Learning and Differentiated Instruction.....	27
Special Education Referral and Assessment.....	28
<b>Racism and Bias in Education.....</b>	<b>32</b>
Colonialism and Indigeneity.....	32
Anti-Black Racism and Schooling.....	35
Gender and Sexuality.....	37
Class .....	39
<b>Thinking Strategically: What Can Districts Do? .....</b>	<b>40</b>
Centring Students, Families, and Communities in Planning.....	40
The Collection and Analysis of Demographic Data to Inform Planning.....	41
<b>Conclusion .....</b>	<b>42</b>
References .....	44
Reviewers .....	57
Writing Team.....	58

**Preferred citation:** Parekh, G., Cameron, D., Gaymes San Vicente, A., Gordon, A., Ineese-Nash, N., James, C.E., Murray, K., Reid, L., To, J., & Underwood, K. (2022). *Equity and Human Rights in Special Education: Critical Reflective Practice Guide*. Toronto: York University. (Project lead followed by co-authors in alphabetical order)

## **Setting the Context**

As educators,<sup>1</sup> administrators, and system leaders, knowing how to effectively respond to students' diverse ability can be complicated. When disability or exceptionality are believed to be present, special education is often involved and responsible for identification, intervention and individualization as well as for organizing support. Special education plays a significant role in accessing specific services and access to resources, including technology, equipment, augmentative communication devices, ASL, deaf-blind and blind educational services that are a fundamental right for students (Snoddon, 2020a, 2020b; Snoddon & Murray, 2019). However, special education practices have been historically steeped in medicalized understandings of disability, which ultimately approach student learning from a deficit model (Connor, 2013; Mitchell, 2015). Also, there continues to be an overrepresentation of racialized and historically marginalized students involved in special education, both within special education identifications as well as placements in special education programming (Brown & Parekh, 2010; Parekh & Brown, 2019). As such, many advocacy and rights organizations have raised ongoing concerns that bias and racism may be influencing perceptions of and responses to students' perceived ability (Coalition for Alternatives to Streaming in Education, n.d.; Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario, see Pichette et al., 2020; Ontario Human Rights Commission [OHRC], 2018).

This reflective practice guide provides an overview of critical considerations for special education and examines the role that bias and racism play in addressing student ability. In addition, this guide offers educators, administrators, and system leaders' strategies they can adopt to reduce the negative effects of bias and racism in decisions around special education. As part of this work, we challenge current, medicalized, and dichotomous notions of ability and/or disability and propose a cross-solidarity strategy for greater equity within public education.

## **How to Use This Guide**

The purpose of this guide is to think about ability and disability through a socio-cultural lens and to examine how bias can influence pedagogical decisions and decisions made around special education. There are four major areas to the guide:

- First, the guide reviews the international empirical and theoretical literature on disability and ability-based discrimination.
- Second, critical considerations relating to special education and implications are discussed, supported by international research, Ontario provincial policy, and analyses of socio-demographic data.
- Third, the guide offers a review of critical reflective practice and offers targeted strategies for educators and system leaders addressing specific areas of education (e.g. the early years, inclusive Kindergarten to Grade 12

---

<sup>1</sup> Please note that the term "educators" is inclusive of Ontario College of Teachers educators, Registered Early Childhood Educators, Educational Assistants, Child and Youth Workers, and school personnel involved in the education of a student.

(K-12) education, referrals and assessment) as well as examines specific evidence-based areas of discrimination (e.g. anti-Indigenous racism, anti-Black racism, gender and sexuality, and class).

- Lastly, the guide explores what systems can do to support educators and educational leaders as they work towards greater equity and justice for students involved in special education.

## **Thinking Critically About Disability**

There are many ways to think about disability. In schools, disability is often considered as an impairment. However, simply thinking about disability as an impairment often reduces disability to an individual experience (Barnes & Mercer, 2010; Barton, 2006; Oliver, 1990). The individual or medical model of disability, where disability is understood as a result of biological, cognitive, or mental health variability, achieves much the same end. The individual or medical model implies that disability means something is “wrong” within the individual and requires “fixing” through services, treatments, and rehabilitation (Brantlinger, 2006). In contrast, many disability advocates embrace a social understanding of disability whereby an individual with an impairment is “disabled” by the conditions they encounter in the everyday (e.g. inaccessible environments and processes, discriminatory attitudes, and so on). This framework is helpful when thinking about socially just practices as it prioritizes addressing and changing social and environmental conditions as opposed to changing the individual.<sup>2</sup>

There are also many cultural understandings of disability. For instance, in Ontario, Western medicine and psychology value particular developmental outcomes over others and have established developmental norms by which all children are measured. However, Indigenous communities have varying understandings of disability and difference that challenge bio-medical frameworks and approaches (Ineese-Nash et al., 2017). In particular, because of a cultural orientation towards collective welfare, difference is not often considered to be a disabling characteristic in itself (Senier, 2013). That is to say that many disabilities within some Indigenous cultures are regarded as holding spiritual significance rather than being a detriment to the individual or community (Lovern & Locust, 2013). In brief, it is the belief that all children are gifts to the community and all children have gifts in addition to and, at times, as a result of identified impairment and/or experience of disability.

Language can be an important way to share disability-related experiences and identities. Person-first language, such as people with disabilities, is typically adopted in international principles and rights legislation. The National Centre for Disability and Journalism (2021) recommends the use of person-first language the preferred identity of particular individuals or groups is unknown. However, many

---

<sup>2</sup> For more information on disability in a Canadian context, please refer to the following groups: Council of Canadians with Disabilities – <http://www.ccdonline.ca/en/humanrights/>; Dawn Canada – <https://dawnCanada.net/>; and Disability Justice Network of Ontario – <https://www.djno.ca/>. <https://www.endstreaming.org/>

disability advocates and those active within the disability community have adopted identity-first language, as often employed in racial identity (Annamma & Morrison, 2018). Using identity-first language not only recognizes the cultural and experiential solidarity of disability identity, but also emphasizes how people are disabled through their environments – socially, politically, economically. Identity-first language draws attention to the systemic barriers that disable participation. As with all identities, it is our purview that people should be able to name their own experiences. Therefore, throughout this guide, we will adopt both person-first and identity-first language. It is important to note that recent changes recommended by the APStylebook (2021) and the NCDJ (2021) include avoiding the use of the terms “special needs” and “special education”, particularly in relation to describing individuals, as many find these terms to be euphemistic, offensive and stigmatizing.

## **Ableism**

Ableism is a form of discrimination that is grounded in the privileging of real or perceived ability. Ableism defines the parameters against which others are measured (Goodley, 2014). Ableism ascribes human value to ability and devalues the participation and contribution of those deemed unable or disabled. In school, ableism informs notions and/or perceptions of a student’s ability, capacity, and skill, which can lead to discrimination (see Hall, 2019) as expressed through lower expectations, inaccessible learning environments and material, academic streaming, and a reduction of academic choice (Shifrer, 2013, 2016). According to the Law Commission of Ontario (2012), ableism:

...may be defined as a belief system, analogous to racism, sexism or ageism, that sees persons with disabilities as being less worthy of respect and consideration, less able to contribute and participate, or of less inherent value than others. Ableism may be conscious or unconscious, and may be embedded in institutions, systems or the broader culture of a society. It can limit the opportunities of persons with disabilities and reduce their inclusion in the life of their communities. (para. 13)

Students can face a number of barriers in education as a result of ableist assumptions. The fact that our education system is not designed to seamlessly educate all students from the moment they enter school is evidence of this inherent ableism. Embedded within educational environments and pedagogical approaches are a variety of design choices, informed by assumptions about the capacities of the “average” student – assumptions that may not be true for many diverse students, including disabled students.

## **Disability as an Intersectional Experience**

Schools and schooling practices can create disabling conditions for students (Barton, 2006; Campbell, 2009; Erevelles, 2014). Just as Crenshaw (1989) describes in her discussion of intersectionality, disability is not experienced in

isolation from other socio-demographic experiences, such as the racialized, classed, and gendered experiences. The Ontario Human Rights Commission (OHRC, 2014) describes intersectional discrimination in the following way:

Discrimination may be unique or distinct when it occurs based on two or more *Code* grounds. Such discrimination is said to be “intersectional.” The concept of intersectional discrimination recognizes that students’ lives involve multiple interrelated identities, and that marginalization and exclusion based on *Code* grounds may exist because of how these identities intersect. (Sec. 7)

Bias related to racism, classism, xenophobia, language learning, and other forms of discrimination can influence how ability is perceived and understood (Annamma et al., 2013; Erevelles et al., 2019; Reid & Knight, 2006). For instance, white, South Asian, or East Asian students are more often perceived to have ‘excellent’ learning skills compared to Black students, despite having similar levels of achievement (Parekh et al., 2018). In the context of schools, students’ identities intersect with how ability and disability are constructed and inform the perceptions, expectations, and attitudes of those around them. For instance, bias related to racial identity may lead to the perception that a racialized child’s behaviour is disordered, or that low achievement from a child living in poverty is due to disability as opposed to a lack of access to resources (Artiles et al., 2010; Connor, 2017; Howard et al., 2009).

Intersectionality can also be used to better understand the disabling conditions that particular populations face. For example, for some Indigenous peoples, disability is an intersectional experience influenced by multiple cultural and contextual factors (Ineese-Nash, 2020). Similarly, for racialized students, students who have newly immigrated to Ontario or for students whose families are experiencing poverty, the experience of disability can be influenced by racism, xenophobia as well as economic barriers.

As disability is both relationally and socially produced, this work will draw on the framework of disability justice. Disability justice is oriented towards centring the lived realities, dreams, and desires of disabled peoples, particularly those who have faced marginalization by able-centric societal systems (Piepzna-Samarasinha, 2018). As a social movement rooted in justice and liberation of disabled communities, disability justice advocates recognize the intersectional experience of disability that may be impacted by multiple forms of oppression such as racism, sexism, and colonization (Jampel, 2018). From this perspective, justice can be realized through the dismantling of ableist systems that produce disablement while recognizing disability as a life experience that holds value in itself (Podlucká, 2020).

## **Critical Considerations in Special Education**

Special education holds a long and important history within Ontario public education.<sup>3</sup> It is important to acknowledge that special education, much like the

---

<sup>3</sup> If interested in learning more about the history of special education in Ontario, see Chupik and Wright (2006); Ellis (2019); Ellis and Axelrod (2016); Robinson et al. (2012); and Rubinoff (2017).

implementation of academic streaming, was intended as an equity strategy – a strategy committed to the support and education of disabled students. More recently, questions have been raised as to whether special education, as a system, might also be contributing to immediate and long-term barriers for students. Currently, special education functions as a primary source of funding and is also a procedural and social policy strategy for specific forms of educational services. Over the last many generations, special education in Ontario has expanded to include students who have not been formally identified with an exceptionality. The expansion of support was intended to meet the obligation to accommodate students in a timely way, based on a perceived need rather than dependent on a specific medical diagnosis, as required under Ontario's *Human Rights Code* and the Canadian *Charter of Rights and Freedoms*, as well as attempt to address backlogs in service resulting from lengthy identification processes in schools (Office of the Auditor General of Ontario, 2010). Despite the expansion of service and reach, the OHRC (2018) has stated that “Disability’ continues to be the most cited ground of discrimination under the *Human Rights Code* in human rights claims made to the Human Rights Tribunal of Ontario (HRTTO), with significant systemic issues being raised in disability and education claims” (para. 3).

In reviewing the international literature and empirical evidence, identified systemic issues include the way special education assumes a deficit understanding of ability, allocating support and organizing students in relation to their identified “need,” impairment, or exceptionality. Other systemic issues related to international special education systems include the process through which students are identified and labelled with categories of impairment as well as the practice of ability-grouping in special education programming (Mitchell, 2015). Identification processes have been long involved in controversy with questions around the validity of assessment material and what intelligence or ability means (Gould, 1996; Ladwig & MacPherson, 2017; Sloan, 2013); how identification categories are defined and understood (Christensen, 1996; Reid et al., 2020; Samuels, 2014); and questions about the role that identification and labels play in supporting students in the classroom (Berman & Connor, 2017). The legitimacy of special education identifications and placements is further called into question when students’ demographic and program data reveal evidence of disproportionate representation within special education categories and programming across students’ identities, particularly in terms of Indigeneity, race, class, gender, ability, and sexual orientation.

As a practice, special education programming often advocates for ability-grouping (Danforth, et al. 2006; Ellis, 2013). Ability-grouping is the organization of students by categories of impairment or perceived ability into ability-based classes or programs. Extensive research has shown that ability-grouping, generally, can create barriers to students’ access to academic opportunities and overall achievement (Hehir, et al., 2016; Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2012). This is particularly true for students organized into groups designated as having a “lower” ability (Archer et al., 2018). Research has shown that regardless of demonstrated ability, placement in an elementary special education program can, for

many students, limit access to higher academic programming in high school (Parekh & Brown, 2019) and significantly limit students' access to post-secondary education<sup>4</sup> (Brown et al., 2020). Students report that being involved in special education can result in experiences of stigma and discrimination in school (Provincial Advocate for Children and Youth, 2016). Researchers and advocates (Canadian Research Center on Inclusive Education; Community Living Ontario; Inclusive Education Canada; Parents of Black Children) also argue that many students who are identified and placed in special education programs could be better supported and be successful in the general classroom, and they question whether special education placements can be a form of systemic exclusion (Ferri & Connor, 2005).

## **Who Are We Talking About?**

As this guide points out, there are many ways to understand disability, but when thinking about disability through an equity and social justice lens, it is important to think about disability from a sociological perspective – one that does not require pathology to be “real” or experienced. Students who are traditionally understood as “having a disability” are not the only students who are disabled by schooling practices, particularly practices related to measures of ability, ability-grouping, and special education. For instance, in special education, there are students who are born with or acquire visible impairments, who may use mobility devices, and who may use augmentative communication strategies. There are students who have been formally identified through school as having various invisible impairments, with program or service decisions supported by psychoeducational assessments or medical experts. Similarly, there are students who access special education services and an Individual Education Plan (IEP), but who have not been formally identified through an IPRC at school. There are students who access special education services yet who will not experience stigma or disablement, nor identify as disabled. There are also students who self-identify as disabled, but are not recognized or supported through special education. Lastly, there are students who arrive to school with no evidence of impairment, but are still perceived as “disordered,” or as requiring special education intervention. Each of these groups of students may have varying degrees of experience of disablement or disability and subsequently elect to identify as disabled or as someone with a disability. It may be interesting to note that, based on a study using Toronto District School Board (TDSB) data, only about a third of students identified through special education as having a “special education need” also self-identified as having a disability (Parekh & Brown, 2020).

## **Giftedness: Where Does It Fit?**

In Ontario, giftedness is part of the special education system. Through special education, students can be referred, assessed, and identified as gifted. Once

---

<sup>4</sup> Note that, in this context, post-secondary education refers to college or university education. From the limited research available, apprenticeships are predominantly an indirect post-secondary education destination (see Gallagher-Mackay, 2017).



identified, students are entitled to an IEP, and, depending on the program options available within the school board, students may be offered a placement within a self-contained (full-time or part-time) gifted program. In terms of academic outcomes (e.g. credit accumulation, graduation, post-secondary education), students identified as gifted and/or placed within gifted programs typically fare well in education and, when they are tracked, fare similarly well across placements (Brown & Parekh, 2010). Empirical studies have shown varied results from the congregation and/or acceleration of students identified as gifted, with both positive and mixed outcomes (see Brulles et al., 2010; Steenbergen-Hu et al., 2016). However, there is extensive debate over whether grouping together students identified as gifted leads to higher academic achievement or whether the programming offered within gifted programs that is accompanied with high expectations for performance is the key (see McClure, 2007). Also, gifted education may not support all learners equally (see Redding & Grissom, 2021).

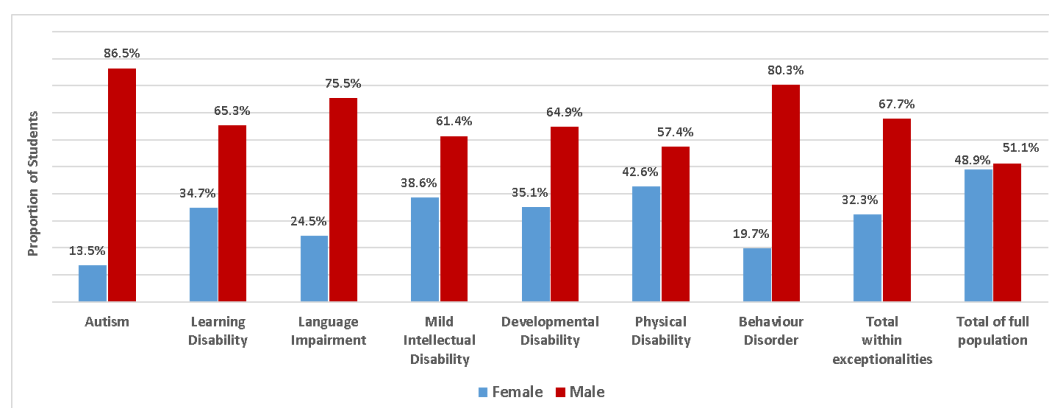
Working within a deficit framework of disability, giftedness is often positioned as a highly valued identification that can open doors to additional academic opportunities that are interesting and engaging and that promote a more privileged status. Giftedness is also largely determined based on psychometric tests (Gaztambide et al., 2013), which have a complicated history of racial and class discrimination and bias (Gould, 1996). Giftedness, as both identification and programming, has been challenged over its disproportionately white, male, and wealthy demographic (Leonardo & Broderick, 2011; Mansfield, 2015; Parekh, et al, 2018). In fact, when comparing the demographic profiles of the highest achieving students compared to students identified as gifted, the result presents two very distinct groups. While students identified as gifted are more likely to identify as white and male, whose families have high-status professional positions, the highest achievers are more often female students who identified as South Asian, Southeast Asian, and East Asian (Parekh et al., 2018). As such, questions as to whether gifted programming advantages already advantaged students have been raised (Onstad, 2020). (See Table 1 and Figure 2 for more information related to giftedness.)

## **What Does the Data Tell Us?**

The collection and analysis of students' socio-demographic data is an important tool that can be used to identify areas of inequity. In special education, the issue of disproportionality is significant and often underscores community concerns around the overrepresentation of racialized students, students experiencing low income, and male students within special education categories and programs. The TDSB is the Ontario school board with the longest running identity-based data collection strategy and the most detailed dataset/analysis available on special education, thus this guide has included data from the TDSB. Boards across Ontario are increasingly collecting and analyzing identity-based data. In future, data correlating students' socio-demographic identities with programming and outcomes will be more readily available around the province. However, data trends from the

TDSB, relating to gender, race, class, and ability-based disproportionality, have been evidenced internationally, particularly in US and UK (Archer et al., 2018; De Valenzuela, et al, 2006; Oakes, 2005; Skiba et al., 2006). It is important to note that bias exists in boards that have both hetero and homogenous student populations, whether they are located in urban or rural contexts. Bias and discrimination have been entrenched and perpetuated through history and exist in all facets of society and institutions – no system is immune. Therefore, should the overall demographic patterns differ from board to board, the trends may be similar.

Figure 1: Gender identity across special education categories (excluding gifted)



Data source: Brown et al. (2021) extracted from the TDSB School Information Systems (SIS), 2016–17. *Note.* This data was drawn from SIS and was not inclusive of multiple gender identities.

As Figure 1 shows, students identified as male are far more likely to be identified across all special education categories than their female peers, particularly in the categories of autism and behaviour exceptionalities. There are also strong relationships between special education identifications and students' racial identity. In particular, Black, Indigenous, and Latinx children tend to be overrepresented in special education categories and special education programs (excluding gifted) (Brown & Parekh, 2010; Mattson & Caffrey, 2001). Indigenous children are diagnosed with disability at a rate of approximately two times that of non-Indigenous children (Durst, 2006) and are, proportionately, two to four times as likely to be identified through special education. There is a growing body of research to suggest that Indigenous children are often streamed into special education programs and intervention systems due to perceived differences in learning and communication styles (Ball & Lewis, 2011).

Tables 1 and 2 examine the relationship between self-identified race and special education categories (both overall and specific exceptionality categories). Compared to overall proportional representations of each racial group, both Tables 1 and 2 demonstrate the disproportionate representation of students across special education categories. Black and Indigenous students are the most likely to be overrepresented within special education categories (excluding gifted) followed by Latinx and Mixed students. Black, Indigenous, and Latinx students (combined) made

up 14.3% of the total student population in 2016–17, but only 2.4% of students identified as gifted. On the other hand, white and East Asian students (combined) made up 40.8% of the student population in 2016–17, but represent close to 70% of students identified as gifted. Data on specific categories reveals that Black students were notably overrepresented in categories such as behaviour and mild intellectual disability; South Asian students were overrepresented in developmental disability and language impairment categories; Mixed students were overrepresented in behaviour and learning disability categories; and white students were overrepresented in autism and learning disability categories. There is a history of low self-identification rates of Indigenous students within the TDSB due to risk of discrimination (Yau et al., 2011). As such, special education categorical figures could not be reported in Table 2.

Table 1: Students’ racial identity across special education categories

	Gifted Exceptionalities		No Special Education Identification		Exceptionality Excluding Gifted		IEP Only		Totals	
	06–07	16–17	06–07	16–17	06–07	16–17	06–07	16–17	06–07	16–17
Black	2.8%	1.9%	11.7%	10.6%	22.2%	20.0%	28.2%	21.7%	13.5%	12.2%
East Asian	27.1%	23.7%	19.2%	14.2%	6.6%	6.5%	8.9%	6.1%	17.7%	13.1%
Indigenous	-	-	0.2%	0.1%	0.8%	1.2%	0.5%	0.7%	0.3%	0.3%
Latin American	0.3%	0.5%	1.9%	1.7%	2.6%	2.8%	2.9%	2.6%	2.0%	1.8%
Middle Eastern	0.7%	1.5%	4.9%	6.6%	4.0%	4.8%	5.5%	6.1%	4.8%	6.1%
Mixed	6.3%	13.1%	5.5%	10.9%	7.4%	14.8%	5.6%	14.3%	5.7%	11.7%
South Asian	9.3%	11.4%	21.8%	24.7%	10.8%	11.6%	15.8%	16.7%	20.2%	22.1%
Southeast Asian	1.9%	2.1%	4.2%	5.6%	2.8%	3.7%	2.9%	2.7%	3.9%	4.9%
White	51.7%	45.7%	30.6%	25.6%	42.8%	34.5%	29.7%	29.1%	32.0%	27.7%
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100.0%	100.0%

Data source: Brown et al. (2021) extracted from the TDSB School Information Systems (SIS) and Student Census, 2006–07 and 2016–17.

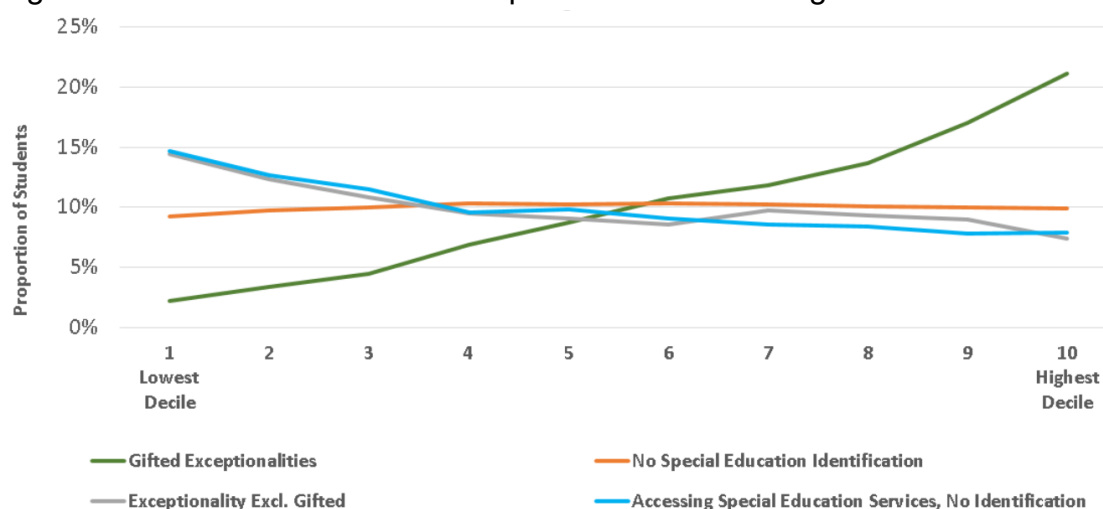
Table 2: Students’ racial identity across exceptionality categories

	Autism	Learning Disability	Language Impairment	Mild Intellectual Disability	Developmental Disability	Physical Disability	Behaviour	Total within Exceptionalities	Total of Full Population
Black	14.1%	17.8%	19.4%	32.3%	21.9%	16.2%	44.1%	20.1%	12.2%
East Asian	8.9%	6.8%	11.1%	3.5%	4.7%	13.5%	1.5%	6.5%	13.1%
Latin American	1.4%	3.3%	2.8%	1.6%	4.7%	—	2.2%	2.8%	1.8%
Middle Eastern	2.3%	4.4%	8.3%	8.4%	6.3%	5.4%	1.5%	4.7%	6.1%
Mixed	14.1%	16.2%	5.6%	9.1%	1.6%	2.7%	23.5%	14.9%	11.7%
South Asian	12.5%	8.7%	30.6%	22.4%	37.5%	24.3%	0.7%	11.3%	22.1%
Southeast Asian	6.2%	3.5%	8.3%	3.3%	4.7%	8.1%	—	3.7%	4.9%
White	40.3%	38.2%	11.1%	17.7%	17.2%	29.7%	22.8%	34.7%	27.7%
Total	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Data source: Brown et al., (2021) extracted from the TDSB School Information Systems (SIS) and Student Census, 2016–17. *Note.* Figures could not be reported for Indigenous students in this particular table as numbers of self-identified Indigenous students were too low.

Additionally, there are also significant relationships between income and special education categories. Students marginalized by poverty are more likely to be identified through special education categories (excluding giftedness). For instance, special education categories are highly classed with wealthier students overrepresented in categories such as giftedness, learning disability, and autism. Less wealthy students are overrepresented in categories such as behaviour and mild intellectual disability.

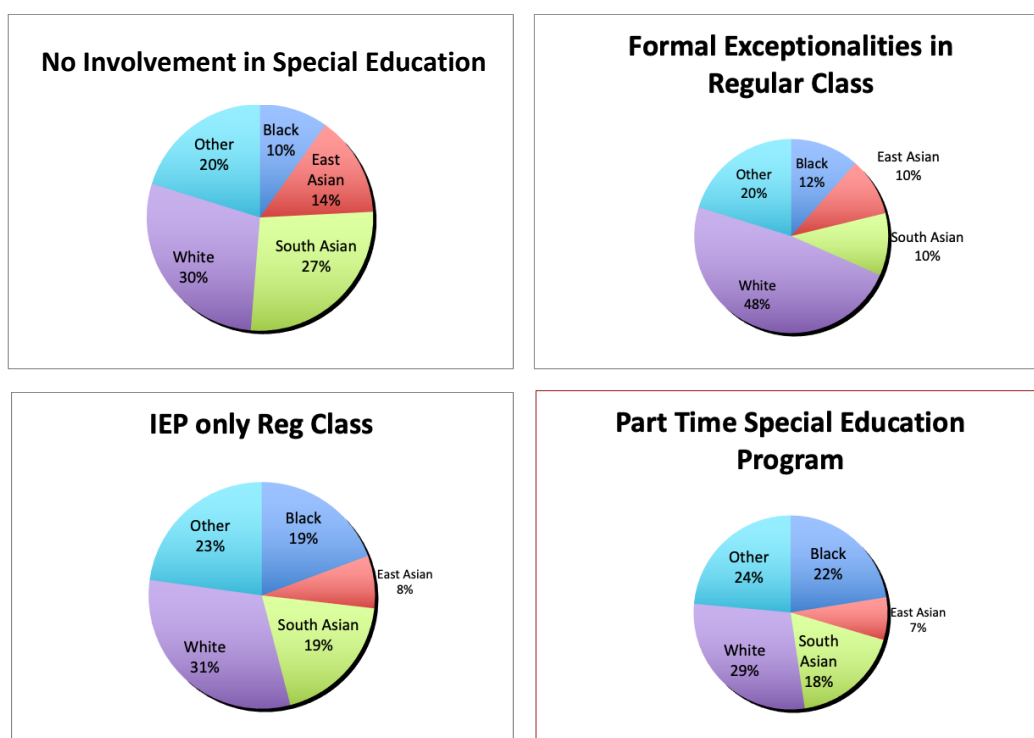
Figure 2: Students' income across special education categories



Data source: Brown et al. (2021) extracted from the TDSB School Information Systems (SIS) 2016–17.

Identifications aside, troubling trends also exist in how the perception of disability correlates to students' socio-demographic characteristics. For example, Black and racialized students, male students, and students experiencing poverty are more likely to be placed in self-contained special education classes where white, wealthy, and female students are more likely to be included in the general classroom. Consider Figure 3 that shows the differences across special education configurations and students' self-identified racial identity.

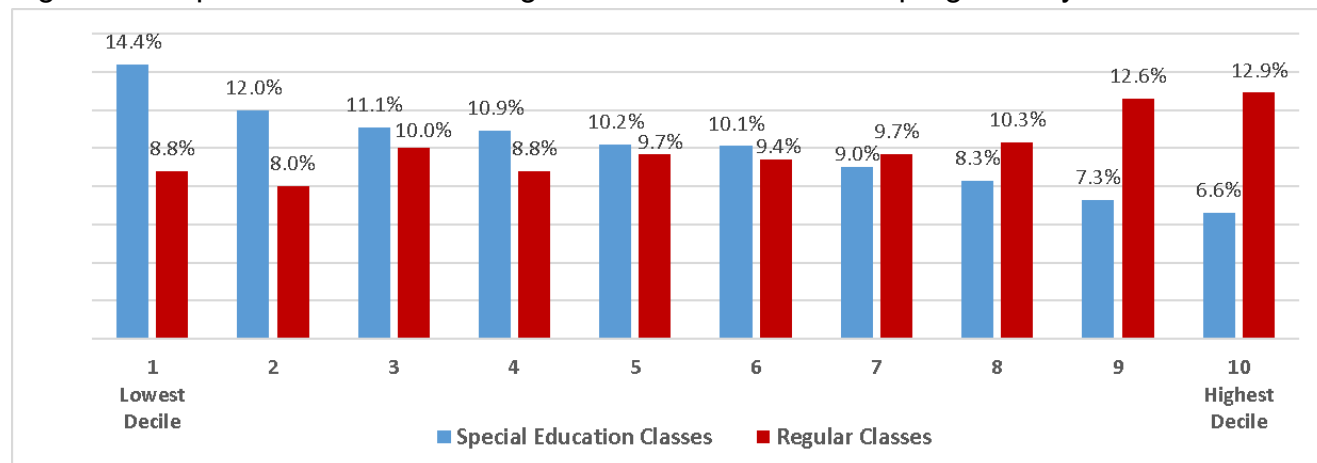
Figure 3: Students' racial identity across special education placements



Data source: Parekh et al. (2019).

Examining the four largest racial categories within the TDSB, the data shows the disproportionality of Black students placed in special education programs. Whereas white students, identified through special education, were more likely to be included in the general class. In terms of economic class, inclusion has a linear relationship to income, with wealthy students more likely to be included and less wealthy students placed in self-contained special education classes (see Figure 4).

Figure 4: Proportion of students integrated or in self-contained programs by income



Data source: Brown and Parekh (2010).

## Future Implications

Increasingly, there is international recognition that special education structures and ability-grouping play a predominant role in the greater context of K–12 academic streaming (Archer et al., 2018; Brantlinger, 2006; Ferri & Connor, 2005). Recent data from within Ontario also shows that students in special education are overrepresented in secondary Applied and Locally Developed/Essentials courses (James & Turner, 2017), leading to lower rates of access to post-secondary education compared to students who take Academic courses (Brown, Tam, et al., 2017). Although ability and achievement are often said to be the primary drivers of secondary decisions around course selection, the disproportionalities indicate that bias likely also plays a role. For instance, when holding Grade 6 EQAO achievement constant, students in self-contained special education classes were far less likely to be placed in Academic courses in Grade 9 compared to students with similar achievement in mainstream classes (Parekh & Brown, 2019). Indeed, longitudinal studies have shown that being placed in a self-contained special education class by Grade 5 is a key indicator of not applying to post-secondary education (Brown, Yau, et al., 2017). Applying to post-secondary may not be the ultimate goal for every student, but the moral imperative of public education should be to ensure that every student can graduate with the choice to pursue a post-secondary education, should they so desire.

## Human Rights in Special Education

Human rights represent one of the most important tools we have when it comes to combating racism, ableism, and other oppressive practices in our school system. The right to access an education, without discrimination, is one such human right, and it is enshrined in a number of international conventions including the *Convention on the Rights of the Child* (United Nations, 1989, art. 2, 23, 28, 29) and the *Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities* (United Nations, 2007, art.

5, 24). These conventions endow all children with the right to access a meaningful education geared towards realizing their full potential.

This international legal obligation has largely been implemented in this province via Ontario's *Human Rights Code* (the *Code*), which lays out the specific human rights obligations that are relevant to educators. The *Code* is a provincial law that, in the context of education, aims to create an inclusive educational system that is responsive to the individual needs of its students. It guarantees all students equal access to education and prohibits discrimination on the basis of certain protected characteristics (e.g. disability, race, gender, sexual orientation) (*Human Rights Code*, R.S.O. 1990, c. H.19 at s. 1).

Under the *Code*, in order to establish whether or not discrimination in education has occurred in a given circumstance, an individual must demonstrate that (a) they have a protected characteristic;<sup>5</sup> (b) they have experienced an adverse impact in the education system; and (c) their protected characteristic was a factor in the adverse impact (*Moore v. British Columbia (Education)*, 2012 SCC 61, [2012] 3 S.C.R. 360 at para. 33).

For many students, the very structure of the education system means that they experience this type of discrimination on a regular basis. The education system, as it currently stands, is not set up to meet their needs in a seamless manner and, as a result, these students often require accommodations and/or modifications to their learning environment to ensure that they can access meaningful education. In fact, the Supreme Court of Canada has stated that special education is a means by which students with disabilities can get “meaningful access” to educational services that are available to all students (*Moore v. British Columbia (Education)*, 2012 SCC 61, [2012] 3 S.C.R. 360 at para. 28). As such, providing special education represents one strategy by which school boards can meet their legal obligation to avoid discriminating against students with disabilities.

Under the *Code*, school boards have a legal duty to provide timely and individualized accommodations and supports to students with disabilities up to the point of undue hardship. Undue hardship is a legal term that takes several considerations into account including the cost of particular accommodations, outside sources of funding for such accommodations, and any relevant health and safety considerations. It is a very high standard. Outside of these specific considerations, factors like inconvenience, student or instructor morale, third-party preferences, and collective agreements are not legally relevant considerations when determining whether the hardship imposed by a particular accommodation is “undue” (See the *Code* ss. 11, 17; OHRC, 2018). Providing support by means of education assistants (EAs), instructional materials in alternate formats, behavioural management plans, or modified methods of instruction all represent forms of accommodation that may be

---

<sup>5</sup> Note that this includes students who may be *perceived* as having a protected characteristic, whether they have that characteristic or not. See *Quebec (Commission des droits de la personne et des droits de la jeunesse) v. Montréal (City)*; *Quebec (Commission des droits de la personne et des droits de la jeunesse) v. Boisbriand (City)*, [2000] 1 S.C.R. 665.

required by law depending on the needs of the student (for a list of potential accommodations, see OHRC, 2018).

## **Disputes Over Accommodations**

In practice, sometimes there are disputes over the type of accommodations that should be put into place. In these situations, it is important to remember that no one person has ultimate authority over the type of accommodations a student should receive. The law instead conceptualizes the process of developing accommodations as a collaborative one where educators must consult with students and families about the type of accommodation that should be put into place. This collaborative process typically takes place during the development of a student's IEP. It should be emphasized that one of the most common complaints from family members about the accommodation process is that they do not feel involved in the development of the IEP and often are asked to sign a completed document into which they had no input (Reid et al., 2018; Underwood, 2010). As a result, one of the most important things that educators can do to adhere to their human rights obligations is to make the IEP development process as inclusive of students and their families as possible, while recognizing that the legal responsibility to properly accommodate students remains with the school board. Many strategies may be required to promote effective family participation including scheduling sufficient time to review the IEP with the family; providing family members with detailed information about the various accommodations/modifications, educational pathways, and services available to the student; and ensuring that feedback from the student and family on the IEP is seriously considered in the decision-making process.

## **Additional Human Rights Obligations Related to Race and Disability**

Individual educators play an important role when it comes to delivering special education services and properly accommodating disabled students. However, avoiding discriminatory treatment involves more than just properly accommodating students. There are many forms of discrimination prohibited under the *Code*. For example, educators, principals, and other school administrators must exercise their professional discretion in a non-discriminatory manner. This includes situations where they are making decisions about anything that could potentially disadvantage an individual because of a protected characteristic (e.g. identification or placement decisions, assessments of ability).

This requirement is particularly relevant when it comes to issues like school discipline for disabled students. Under the *Code*, educators have a duty to assess each student with a disability based on their individual needs and circumstances prior to imposing any discipline. Educators risk violating students' human rights where they use their disciplinary discretion to punish students for unaccommodated



or inadequately accommodated disability-related behaviours.<sup>6</sup> This includes both classroom discipline and more serious forms of discipline like suspension and expulsion. It is also imperative that, barring undue hardship, disability be considered in the development or implementation of any consequences.

The requirement to avoid discriminatory decision-making is also relevant for Indigenous and racialized students. For example, under the *Code*, educators have an obligation to ensure that they are not disciplining Indigenous or racialized students more often or more harshly than other non-Indigenous or non-racialized students for similar behaviours (*B.C. v. Durham Catholic District School Board*, 2014 HRTO 42 (CanLII); *J.B. v. Toronto District School Board*, 2011 HRTO 1985 (CanLII) at para. 41–43). Furthermore, before punishing a student, educators should also consider whether his or her behaviour was a response to experiences of bullying, harassment, or other forms of discrimination linked to any protected characteristics.

In addition to the types of discrimination discussed here, there are several other forms of discrimination that are prohibited under the *Code* (e.g. harassment, poisoned environment). For more information on how educators can meet their *Code* obligations to prevent and respond to discrimination, see OHRC (2018).

### **Best Practices to Meet Your Obligations Under the Code**

It should be emphasized that many of the practices described in this guide, like Universal Design for Learning or Differentiated Instruction, represent best practices for meeting one's obligations under the *Code*. That is, they often prioritize preventing barriers through inclusive design and eliminating discriminatory barriers before they become a problem rather than focus only on individualized accommodations and after-the-fact solutions. After-the-fact solutions can be time consuming to implement and may provide an imperfect access to the educational environment. If an educational environment is instead designed in an inclusive manner, in accordance with the practices described below, educators can be far more confident that they are meeting their obligations under the *Code*.

---

<sup>6</sup> See also *Education Act*, R.S.O. 1990, c. E.2., O. Reg. 472/07: *Behaviour, Discipline and Safety of Pupils* at ss. 2–3, which lays out the mitigating factors that must be considered by principals and vice-principals when contemplating suspending or expelling a student. These sections specifically advise principals and vice-principals to consider whether the “pupil does not have the ability to control his or her behaviour,” whether the “pupil does not have the ability to understand the foreseeable consequences of his or her behaviour,” and, in the case where an IEP has been developed, “whether appropriate individualized accommodation has been provided.”

## **Critical Reflective Practice Guide**

Examining practical and procedural concerns along with students' demographic data, there is clear support for the OHRC's claim that certain students are streamed into special education "based on stereotypical assumptions about their capabilities due to their identification with the *Code* grounds of disability and race" (OHRC, 2018, 4.4. para. 4). In response, several rights and advocacy organizations, including the OHRC, have identified biases such as racism, classism, and ableism as factors potentially shaping special education identification and placement decisions. As such, critical reflective practice can help educators identify and dismantle classroom- and school-based barriers that disproportionately and negatively affect students believed to have an impairment impacting their learning. Critical reflective practice can offer educators tools to help guide them through classroom assessment, referral, identification, and placement decisions, as well as negate the overrepresentation of historically marginalized students in special education.

For those in leadership positions, integrating several ethical approaches to decision-making is recommended. When making decisions related to education programming and placement, considering the ethics of care, justice, critique, and profession (see Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2016), as well as ethics of community (see Furman, 2004), is important. Lynch (2016) describes,

- the ethic of care and urges "school leaders to show care, concern, and connection with stakeholders in solving moral dilemmas" (para. 4).
- the ethic of justice as integrating the understanding of current laws, policies, and rights into decision making.
- the ethic of critique as reflecting on issues of power and inequities experienced by members of the school community.

Furman (2004) also advocates the ethic of community which privileges the communal (as opposed to the individual) in moral decisions around schooling. Each component of this ethical framework requires consideration when making decisions based on students' ability and about referrals, programming, and placement in special education.

## **Thinking through Systems: Critical Reflective Practice and Culturally Relevant and Responsive Pedagogy**

Critical reflective practice requires educators to position themselves as learners in the service of students. This disposition means that educators are always critically thinking and rethinking their own positionality and identity along with their practice and pedagogy to determine the best possible way to support the learning of all students. Educational practice serves as the true catalyst to achievement, and critical educators must resist bias in relation to student abilities, labels, and social identities. Critical reflective practice is also strongly anchored in the core philosophical belief that all young people can develop skills and demonstrate

achievement. Therefore, critical reflective practice challenges a deficit understanding of ability. In Ontario, critical reflective practice often adopts strategies such as Differentiated Instruction and Universal Design for Learning. However, there is a need to further integrate anti-bias and anti-oppressive practices steeped in culturally relevant and responsive pedagogy to address inequitable student outcomes.

Culturally relevant and responsive pedagogy is the intentional action of merging *who* the student is with, *who* the educator is, and *how* educators choose to teach. Culture is a broadly defined term that may include many of the protected identities articulated in the *Code*. It is a term that represents commonality and may be situated in shared histories, experiences, religious beliefs, racial identities, place of origin, and so on (Ladson-Billings, 1995a, 1995b, 2014; Muhammad, 2020). Culturally responsive teaching (CRT) embodies three well-documented tenets: academic success/high expectations, cultural competence, and critical consciousness (Ladson-Billings, 1995a, 1995b, 2014). Academic success requires a rigorous curriculum for all students with the expectation of increased academic achievement. As culture is not static, cultural competence requires educators to use a child's cultural knowledge and practices, from an asset-based lens, as the primary vehicle for learning. This means that the student's lived realities are the fertile ground for learning. Critical consciousness provides students the opportunity to build awareness and critique the world around them. Critical consciousness also enables students to actively understand, engage, and critique their own social location (Gay, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 1995a, 1995b, 2014). "All instruction is culturally responsive. The question is: to which culture is it currently oriented" (Ladson-Billings as cited in Kaul, 2019, para. 2).

The intentional merging of a critically reflective practice with a CRT approach increases the achievement of all students and is an expectation clearly articulated in the front matter of all Ontario curriculum documents:

[A]ll students see themselves reflected in the curriculum, their physical surroundings, and the broader environment, so that they can feel engaged in and empowered by their learning experiences...[It] affirms the worth of all students, and helps students strengthen their sense of identity and develop a positive self-image. It encourages staff and students alike to value and show respect for diversity in the school and the broader society. (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2019, p. 77)

CRT is particularly important when it comes to developing and implementing assessments and measures of student learning. However, reflection alone, critical or not, is insufficient to bring about structural change. For instance, critical reflective practice must be rooted in anti-bias, anti-oppressive practice. This means that we must couple critical reflective practice with a commitment to transformative practice through action.

Recognizing the intersectional experiences of students, we have structured the guide to first explore critical reflective practice through facets of education that all children may experience (e.g. the early years, inclusion within K–12 education, and assessment and referral practices). From a review of the international literature and

available data in Ontario, it is clear that there are key groups who continue to experience barriers in school and who are overrepresented within special education. Therefore, the second part of this section examines targeted experiences relevant to identity-based groups.

## **The Early Years**

The early years are different from school age programming because they are part of a range of settings and systems, including social services, health, education, and community programs, and they serve children alongside their families. Early years programs and services are more than childcare. Family support programs including EarlyON; early intervention programs including preschool speech and language services; hearing and vision screening and programs for deaf and blind children; the Infant and Child Development Program; health care; and early childhood education and care programs are all spaces where children can flourish. In the early years, families are served by many programs alongside their children. This is very different from family engagement or consultation for children of school age (K–12), where the program purpose is driven by curriculum and school-led goals. For families who have disabled children, as well as those who may rely on community agencies for housing, food security, cultural safety, and economic security, entering into school may not be the new institutional experience that it is for other families.

Many families of disabled children have already engaged with several organizations and hold a lot of knowledge about how their child is learning. Many families have had to contribute time, money, and energy, as well as engage in relationships that can be uncomfortable, in order to gain entry into programs and/or access services that they believe, or others have told them, their children need (Underwood, et al., 2018; Underwood, Frankel, et al., 2019). However, due to systemic barriers, many children and their families have not been able to access early years programs and services. Families experience many demands on their time and resources, including the work and courage it takes to engage in relationships with educators who may not hold the same cultural viewpoints. Educators and administrators can support families by ensuring that families are acknowledged as decision-makers, while neither expecting nor demanding their participation.

The early years are a critical time in human development. Early childhood programs have been successful in improving developmental outcomes when they are culturally relevant and grounded in understanding of childhood, development, gender, and identity in ways that respect multiple identities (Macniven et al., 2020). Early childhood programs have also been found to be effective at reducing enrolment in special education in elementary grades, particularly for disabled children, children living in low-income homes, and Indigenous and/or racialized children (Guralnick, 2004, 2011; Heckman, 2011; McCain, 2020). These gains are often understood as indicative of normative development – “norms” based on English-speaking, middle-class, culturally Eurocentric values. However, not everyone

fits within these “norms.” Regardless, disabled children have the right to high quality early education, care, and intervention, as well as other services designed to protect a child’s dignity and facilitate a child’s achievement of the fullest possible self-reliance, social integration, and individual development (see United Nations, 1989, 2007).

Guidance/strategies for educators:

- *Consider families as experts and partners in understanding and supporting their children’s development.* Before or shortly after children begin school, reach out to families to gain a better understanding of their perspective on disability. Learn about other programs and services that they have already engaged and use the recommendations shared from early years professionals. Listen and take into account any concerns the parent(s)/guardian(s) may express about previous assessments and/or recommendations. Reflect on your own understanding and perspectives of disability. Learn more about diversity in child parenting practices to support human capabilities and value human differences.
- *Critically review screening strategies and their implications.* Reflect upon the criteria used for “success” or “readiness” and the values they promote. Review screenings used in your practice. Are they accessible to and reflective of all the children in your class/school? Are screenings being used to monitor students’ learning to inform support or as a form of surveillance? Review referral practices and policies in your school. While most young disabled children will not have a diagnosis, recognize that disability is present in the early years and that it is a valuable viewpoint from which to understand childhood. Educators and system leaders should familiarize themselves with the scope of early childhood education and care services, particularly early intervention. Further, schools should support those families and children previously unable to access these programs and services.

Questions for reflection:

- Which developmental milestones are privileged in your practice?
- How are developmental milestones tracked and measured in the classroom? What type of developmental approach do they support and do developmental principles align with those of your students’ families?
- What tools might you need to be able to provide differentiated instruction in the universal classroom?
- What might be the implications of screening outcomes? Depending on outcomes, what might be the implications for families? Will outcomes require further systems/processes that families will have to engage? How can these connections and relationships be facilitated by the school and integrated into school practice?

Guidance/strategies for school and system leaders:

- *Ensure families have access to key information related to the early years.* Enhance educator capacity in both knowledge and practices related to the early years. In early entry presentations and materials, provide family/caregivers with the information they need to be able to participate in decision-making and support their children. Encourage questions from families as they learn about the system and what is available for their children. Ensure continuity in staffing, transportation, and other systems so that parents can build relationships with school personnel. Review and become familiar with what services/supports are available in your area, and which services and supports the family knows. Invite families to bring whomever they like to meetings, ensuring that they are aware of board policy around attendance; this will facilitate discussions with families. Recognize the early years' services and programs as partners in students' education and family support.
- *Acknowledge and respond to difference.* Children have the right to early intervention. Differences come from a diversity of physical, cognitive, emotional, and biological characteristics. These differences, however, are understood through various cultural lenses. Inclusive practice does not ignore difference or aim to achieve sameness. Acknowledge difference and respond by adjusting practice and approaches in the classroom.

Questions for reflection:

- What role do families currently play in decisions relating to their child's educational pathway?
- How can schools further engage and effectively build trust with guardians/families without adding additional demands on them?
- How can schools ensure that guardians/families are given sufficient information about academic trajectories and outcomes to be able to make truly informed decisions about their children's educational pathways?

## **Core Tenets of Inclusive Instruction Across K–12 Classrooms**

Effective instructional practices by classroom educators are key to ensuring success for all students. However, these practices are influenced by an educator's conception of student "ability" and how it is perceived alongside race, class, disability, gender, sexuality, and other identities. There is a popular belief that "ability" is a singular and fixed quality within students that can be objectively measured (Ladwig & McPherson, 2017). This view, coupled with the historic overrepresentation in special education programming, and in turn, lower graduation rates, of students from Black, Indigenous, racialized, and lower-income communities, has reinforced harmful narratives of low student "ability" within marginalized populations. Disabled students are also often seen by educators as though their impairments represent their whole selves rather than just one facet of their complex

identity, a phenomenon known as “disability spread” (Sapon-Shevin, 2014). When educators reduce students’ multiple identities into single labels, they tend to respond from a place of misconception and stereotype (Sapon-Shevin, 2014).

Biases result in lower expectations, the provision of poorer quality learning experiences, and the reduction of intellectual demands on learning tasks, all of which lead to diminished academic outcomes for marginalized students. Research on the relationship between modified curriculum, sustained academic gaps, and limited post-secondary access is beginning to emerge, suggesting that modifying curriculum, particularly in the early grades, can result in reduced access to both Academic-level programming in high school and post-secondary options (see Brown et al., forthcoming). Note that under the Ontario Ministry of Education’s Policy/Program Memorandum No. 8, modifications to curriculum are not to be considered unless a student has been offered Universal Design for Learning; differentiated instruction; and instructional, environmental, and assessment accommodations to access grade-level curriculum, and has been unable to demonstrate learning with the aid of these approaches (Ontario Ministry of Education, *Identification of and program planning for students with learning disabilities*, 2014).

Disabled people have been advocating for recognition of disability as part of their identity and experience. In many ways, disability has been constructed in educational settings where perceived atypical behaviour, development, and performance of normative tasks are used to identify differences in children (Grue, 2007). These differences are then articulated as deficits or needs of the child, rather than deficits in how we have organized education or normative expectations of children. Young disabled people and their families have argued that there is a need to “develop curriculum – beginning in the early grades – that normalizes difference, helps reduce stereotyping and eliminates bullying” (Provincial Advocate for Children and Youth, 2016).

Engaging in disability culture<sup>7</sup> and understanding disability identity can help educators to foster conversations about disability that promote more positive thinking about identity. Disability culture is often omitted from culturally responsive pedagogical approaches in the classroom. However, the inclusion, response to, and celebration of disability identity and disability culture could reorient how ability and disability are currently addressed in schools. Within reflective practice, it is important to integrate and consider disability all the way through students’ academic trajectories.

Guidance/strategies for educators:

---

<sup>7</sup> For more information and examples of disability culture, please see the work of Tangled Art + Disability (<https://tangledarts.org/>); Bodies in Translation (<https://bodiesintranslation.ca/>); and Sins Invalid (<https://www.sinsinvalid.org/>).

- *Value student diversity.* Every class is heterogeneous. Educators who value difference hold positive and affirming views of all students, recognize students' multiple and intersecting identities, and reflect these within their planning, programming, and classroom materials. Underwood (2013) highlights that "educators who believe that all children have a right to participation are more likely to find ways to reduce barriers and to understand how each child learns" (p. 13).
- *Support high expectations through relationship-building.* From the stance of a "warm demander" (Hammond, 2015), an inclusive educator focuses on developing students' sense of belonging by focusing on building rapport and trust and demonstrating personal regard for students. This educator earns the right to demand effort from all students to meet high expectations, while continuing to scaffold learning, remove barriers, and provide emotional support.
- *Ensure learning experiences are accessible to all students.* By viewing curriculum as adaptable to students' needs and lived experiences, educators can create responsive learning opportunities that are free of barriers, cognitively demanding, and build on students' strengths. Support student-centred inquiry that draws on students' prior knowledge and interests to learn new concepts, reflect on students' varied identities and societal diversity in pedagogical materials, leverage technology to assist students with accessing information and expressing their ideas, and differentiate instruction by providing choice in how students interact with learning and how they express their understanding.
- *Support students within the general classroom.* Rather than rely only on a pull-out model of remediation, inclusive educators design instructional routines and programming to embed support *within* the classroom. For example, providing flexible and responsive small-group instruction in literacy and mathematics not only supports struggling learners but indeed supports all students to take their next steps in learning. The Ontario Ministry of Education's *High-Impact Instructional Practices in Mathematics* (2020) suggests that "small-group instruction is so powerful at moving student thinking forward that it is worthwhile for educators to intentionally carve out time to include it in their daily plans" (p. 20).
- *Ensure the classroom teacher is students' primary educator.* Teachers are responsible for program design and for teaching all students in the classroom, regardless of disability or involvement in special education.

Questions for reflection:



- Based on your current practice, what barriers might exist for students to fully participate, engage, and demonstrate their learning? What steps could you take to remove these barriers?
- Which student identities may experience disadvantage in your classroom? What is your perception of these identities?

Guidance/strategies for school and system leaders:

- *Focus school/system leadership on equity, anti-racism, and anti-oppression.* All leaders must understand the interplay between racism and ableism and how it manifests in schools and classrooms, resulting in the further marginalization of students. School and system leaders must centre their work on creating equitable and inclusive learning environments where all staff and students develop their critical consciousness and interrogate bias, racism, and oppression. It is important that this learning be integrated into the school improvement process, which is both measured and monitored.
- *Identify, address, and eliminate discriminatory systems, structures, and practices.* Critically examine micro- and macro-level policies and processes to identify potential areas in need of development. Leaders should ask critical questions about how different students are treated and organized in their schools, and how the system might be reinforcing societal inequities. Collecting identity-based data is a starting point to uncover or provide greater clarity about systemic discrimination, but schools can also gather student voice and qualitative information through appropriate and respectful strategies to learn more about students' perspectives within different school spaces. At the same time, it is important to study institutional structures, processes, and practices by monitoring how decisions are made locally and who is making them (Underwood, Smith, et al., 2019). Once discriminatory patterns and/or structures have been identified, it is the responsibility of leadership to immediately take steps to eliminate them.
- *Prioritize accessibility and participation.* Ensure that schools are accessible to students and their families. Ensure that transportation is accessible and does not limit the amount of time students spend within the school. Ensure disabled children are equitably and respectfully involved in school events, plays, performances, open houses, and so on. Solely celebrating students who demonstrate excellence in performance or achievement can exclude the contributions of others. Ensure school celebrations and events showcase a diversity of students' gifts.
- *Think through and engage system research.* Continue to develop and enhance equity competencies in school leadership and student voice through youth action research, making sure to seek out voices from historically marginalized and disproportionately represented students relating to disability, race, ethnic origin, religious diversity, Indigenous identity, gender, sexual diversity, class, and other categories of diversity. Educators must critically

analyze, through quantitative and qualitative data, how special education may be disadvantaging students from already marginalized backgrounds and act to make systemic changes. Developing and measuring the impact of equitable, inclusive, and culturally responsive learning environments must be central to all school- and board-level improvement efforts.

- *Develop school and system improvement plans alongside educational stakeholders (e.g. students, parents, community organizations, advocacy groups)* (see Shah, 2018). It is important to model inclusive and responsive practices in leadership roles. School and system leaders should actively seek out voices from students and parents from historically marginalized groups and community organizations that also work directly with families when creating improvement plans.
- *Measure success by student participation and engagement, in addition to achievement of curriculum expectations* (see Shah, 2018). Meaningful participation in curricular activities is often a valuable indicator of successful teaching and of having successfully supported students' skill development (Parekh & Underwood, 2015). School administrators should visit classrooms frequently to support educators, measure the effectiveness of classroom structures, and monitor levels of student participation. Also, ensure that students, as much as possible, participate in rich grade-level learning with peers, and that they are provided with adequate supports within the classroom.
- *Engage in critical reflection and ongoing professional learning related to disability*. Recent Canadian research has demonstrated that principals often work in isolation and lack significant professional learning related to disability (Sider et al., 2021). Engaging in critical reflection and ongoing professional learning can help build principals' efficacy and leadership capacity.<sup>8</sup>

Questions for reflection:

- What experiences have framed your skills, knowledge, and attitudes about inclusive education?
- What structures, policies and practices may be perpetuating societal inequities in your school/system? What qualitative and quantitative data do you need to access in order to learn more about your school/system community?
- How do you address system data with a critical lens that does not perpetuate deficit thinking about historically oppressed populations?

---

<sup>8</sup> Several web-based case studies and case inquiry resources are provided by Lead to Include (<https://www.leadtoinclude.org/resources>) as well as through the Ontario College of Teachers (see [https://www.oct.ca/-/media/PDF/Exploring%20Leadership%20Practices%20through%20Case%20Inquiry/ExplLdrshpPrctc sCseInqry\\_en\\_web.pdf](https://www.oct.ca/-/media/PDF/Exploring%20Leadership%20Practices%20through%20Case%20Inquiry/ExplLdrshpPrctc sCseInqry_en_web.pdf))

- How do you know if your staff are engaging in inclusive and culturally responsive classroom practices?
- What measures can be employed to check for progress in inclusive practice and secure accountability?
- Are the programs at your school accessible to and inclusive of disabled students? Are there admissions or entrance criteria that implicitly exclude disabled students?
- How often is disability considered in terms of mitigating circumstances around safe school practices?
- If there are special education programs within your school, where are they located? How have they been integrated into the school community?

## **Universal Design for Learning and Differentiated Instruction**

Universal Design for Learning (UDL) is an approach that considers the learning environment and ensures that all students have access to participation in the classroom. However, UDL is incomplete without differentiated instruction (DI). DI is a student-centred strategy that promotes the differentiation of instruction based on students' interests, readiness, and preferences (Tomlinson & Imbeau, 2010). Using DI, educators can differentiate the content they teach, the process through which they teach it, and the product they expect students to produce to demonstrate their learning. UDL addresses the classroom environment, but not all environmental conditions will work for every student, therefore DI also promotes adjusting the environment (e.g. noise, light, organization, seating, transitions) depending on the students in the classroom. DI promotes flexible groupings as well as tasks that are relevant to the student with continual descriptive feedback. This is consistent with human rights approaches to inclusive design and accommodations.<sup>9</sup>

UDL requires an educator to create learning environments that offer students a variety of ways to engage with learning. DI requires educators to provide multiple avenues for students to express knowledge, which may include assistive technology, as well as multiple ways in which students can respond to a task. While DI and UDL can be implemented without a deep understanding or reflection of a child's culture and intersecting identities, it is critical that educators include culture as a vehicle to provide more relevant and equitable learning opportunities (Fitzgerald, 2020).

Guidance/strategies for educators:

- *Set the conditions to support student learning.* Consider the learning environment: How are activities structured and are they accessible to all students in the classroom? Consider the learning material: Who is reflected in the class material? Whose stories are being told? Whose identities are celebrated in the toys, books, posters, and learning material? Establish an

---

<sup>9</sup> See OHRC (2018) relating to inclusive design and the duty to accommodate.

inclusive classroom community that values all the ways in which students move through the room and activities.

- *If developing or amending students' IEPs, do so in collaboration with students and their families.* Ensure there are opportunities to meet with each student/family to discuss the IEP and how students will be supported to meet the program goal. Consult with families on the development of the IEP recognizing that students and families must be central to the planning and implementation process. Families know their children best and need to be active participants and be provided with sufficient information about the implications of programs, pathways, placements, and other considerations in order to make informed decisions and give informed consent; families should not simply receive a pre-developed IEP for signing. Note that consultation with families has always been required (Ontario Ministry of Education, *The Individual Education Plan (IEP): A resource guide*, 2004; Ontario Ministry of Education, *Special education in Ontario (Draft Version, 2017): Part E: The Individual Education Plan (IEP)*), but that authentic collaboration, where families not only sign off that they have been consulted but that they also support the content of the IEP, is not guaranteed within current legislation in Ontario.
- *Commit to establishing an inclusive classroom culture.* Engage in learning and integrating disability culture and identity into classroom and learning materials. Educators and administrators can educate themselves about the intersectionality of disability and racial, cultural, and other identities. Create heterogeneous groups that privilege friendships. For example, allow friends of diverse ability who support each other to work together.

Questions for reflection:

- How is disability represented within classroom materials? Do representations uphold or challenge disability stereotypes? Do they normalize in a positive way the diversity of student ability, expression, ways of learning, and ways of doing things? How are students with multiple identifications of exceptionality recognized?
- Language can be used to explicitly or implicitly create an “in” group and an “other.” How often do you hear ableist or sanist words such as “lame,” “crazy,” “stupid,” “idiot,” “moron,” or “ret\*rd” expressed within your classroom or school? How do you intervene?
- How is excellence recognized in disabled students? How are students encouraged and supported to meet curriculum and academic standards?

## **Special Education Referral and Assessment**

Students are entitled to early identification and intervention. As such, special education can organize services, technology, and resources critical to students'

academic success. There is also a great deal that can be integrated into classroom practice (e.g. pedagogical strategies, accommodations) that does not require special education involvement. Educators in the classroom are often tasked with being the first to evaluate students' academic achievement and skills and are therefore often the first to notice whether a student may be approaching learning differently than expected and possibly exhibiting signs of impairment or exceptionality. So when should educators bring students forward for further referrals and/or assessments through special education? The answer is that each situation is unique and will require unique consideration of contextual factors. One of the complicating issues with special education referrals is that the very difference perceived as impairment or exceptionality may be based on cultural, linguistic, class, or demographic experiences unfamiliar to those in the position of identifying difference. In particular, it is critical that the learning environment be assessed, not just the student.

Bias also influences classroom assessment practices and can impact students' educational trajectories. Educator positionality and bias plays an especially impactful role in the rate of special education identification and placement from racialized and low-income communities. Assessing students through a lens of white, middle-class, cis-gendered norms (e.g. observations of peer interactions, learning skills reporting, etc.) runs the risk of problematizing historically oppressed populations of students. Because an educator's professional judgement is at the heart of assessment, evaluation, and reporting (Ontario Ministry of Education, *Growing Success*, 2010), evaluations of student achievement are inherently subjective and prone to bias. Achievement on tasks completed at home are often, at least in part, a measure of the socio-economic status of families and the means they have to support learning at home. Trauma-informed assessment recognizes that inter-generational experiences – including those that result from racism, residential schools, and other forms of state and social control over Indigenous and Black students – have resulted in the mis-designation of students into behavioural categories and a poor understanding of learning difficulties. Providing closed tasks to students that only honour certain ways of knowing prevent some students from fully demonstrating their understanding. Student referrals to special education are regularly initiated by low academic achievement based on classroom assessments. For example, if a student is identified as having low achievement on multiple curriculum-based assessments, this can trigger the special education process rather than initiate pedagogical differentiation within the classroom.

Guidance/strategies for educators:

What to try first:

- *Adjust practice.* It is important that educators address difference and respond by adapting the learning environment and employing strategies like UDL or DI to support student learning.

- *Reflect on the assumption of difference.* Consider whether perceived difference is a result of a cultural, linguistic, or experiential difference from that of the educator.
- *Accommodate.* Accommodations do not have to be formalized through an Identification, Placement, and Review Committee (IPRC) or on an IEP to be integrated or enacted in the classroom. Students may need an occasional accommodation to address time-limited, situational issues (e.g. illness, tiredness, travel) or ongoing accommodation to address extended experiences (e.g. impairment, family disruption, housing precarity, and so forth).
- *Work in partnership with students.* Families are critical partners in schooling, but, as the United Nations (2016) upholds, “education is the right of the individual learner and not, in the case of children, the right of a parent or caregiver” (p. 3). Students can often alert educators to what is working or not working for them in the classroom in terms of pedagogy, curriculum, or timelines. It is critical that we integrate students’ values, goals, and aims into how they are supported in school.

When to refer to special education:

- *Technology resources.* Through special education funding, students can access useful technological resources such as computers, digital programming, augmentative communication, mobility aids, braille machines, and much more to assist their learning and their access to the curriculum.
- *Human resources.* Students may require the assistance of additional staff to support their daily activities in school. For instance, a sign language interpreter, a child and youth worker, and an educational assistant are all examples of human resources that are often made available through special education.
- *Service resources.* Students may also benefit from access to specific services such as speech and language therapy, braille services, and ASL to assist in learning skills and ensure access to the curriculum, all of which may warrant a referral to special education. Note that school boards generally offer multilingual or first-language services to support students.

Questions for reflection:

- Prior to bringing forward students for referral to special education or early intervention, how have you checked your assumptions around the differences you observe?
- How have you modified your practice and what forms of accommodations have you integrated into your classroom to support student learning without going through special education?
- How are the values, aims, and goals of your students honoured and integrated into how they are supported in your classroom?

- Due to its historical stigmatization, students are often wary of special education. The stigma around special education goes largely unacknowledged in schools. How can educators challenge and reduce students' lived experience of stigma associated to special education?

Guidance/strategies for school and system leaders:

- *Clear communication around implications of student's involvement in special education.* Families need to understand what lies ahead for their child and what they can expect from their child's involvement in special education. System data should be made available to students and families. Families should be privy to the expected duration and purpose of their child's involvement in special education. Do families know what they will receive when they go through a formal IPRC meeting? Could those same aims be met working with the classroom teacher and school staff?
- *Consult with families.* What do families want out of their child's involvement with special education? Can those goals be met within the classroom?
- *Tracking student support and referrals to special education.* Tracking which students are offered accommodation and support within the classroom outside of special education and which students are referred to and supported through special education is an important school and system activity in understanding and working through bias.

Questions for reflection:

- What are the demographics of students in special education or on an IEP? Why might student demographics be disproportionately distributed across special education programs or identification categories?
- How much do schools share with families about the special education process and outcomes before they become involved? Do they know the kinds of access to services and resources their child will receive? Are those adequate? Do they know how long their child will be in a particular program? What will they gain? What will they lose?
- Principals must sign off on students' IEPs, regardless of whether they were generated through an IPRC process or not, to say they have consulted with families, but what does that consultation look like? Are families happy with how the IEP was developed? Are they satisfied with the content, strategies, and goals? If not, what strategies do school and system leaders have in place to ensure that students' IEPs reflect the values and goals of the student and their family?
- How are referrals to special education being tracked around students' socio-demographic characteristics and outcomes?

## **Racism and Bias in Education**

Many students with various racial identities experience racism in education. Historically, students who self-identify as Black, Indigenous, Latinx, or Mixed have tended to experience barriers along their academic trajectories (Brown & Parekh, 2010; Parekh, 2013). However, other racialized groups also experience racism, such as anti-Asian racism, that may not have direct effects on academic achievement specifically. In addition to racism, students may also experience barriers in school based on their gender or sexual identity as well as their families' economic position. Barriers to academic achievement can include low expectations for academic performance as well as placement in special education and non-Academic programming indicative of lower ability (Brown et al., 2016; James & Turner, 2017). Such barriers can result in reduced eligibility to move on to post-secondary education following high school (Brown et al., 2020).

Notions of whiteness and white supremacy<sup>10</sup> operate within public education systems, shaping perceptions around what constitutes excellence in relation to achievement, in-class performance, and behaviour. Racism in schools is directly rooted in colonization, resulting in the social and academic exclusion of racialized students. When examining data related to special education and racial disproportionality, two groups of students are consistently more likely to be overrepresented within the special education system: Indigenous and Black students. Therefore, we will begin this section of the reflective practice guide by specifically addressing anti-Indigenous and anti-Black racism.

## **Colonialism and Indigeneity**

Indigenous and disabled experiences of schooling in Canada have been fraught with harmful, and at times lethal, practices (Ineese-Nash, 2020). The Indian Residential School (IRS) system is one way in which Indigenous children have been forced to assimilate to the dominant Eurocentric settler colonial society of the early 1900s (MacDonald, 2019). Similarly, disabled children and adults have suffered harm in Canadian institutions premised on rehabilitation and cure models of disability intervention (Strong-Boag, 2007).

Particularly within the context of settler colonialism, Indigenous disabled people are often considered “doubly disadvantaged” (DiGiacomo et al., 2013, p. 1) through the intersection of oppressive societal structures, including a lack of access to the social determinants of health (King et al., 2009). As a result of these systemic inequities, Indigenous communities face disproportionately higher rates of ill health (Adelson, 2005), mental illness (Nelson & Wilson, 2017), and disability (Smylie &

---

<sup>10</sup> White supremacy is defined by Frances Lee Ansley as “a political, economic and cultural system in which whites overwhelmingly control power and material resources, conscious and unconscious ideas of white superiority and entitlement are widespread, and relations of white dominance and non-white subordination are daily re-enacted across a broad array of institutions and social settings” (cited in Newkirk, 2017, para. 8).



Adomako, 2009) as compared to non-Indigenous communities. Ongoing colonialism contributes to the prevalence of disabling conditions on both an individual and systemic level (Ineese-Nash, 2020).

Indigenous peoples have cultures, worldviews, and lived experiences that define what it means to be a capable, competent, or valued human being and how to support children's development (James, 2016). The denial of cultures, worldviews, and lived experiences is how educational institutions continue to colonize Indigenous, disabled, Black, and other marginalized children (Ineese-Nash, 2020). Enhancing conditions for Indigenous children with disabilities therefore requires a culturally safe approach in which beliefs of disability may be honoured and integrated into education and intervention planning (Underwood, Ineese-Nash, et al., 2019). There is a need to integrate Indigenous perspectives in classroom settings as a way to dispel stereotypical framings of Indigenous peoples, support reconciliation, and foster spaces where Indigenous children's unique methods of engagement are not pathologized.

In their literature review, Rountree and Smith (2016) identified strengths-based indicators from Indigenous research around the world. Using strengths-based approaches is critical to re-framing childhood and education outcomes that are inclusive. Indigenous approaches to early intervention and education have been created over thousands of years through Indigenous ways of life. Indigenous approaches to early intervention and disability privilege traditional healing practice over bio-medical knowledge. Early intervention and approaches to education that value Indigenous ways of knowing will have outcomes that centre Indigenous language, land-based learning, community relationships, and cultural practices over mainstream health interventions (Robertson, 2016). These forms of early childhood education, care, and intervention have largely not been permitted within existing provincial education programs.

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRC) has developed key guidelines for educators and school systems. The recommendations below include guidance and calls to action from *Honouring the Truth, Reconciling for the Future* (TRC, 2015):

Guidance/strategies for educators:

- *Commit to supporting Indigenous students through practising cultural safety and trauma-informed approaches where cultural differences, demonstrations of understanding, cultural knowledge, and experience are recognized and valued in the classroom.* The TRC recommends committing to "Developing culturally appropriate curricula" (Education Reform, Call to Action 10, iii, p. 149) where Indigenous students are able to express their understandings in ways that are meaningful to them. "Sharing information and best practices on teaching curriculum related to residential schools and Aboriginal history" (Education for Reconciliation, Call to Action 63, ii, p. 238). "Building student

capacity for intercultural understanding, empathy, and mutual respect” (Education for Reconciliation, Call to Action 63, iii, p. 239).

Questions for reflection:

- How are Indigenous identities and histories reflected in the classroom and school?
- Which students are best served by current educator practices? How might certain practices be damaging or harmful to particular students (such as Indigenous students within the context of residential schooling and current colonial forms of schooling in public systems)?
- What does decolonizing educational practice mean? How can educators think through decolonization when it comes to particular curricular areas (e.g. mathematics, language, science) and classroom practices (e.g. evaluation of participation, educational assessment, monitoring of progress and behaviour expectations)?
- Is what you are observing as a variance in ability really a difference in approaches to/expressions of learning (i.e. cultural differences)?
- What does the data tell us about the experiences and outcomes of Indigenous learners?

Guidance/strategies for school and system leaders:

- *Adopt Indigenous-led practices and ensure there is Indigenous community involvement in key educational decisions involving Indigenous children.* Understand that Indigenous families’ histories may include trauma produced through their own experiences of education; therefore, relationship-building and trust are critical. Adopt an expanded view of family that includes extended family as part of the support for children and encourage families to bring a trusted community member with them to meetings. Ensure there is representation from the Indigenous community and/or formalized partnerships with Indigenous service agencies to participate in IPRC decisions and interventions related to Indigenous children. The TRC (2015) recommends “Enabling parents to fully participate in the education of their children” (Education Reform, Call to Action 10, vi, p. 150), and “Developing and implementing Kindergarten to Grade Twelve curriculum and learning resources on Aboriginal peoples in Canadian history, and the history and legacy of residential schools” (Education for Reconciliation, Call to Action 63, i, p. 238).

Questions for reflection:

- As Indigenous children with disabilities are often doubly marginalized through the intersection of multiple forms of oppression, how can we envision targeted approaches to serving the needs of this population and affirming the strengths of Indigenous students and families?
- How can Indigenous parents/families and community leaders engage in self-determination, self-governance, and be meaningfully involved in envisioning more appropriate, relevant, and responsive pedagogical approaches, and ensure that their input is incorporated into education policy, program, and funding decisions?
- Examine and respond to available data, both qualitative (e.g. educator observation, parent concern) and quantitative (e.g. student census, identity-based data, test scores, suspension/expulsion data) that may show gaps or disproportionalities. What does the data show in your school/district?

## **Anti-Black Racism and Schooling**

While distinct, anti-Black racism shares many commonalities with ableism (Erevelles, 2014) and anti-Indigenous racism as a result of its rootedness in colonization. Anti-Black racism has a unique history in Canada and is deeply rooted in Ontario's educational institutions as it reinforces and normalizes beliefs, attitudes, and discriminatory practices towards people of African or Caribbean descent, such as segregated schooling and enslavement. Canadian and international research consistently show that students who self-identify as Black are one of the racialized groups most likely to be negatively impacted through special education practices and processes (Erevelles, et al., 2006; Parekh & Brown, 2019). Moreover, Black students are more likely to be perceived as demonstrating problematic behaviour in school, be subject to excessive suspensions and expulsions, and experience the "school-to-prison pipeline" (Erevelles, 2014; Skiba et al., 2014, 2016).

Anti-Black racism manifests through educational policies, pedagogy, and practices and is often rendered invisible when coupled with the intersections of ability. Anti-Black racism exists through the enactment of daily, routine system practices, many of which are tied to racialized notions of ability. As David DeMatthews (2020) notes, "Racism and ableism are built into schools and principals can reproduce these inequities unknowingly" (p. 28). These inequities result in the overrepresentation of Black students in special education programs; the disproportionate implementation of IEPs in the early years and academic streaming in secondary school; and the disproportionate use of institutionalized processes and policies such as school-based team meetings and IPRCs. It is important to understand the historical and present-day impact of these educational decisions that result in Black students reporting a sense of low self-esteem tied to academic success, elevated experiences of exclusion within school spaces, and worry for the future (Murray, et al., 2020).

Recognizing the negative impacts of these practices allows educational practitioners to notice and name anti-Black racism and the underlying deficit

ideologies that drive educational decisions for Black students, including special education decisions. Such educational decisions have long-standing implications regarding the life chances for Black students. Although special education provincial guidelines in Ontario indicate that school boards have flexibility in using special education funding as they deem necessary in order to be responsive to local needs (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2021), systems continue to choose funding supports that replicate historical narratives and harmful decisions regarding Black students. By reinforcing the development of equity and anti-racist leadership competencies through an intentional focus on anti-Black racism and through a critical disability theoretical framework, we can move towards disrupting biases, assumptions, and beliefs tied to socially constructed notions of race and disability. Research on special education urges a model of transformative change that speaks to positive long-term gains for Black students (Adjei, 2018). We know that Black families and communities are supportive and are eagerly awaiting and working towards a different way to engage with educators, administrators, and system leaders to tackle these issues of anti-Black racism, particularly while challenging ableism.

Guidance/strategies for educators:

- *Centre Black students, families, and communities and utilize them as knowledge holders in decision-making processes.* Ensure educational decisions (e.g. development of the IEP, participation in the IPRC process, decisions to modify curricular expectations [see Ontario Ministry of Education, 2014], decisions for special education or non-Academic programming placements) are made with guidance from the Black communities. Ensure full information is provided about trends and data relating to different programs, supports, placements, and pathways to ensure fully informed consent. Review assessment practices and tools for cultural biases; if biases are detected, find alternative options. Ensure positive racial identity is embedded in the curriculum as well as the resources tied to instruction.
- *Engage in professional learning* (readings, focused critical discussions, and capacity building) to deepen understanding of the trends and impact of anti-Black racism and ableism.

Question for reflection:

- How are Black identities and experiences currently represented within the classroom curriculum and learning material for all students, and where might intervention be needed?
- What leadership opportunities are available for Black youth within your school? How can Black excellence be recognized, fostered, promoted, and expected?

Guidance/strategies for school system leaders:

- *Commit to greater representation and advocacy within educational decisions as well as within the school.* For example, ensure someone who is knowledgeable in special education, with a relationship to the child and their community, is part of identification, placement, and program decisions. Review assessment, placement, and admissions practices and consider how they create barriers for or exclude Black students and their families. Support, train, and create opportunities for staff, educators, and trustees to engage in anti-racist work and its relationship to decision-making processes.

Question for reflection:

- What strategies do system leaders currently employ to promote engagement, advocacy, and relationships with Black families and communities? Where might these strategies be falling short? What opportunities are schools currently offering Black students and their families?
- Examine and respond to available data, both qualitative (e.g. educator observation, parent concern) and quantitative (e.g. student census, identity-based data, test scores, suspension/expulsion data), that may show gaps or disproportionalities. What does the data show in your school/district?
- Who is deciding which opportunities are valued and made available? What are ways to ensure there is community direction and feedback in terms of what is offered at school?

## **Gender and Sexuality**

Studies conducted both within Canada and internationally have demonstrated that male-identifying students and students who self-identify as belonging to the LGBTQ2S+ community are overrepresented within special education categories and placements (Brown & Parekh, 2013; Yau, et al., 2015). In terms of gender, research shows a significant difference in how students' learning is perceived across gender despite similar levels of achievement, with female students being more likely to be perceived as having excellent learning skills compared to their male peers (Parekh et al., 2018). Research results raise questions around gendered expectations related to behaviour and performance as well as how students may be socialized differently by gendered expectations in terms of their relationship to school and academic work. Research also shows differences in experiences of bullying and harassment across gender and sexual identities (Yau et al., 2014). Students who self-identify as LGBTQ2S+ have long reported experiencing a sense of exclusion in school (Parekh, 2014). Exclusion may be in relation to heteronormative expectations, heteronormativity embedded within the culture of the school, a lack of relevant engagement through curriculum, and the continued stigma associated with the teaching of gender and sexuality.

Guidance/strategies for educators:

- *Select curricular material inclusive of positive and diverse gender and sexual orientation representation.* Examine curricular material for harmful and stereotyped representations of masculine, feminine, or non-binary qualities or roles. Where possible, ensure students have choice in material that cover a range of gendered representations. Ensure there is intentional inclusion of LGBTQ2S+ identities within texts and curricular material within all publicly funded schools.
- *Monitor the culture and climate within the classroom and intervene when necessary.* Immediately address incidents of bullying based on gender or sexual orientation or exclusion of LGBTQ2S+ students or students with LGBTQ2S+ family members. Establish a safe classroom climate for students. Ask students for their preferred pronouns and share your own. Avoid describing curricular areas or interests through gendered language (e.g. sciences as masculine, arts as feminine).

Questions for reflection:

- What current school and classroom practices and structures are heteronormative and cissexist? How might these practices become inclusive of all genders and sexual orientations and of LGBTQ2S+ students, families, and communities?
- What forms of learning are being assessed? What materials are being used as the foundation of assessment? How might these relate to notions of gender or sexuality?
- How might popularized perceptions of masculinity be in conflict with learning expectations in schools, particularly around behaviour and notions of compliance?
- Similarly, how might notions of gender influence educator assessment of giftedness, learning disability, or influence educator and student views around student “fit” in various subjects and courses such as STEM or the arts?

Guidance/strategies for school and system leaders:

- *Ensure there are equitable opportunities for student leadership across gender identities.* Offer students equitable guidance around pathways regardless of gender identity. Support clubs that create safe, motivating, and supportive spaces for students who identify as male, female, or non-binary. Support students’ leadership in creating Gay–Straight or Queer–Straight Alliances.

Questions for reflection:

- How does gender preference emerge through language? How do curricular areas become gendered?
- How often do sexist, gender-biased, homophobic, and transphobic incidents occur in your school? How do you intervene? What are the consequences?

- How does heteronormativity manifest in your language and in your expectations of and relationships with students?

## **Class**

Economic privilege has had a historic relationship to higher academic achievement and opportunities, while poverty is often associated with low school performance and overrepresentation within special education identifications and placements (Mansfield, 2015; Reid & Knight, 2006). Access to resources plays an important role in perceived ability, as noted by the significant relationship between high wealth and identification of giftedness in students (Parekh et al., 2017). There is a great deal of literature that examines how poverty can lead to the misidentification of disability (Howard et al., 2009). Studies have also shown how students living in lower-income homes are much more likely to be identified in special education categories and programs indicative of low capacity (Artiles et al., 2010; Brown, 2010). Yet, there is also a great deal of evidence that ability-based assessments can be skewed to favour middle- and upper-class youth (Rix & Ingham, 2021). As a result of historical and systemic racism, there continues to be a relationship between race and opportunities for economic security (Ontario Council of Agencies Serving Immigrants, 2019). Therefore, it is imperative that when measuring and responding to student ability, educators take into account that students may have inequitable access to resources.

Guidance/strategies for educators:

- *Review assignments, measures, and assessments for class bias and the resources required to complete assignments and do well academically.* For particular assignments/assessments: What background experiences (e.g. cultural experiences, travel, technological) do students need to have to be successful? What kind of access to technology (e.g. equipment, internet connection) might students require?
- *Factor in socio-economic realities when assigning tasks for completion at home.* In addition to varying degrees of access to basic needs as well as phone, internet, digital devices, transportation, childcare, and so on, children from different socio-economic backgrounds may also have different roles within the family. What kind of access to family members or community supports might students need? How many hours are required to complete an assignment? Is there flexibility for students who are also employed, in caretaking roles, commuting, and so forth? How much of your assessment is based on access to resources within students' homes or communities? For instance, does it matter how many books (or libraries, electronics etc.) are available to the student?

Questions for reflection:

- Examine what items, experiences, ideas, and access are privileged in your classroom. How much space is offered in classroom discussions of new clothes, new technology, attending concerts, movies, going on vacation?
- How is poverty and/or wealth represented in the narratives within your classroom? Is it tied to merit? Is it framed as a consequence of broader social inequality?

Guidance/strategies for school and system leaders:

- *Identify and strategize ways to mitigate economic demands on students and families in relation to their academic pathways, and strategize ways to ensure equitable access to in-school events and opportunities.* Learn about the costs that can hinder students' pathways (e.g. application fees, tutoring supports) and strategize ways to support access. Ensure that families who contribute financially to the school have an equal voice in school decisions as families who do not. Intentionally disrupt patterns that enable families with greater social and economic capital to have more influence in decisions. Recognize that access to specialized programming and greater opportunities in education are often related to social class.

Questions for reflection:

- Identify and examine how your school asks for funds from families. What are the processes in place when families cannot pay? For instance, is economic circumstance a condition upon which children are excluded from school events? What types of labour are families asked to perform in order to demonstrate the need for economic exemption?
- What role does fundraising play in your school? How might that contribute to an inequality of access to resources within the school?<sup>11</sup>

## ***Thinking Strategically: What Can Districts Do?***

### **Centring Students, Families, and Communities in Planning**

Often, system policy and practice are developed and implemented without intentional consultation with the families and communities most impacted. For example, youth have shared how special education carries a negative stigma that follows them through their experiences in school and the community (Parekh, 2019), yet youth are rarely, if ever, consulted on how to improve practices and the delivery of support in ways that honour their identity and social relations in the school. Also, racial and cultural communities approach and identify with disability and special education practices differently, yet are expected to adopt the vision, approach, and authority of institutional decisions related to their children.

---

<sup>11</sup> For more on challenging the inequities inherent to school fundraising, see Winton (2018).



In order to disrupt these actions, centring students, their families, and communities is essential. This work involves:

- Intentionally honouring students and their families, guardians, and, where they wish, community leaders/advocates within all decision-making processes related to special education. This requires educators to have relationships in these communities that are not solely with the families whose children are struggling in school.
- Acknowledging and ending practices that exclude families from participating in decision-making.
- Educating students and their families on the implications of special education placements and academic tracking so they can make informed decisions.
- Utilizing the expertise within communities to develop anti-bias approaches to special education and disability.
- Encouraging the advocacy of communities to support families as they navigate the various schooling and special education processes.
- Providing opportunities to educate students, their families, and communities on the various educational decision-making processes.
- Creating professional learning for educators to engage in self-reflection as they deepen their understanding of current data trends on the impact of special education decisions, particularly on racialized and marginalized students.

## **The Collection and Analysis of Demographic Data to Inform Planning**

To assist boards in identifying systemic inequities related to student identity and academic access and outcomes, collecting program, achievement, and identity-based data is an important tool.<sup>12</sup> Collecting identity-based data and other important demographic data at individual and system levels is central to deep analysis of the effectiveness of public education service as it pertains to the variety of different populations and communities that public education serves. Without good analytics that help map out how students navigate through and experience public education – the programs in which they participate, the quality of their participation, as well some of the system-defined learning outcomes that they obtain – understanding, critiquing, and adapting policies, programs, and resources to better meet student needs is not possible.

Policy-makers and the public need access to the variety of effects that occur in schools and along students' pathways. For instance, the Applied Program of Study (POS) was created in 1998 as an equity and differentiation strategy. Following a

---

<sup>12</sup> See the OHRC's guide on data collection (OHRC, 2010) and the data standards under the *Anti-Racism Act* (2017). (Note that, due to its date of publication, the OHRC guide uses "Aboriginal" as opposed to the currently appropriate term "Indigenous," but that "Gender Identity" and "Gender Expression" should be read as is – where protected grounds under the *Code* are listed – as these terms were added to the *Code* in 2012.) See also Ontario's *Anti-Racism Data Standards* (Government of Ontario, 2018).

recent analysis of students' pathways, however, this strategy is now being eliminated. Understanding the potential problematic effects of the Applied POS on students who have been historically marginalized in the TDSB (e.g. students who are racialized, are in special education, and come from low socio-economic family backgrounds) would not have been possible without good data collection processes. Data collection and analysis allows boards to identify problematic patterns – often already named by communities – more clearly, and target program and service changes and development to better support all students. The collection of identity-based data and information at an individual level is critical to monitoring students' academic outcomes and experiences as they move through public education. Qualitative data is also important in understanding the school experiences of educators, students, and the students' families, and can help contextualize identity-based data. Identity-based data collection is central to the endeavour of improving public education for all students, but it must also be coupled with meaningful and honouring analysis and action, both in policy and practice.

Collecting demographic information including identity-based data needs to be integrated with ongoing differentiated support of resources to schools. This requires a framework of partnership between public education and the communities that public schools serve. A partnership framework between school and community can effectively advocate for students and support responsive learning opportunities for students that may enhance potential success in students' public-school experiences, as well as their subsequent post-secondary school experiences and life chances. For public education, advocating for students, in partnership with local communities, is also central to the work of collecting identity-based data.

## **Conclusion**

Ableism is a form of oppression that privileges ability and excludes those deemed less able, unable, or disabled. Ableism is tied to white supremacy (Hayden, 2020) and colonialism (Hutcheon & Lashewicz, 2020). Ableist oppression is intersectional and compounded along lines of class, race, gender, and other prohibited grounds. Together, these multiple forms of oppression frame normative ability and excellence through whiteness and wealth. Kendi (2021) reminds us that racism and ableism are historically and inextricably linked. The collusion of ableism and racism was one of the structures used to justify enslavement, enabled the proliferation of the Indigenous residential school system, and contributes to the incarceration of racialized and disabled youth through Ontario's institutional systems. In public education, the intersection of various identities, oppression, and ableism continues to result in streaming, non-rigorous programming, underachievement, low access to post-secondary education, and the disproportionate representation of racialized students in special education classes.

Despite the historic and insidious nature of ableism, this narrative can be challenged with intentional choices made by boards, schools, and each individual educator. While not exhaustive, this guide provides a path forward for those who

choose to critically engage with the principles of justice and equity in schooling, particularly around anti-bias approaches to special education. Boards must acknowledge the existence of ableism, racism, colonialism, heteronormativity, classism, and other biases in society and schools, as well as identify structures and policies that allow intersectional ableism to persist and drive their organizational decisions. Most significantly, boards must hold themselves accountable by asking each school to challenge ableism and intersectional bias and discrimination through school and board improvement plans in ways that can be tangibly monitored and measured.

## References

- Adelson, N. (2005). The embodiment of inequity: Health disparities in Aboriginal Canada. *Canadian Journal of Public Health*, 96(2), S45–S61.  
<https://doi.org/10.1007/BF03403702>
- Adjei, P. B. (2018). The (em) bodiment of Blackness in a visceral anti-Black racism and ableism context. *Race Ethnicity and Education*, 21(3), 275–287.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/13613324.2016.1248821>
- Annamma, S., Connor, D., & Ferri, B. (2013). Dis/ability critical race studies (DisCrit): theorizing at the intersections of race and dis/ability, *Race Ethnicity and Education*, 16 (1), 1–31, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/13613324.2012.730511>
- Annamma, S., & Morrison, D. (2018). Identifying dysfunctional education ecologies: A DisCrit analysis of bias in the classroom. *Equity & Excellence in Education*, 51(2), 114–131. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10665684.2018.1496047>
- Archer, L., Francis, B., Miller, S., Taylor, B., Tereshchenko, A., Mazenod, A., Pepper, D., & Travers, M-C. (2018). The symbolic violence of setting: A Bourdieusian analysis of mixed methods data on secondary students' views about setting. *British Educational Research Journal*, 44(1), 119–140.  
<https://doi.org/10.1002/berj.3321>
- Artiles, A. J., Kozleski, E. B., Trent, S. C., Osher, D., & Ortiz, A. (2010). Justifying and explaining disproportionality, 1968–2008: A critique of underlying views of culture. *Exceptional Children*, 76(3), 279–299.  
<https://doi.org/10.1177/001440291007600303>
- Ball, J., & Lewis, M. (2011). “An altogether different approach”: Roles of speech-language pathologists in supporting Indigenous children’s language development. *Canadian Journal of Speech-Language Pathology and Audiology*, 35(2), 144–158.
- Barnes, C., & Mercer, G. (2010). *Exploring disability: A sociological introduction* (2nd ed.). Polity.
- Barton, L. (Ed.). (2006). *Overcoming disabling barriers: 18 years of disability and society*. Routledge.
- Berman, D. L., & Connor, D. J. (2017). *A child, a family, a school, a community: A tale of inclusive education*. Peter Lang.
- Brantlinger, E. A. (Ed.). (2006). *Who benefits from special education? Remediating (fixing) other people’s children*. Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Brown, R. S., Gallagher-Mackay, K., & Parekh, G. (2020). Redefining risk at school: Elementary school factors predicting post-secondary access. *Educational Policy Analysis Archives*, 28(21), 1–25.
- Brown, R. S., & Parekh, G. (2010). *Special education: Structural overview and student demographics* (Report No. 10/11-03). Toronto District School Board.  
<https://www.tdsb.on.ca/Portals/research/docs/reports/SpecEdStructuralOverviewStudentDemo.pdf>

- Brown, R. S. & Parekh, G. (2013). *The intersection of disability, achievement, and equity: A system review of Special Education in the TDSB* (Report No. 12/13–12). Toronto: Toronto District School Board.
- Brown, R. S., Parekh, G., & Marmureanu, C. (2016). *Special education in the Toronto District School Board: Trends and comparisons to Ontario* (Report No. 16/17-07). Toronto District School Board.  
<https://www.tdsb.on.ca/Portals/research/docs/reports/SpecialEducation%20in%20TDSB%20-%20TrendsComparisons%20to%20Ontario%202009-15.pdf>
- Brown, R. S., Tam, G., & Safari, A. (2017). *Grade 9 cohort special education, 2008–16. Fact sheet 4, November 2017*. Toronto District School Board.  
<https://www.tdsb.on.ca/Portals/research/docs/reports/FS4%20Grade%209%20Cohort%20Special%20Education%20Needs%202008-16%20FINAL.pdf>
- Brown, R. S., Yau, M., Xi, Y., Parekh, G., & Tam, G. (2017). *Elementary at-risk status and post-secondary access in the Toronto District School Board, 2000–2013* [Paper presentation]. Society for Longitudinal and Lifecourse Studies (SLSS) 2017 Annual Conference, University of Stirling, Scotland.
- Brown, R.S., Parekh, G., & Abdulkarim, F. (2021). *Special Education in the TDSB: A re-examination of system trends*. Technical Report. York University. Prepared for the Toronto District School Board. Toronto: Ontario.
- Brown, R. S., Parekh, G; & Zheng, S. (forthcoming). *Middle-school decisions and post-secondary access: Exploring the role of modified curriculum in mathematics* (panel co-chair/organizer)[Paper presentation]. Canadian Society for the Study of Higher Education, Congress. London, Ontario.  
\*scheduled for spring 2020, but cancelled due to Covid
- Brulles, D., Saunders, R., & Cohen, S. J. (2010). Improving performance for gifted students in a cluster grouping model. *Journal for the Education of the Gifted*, 34(2), 327–350. <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ910197.pdf>
- Campbell, F. M. (2009). *Contours of ableism: The production of disability and abledness*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Coalition for Alternatives to Streaming in Education. (n.d.). CASE Fact Sheet and Recommendations. Retrieved August 26, 2021, from  
[https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5ee2aedfd4916c68b6bb2c26/t/60e384cfad15b92d09754e47/1625523434220/CASE\\_Reccomendations\\_2021.pdf](https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5ee2aedfd4916c68b6bb2c26/t/60e384cfad15b92d09754e47/1625523434220/CASE_Reccomendations_2021.pdf)
- Christensen, C. (1996). Disabled, handicapped or disordered: “What’s in a name?” In C. Christensen & F. Rizvi (Eds.), *Disability and the dilemmas of education and justice* (pp. 63–78). Open University Press.
- Chupik, J., & Wright, D. (2006). Treating the “idiot” child in early 20th-century Ontario. *Disability and Society*, 21(1), 77–90.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/09687590500375481>
- Connor, D. J. (2013). Who “owns” dis/ability? The cultural work of critical special education as insider–outsiders. *Theory & Research in Social Education*, 41(4), 494–513. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00933104.2013.838741>

- Connor, D. J. (2017). Who is responsible for the racialized practices evident within (special) education and what can be done to change them? *Theory into Practice*, 56(3), 226–233. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00405841.2017.1336034>
- Crenshaw, K. (1989). Demarginalizing the intersection of race and sex: A Black feminist critique of antidiscrimination doctrine, feminist theory and antiracist politics. *University of Chicago Legal Forum*, 1989(1), 139–167. <https://chicagounbound.uchicago.edu/uclf/vol1989/iss1/8>
- Danforth, S., Taff, S., & Ferguson, P. M. (2006). Place, profession, and program in the history of special education curriculum. In E. A. Brantlinger (Ed.), *Who benefits from special education? Remediating (fixing) other people's children* (pp. 1–26). Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Davis, L. P., & Museus, S. D. (2019). What is deficit thinking? An analysis of conceptualizations of deficit thinking and implications for scholarly research. *Currents*, 1(1), 117–130. <http://dx.doi.org/10.3998/currents.17387731.0001.110>
- DeMatthews, D. (2020). Addressing racism and ableism in schools: A DisCrit leadership framework for principals. *The Clearing House: A Journal of Educational Strategies, Issues and Ideas*, 93(1), 27–34. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00098655.2019.1690419>
- De Valenzuela, J. S., Copeland, S. R., Qi, C. H., & Park, M. (2006). Examining educational equity: Revisiting the disproportionate representation of minority students in special education. *Exceptional Children*, 72(4), 425–441. <https://doi.org/10.1177/001440290607200403>
- DiGiacomo, M., Davidson, P. M., Abbott, P., Delaney, P., Dharmendra, T., McGrath, S. J., Delaney, J., & Vincent, F. (2013). Childhood disability in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples: A literature review. *International Journal for Equity in Health*, 12(7), 1–18. <https://doi.org/10.1186/1475-9276-12-7>
- Durst, D. (2006). *Urban Aboriginal families of children with disabilities: Social inclusion or exclusion? Participatory research: Working together for the inclusion of Aboriginal families of children with disabilities*. National Association of Friendship Centres. <https://indigenousworks.ca/sites/ahrc/files/attachments/Report-NAFC-Disability.pdf>
- Ellis, J. (2013). “Inequalities of children in original endowment”: How intelligence testing transformed early special education in a North American city school system. *History of Education Quarterly*, 53(4), 401–429. <https://doi.org/10.1111/hoeq.12035>
- Ellis, J. (2019). *A class by themselves? The origins of special education in Toronto and beyond*. University of Toronto Press.
- Ellis, J., & Axelrod, P. (2016). Continuity and change: The many factors in special education policy development in Toronto public schools, 1945 to the present. *Teachers College Record*, 118(2), 1–42.
- Erevelles, N., Kanga, A., & Middleton, R. (2006). How does it feel to be a problem? Race, disability, and exclusion in educational policy. In E. Brantlinger (Ed.),

- Who benefits from special education? Remediating (fixing) other people's children. Studies in curriculum theory series* (pp. 77–100). Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Erevelles, N. (2014). Crippin' Jim Crow: Disability, dis-location, and the school-to-prison pipeline. In L. Ben-Moshe, C. Chapman, & A. C. Carey (Eds.), *Disability incarcerated: Imprisonment and disability in the United States and Canada* (pp. 81–99). Palgrave Macmillan.
- Erevelles, N., Grace, E. J. & Parekh, G. (2019). Disability as meta curriculum: Ontologies, epistemologies, and transformative praxis, *Curriculum Inquiry*, 49(4), 357-372, DOI: [10.1080/03626784.2019.1664078](https://doi.org/10.1080/03626784.2019.1664078)
- Ferri, B. A., & Connor, D. J. (2005). Tools of exclusion: Race, disability, and (re)segregated education. *Teachers College Record*, 107(3), 453–474.
- Fitzgerald, A. (2020). *Antiracism and universal design for learning: Building expressways to success*. CAST Professional Publishing.
- Furman, G. C. (2004). The ethic of community. *Journal of Educational Administration*, 42(2), 215–235. <https://doi.org/10.1108/09578230410525612>
- Gallagher-Mackay, K. (2017). *Data infrastructure for studying equity of access to postsecondary education in Ontario*. Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario. <https://heqco.ca/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/FINAL-Data-Infrastructure.pdf>
- Gay, G. (2010). Classroom practices for teaching diversity: An example from Washington State (United States). In *Educating Teachers for Diversity: Meeting the Challenge* (pp. 257–280), OECD Publishing. <https://doi.org/10.1787/9789264079731-15-en>
- Gaztambide-Fernández, R., Saifer, A., & Desai, C. (2013). “Talent” and the misrecognition of social advantage in specialized arts education. *Roeper Review*, 35(2), 124–135. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02783193.2013.766964>
- Goodley, D. (2014). *Dis/ability studies: Theorising disablism and ableism*. Routledge.
- Gould, S. J. (1996). *The mismeasure of man*. W. W. Norton.
- Government of Ontario. (2018). *Anti-racism data standards: Data standards for the identification and monitoring of systemic racism* (Order in Council 897/2018). <https://www.ontario.ca/page/anti-racism-data-standards-order-council-8972018>
- Grue, L. (2007). Cultural locations of disability [Review of the book *Cultural locations of disability*, by S. L. Snyder & D. T. Mitchell]. *Scandinavian Journal of Disability Research*, 9(2), 125–127. <http://doi.org/10.1080/15017410701345365>
- Guralnick, M. J. (2004). Effectiveness of early intervention for vulnerable children: A developmental perspective. In M. A. Feldman (Ed.), *Early intervention: The essential readings* (pp. 9–50). Blackwell.
- Guralnick, M. J. (2011). Why early intervention works: A systems perspective. *Infants & Young Children*, 24(1), 6–28. <https://doi.org/10.1097/IYC.0b013e3182002cfe>





- Kaul, M. (2019, June 4). *Keeping students at the center with culturally relevant performance assessments*. Next Generation Learning Challenges.  
<https://www.nextgenlearning.org/articles/keeping-students-at-the-center-with-culturally-relevant-performance-assessments>
- Kendi, I. X. (Host). (2021, June 9). *Ableism & racism: Roots of the same tree* [Audio podcast episode]. In *Be antiracist*. Pushkin.  
<https://www.pushkin.fm/episode/ableism-racism-roots-of-the-same-tree/>
- King, M., Smith, A., & Gracey, M. (2009). Indigenous health part 2: The underlying causes of the health gap. *Lancet*, 374(9683), 76–85.  
[https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736\(09\)60827-8](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736(09)60827-8)
- Ladson-Billings, G. (1995a). But that's just good teaching! The case for culturally relevant pedagogy. *Theory into Practice*, 34(3), 159–165.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/00405849509543675>
- Ladson-Billings, G. (1995b). Toward a theory of culturally relevant pedagogy. *American Educational Research Journal*, 32(3), 465–491.  
<https://doi.org/10.3102/00028312032003465>
- Ladson-Billings, G. (2014). Culturally relevant pedagogy 2.0: A.k.a. the remix. *Harvard Educational Review*, 84(1), 74–84.  
<https://doi.org/10.17763/haer.84.1.p2rj131485484751>
- Ladwig, J. G., & McPherson, A. (2017). The anatomy of ability. *Curriculum Inquiry*, 47(4), 344–362. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03626784.2017.1368352>
- Law Commission of Ontario. (2012). *Introducing the framework. A framework for the law as it affects persons with disabilities*. [www.lco-cdo.org/en/disabilities-final-report-framework-introduction](http://www.lco-cdo.org/en/disabilities-final-report-framework-introduction).
- Leonardo, Z., & Broderick, A. (2011) Smartness as property: A critical exploration of intersections between whiteness and disability studies. *Teachers College Record*, 113(10), 2206–2232.
- Lovern, L. L., & Locust, C. (2013). *Native American communities on health and disability: Borderland dialogues*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Lynch, M. (2016, April 6). *An ethical framework for leadership practice*. The Edvocate. <https://www.theedadvocate.org/an-ethical-framework-for-leadership-practice/>
- MacDonald, D. B. (2019). *The sleeping giant awakens: Genocide, Indian residential schools, and the challenge of conciliation*. University of Toronto Press.  
<https://doi.org/10.3138/9781487518042>
- Macniven R., Jeffries, T. L. Jr., Meharg, D., Talbot, F., Rambaldini, B., Edwards, E., Hickie, I. B., Sloan, M., & Gwynne, K. (2020). What solutions exist for developmental delays facing Indigenous children globally? A co-designed systematic review. *Children*, 10(7), Article 285.  
<https://doi.org/10.3390/children7120285>
- Mansfield, K. C. (2015). Giftedness as property: Troubling whiteness, wealth, and gifted education in the United States. *International Journal of Multicultural Education*, 17(1), 1–18. <http://dx.doi.org/10.18251/ijme.v17i1.841>

- Mattson, L., & Caffrey, L. (2001). *Barriers to equal education for aboriginal learners: A review of the literature*. British Columbia Humans Rights Commission. <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED459020.pdf>
- McCain, M. N. (2020). *Early years study 4: Thriving kids, thriving society*. Margaret and Wallace McCain Family Foundation. [https://earlyyearsstudy.ca/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/EYS4-Report\\_01\\_15\\_2020.pdf](https://earlyyearsstudy.ca/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/EYS4-Report_01_15_2020.pdf)
- McClure, C. T. (2007). Ability grouping and acceleration in gifted education. *District Administration*, 43(8), 24–25.
- Mitchell, D. (2015). *Education that fits: Review of international trends in the education of students with special educational needs* (2nd ed.). University of Canterbury. <https://www.education.vic.gov.au/Documents/about/department/psdlitreview/Educationthatfits.pdf>
- Muhammad, G. (2020). *Cultivating genius: An equity framework for culturally and historically responsive literacy*. Scholastic.
- Murray, K., De Jesus, S., Armson, S., and Cameron, D. H. (2020). *Critical Conscious Practitioner Inquiry, Report for the Equity Secretariat, Ministry of Education, Ontario*. Toronto School Board
- National Centre for Disability and Journalism. (2021). *Disability Language Style Guide*. <https://ncdj.org/style-guide/#:~:text=AP%20style%3A%20%E2%80%9CDisabled%E2%80%9D%20is,describing%20someone%20as%20%E2%80%9Cchandicapped.%E2%80%9D>
- Nelson, S. E., & Wilson, K. (2017). The mental health of Indigenous peoples in Canada: A critical review of research. *Social Science & Medicine*, 176, 93–112. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.socscimed.2017.01.021>
- Newkirk, V. R., II. (2017, October 6). The language of white supremacy. *The Atlantic*. <https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2017/10/the-language-of-white-supremacy/542148/>
- Oakes, J. (2005). *Keeping track: How schools structure inequality* (2nd ed.). Yale University Press.
- Office of the Auditor General of Ontario. (2010). *2010 Annual Report of the Office of the Auditor General of Ontario*. Queen's Printer for Ontario. [https://www.auditor.on.ca/en/content/annualreports/arreports/en10/2010ar\\_en.pdf](https://www.auditor.on.ca/en/content/annualreports/arreports/en10/2010ar_en.pdf)
- Oliver, M. (1990). *Politics of disablement*. Macmillan Education.
- Onstad, K. (2020, September 19). Who gets to be gifted? *The Walrus*. <https://thewalrus.ca/who-gets-to-be-gifted/>
- Ontario College of Teachers. (2018). *Exploring leadership practices through case inquiry: Supporting inclusive schools*. [https://www.oct.ca/-/media/PDF/Exploring%20Leadership%20Practices%20through%20Case%20Inquiry/ExplLdrshpPrctcsCslnqry\\_en\\_web.pdf](https://www.oct.ca/-/media/PDF/Exploring%20Leadership%20Practices%20through%20Case%20Inquiry/ExplLdrshpPrctcsCslnqry_en_web.pdf)

- Ontario Council of Agencies Serving Immigrants. (2019, March 2019). *New fact sheets show growing racial disparities in Canada* [Press release].  
<https://ocasi.org/new-fact-sheets-show-growing-racial-disparities-canada>
- Ontario Human Rights Commission. (2010). *Count me in! Collecting human rights-based data*. Government of Ontario.  
[http://www3.ohrc.on.ca/sites/default/files/attachments/Count me in%21 Coll  
ecting human rights based data.pdf](http://www3.ohrc.on.ca/sites/default/files/attachments/Count%20me%20in%20Collecting%20human%20rights%20based%20data.pdf)
- Ontario Human Rights Commission. (2014). *Policy on preventing discrimination based on mental health disabilities and addictions*. Government of Ontario.  
[http://www.ohrc.on.ca/en/policy-preventing-discrimination-based-mental-  
health-disabilities-and-addictions](http://www.ohrc.on.ca/en/policy-preventing-discrimination-based-mental-health-disabilities-and-addictions)
- Ontario Human Rights Commission. (2018). *Policy on accessible education for students with disabilities*. Government of Ontario.  
<http://www.ohrc.on.ca/en/policy-accessible-education-students-disabilities>
- Ontario Ministry of Education. (2004). *The Individual Education Plan (IEP): A resource guide*. Queen's Printer for Ontario.  
[http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/general/elemsec/speced/guide/resource/iepres  
guid.pdf](http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/general/elemsec/speced/guide/resource/iepresguid.pdf)
- Ontario Ministry of Education. (2010). *Growing success: Assessment, evaluation, and reporting in Ontario schools*. Queen's Printer for Ontario.  
<http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/policyfunding/growSuccess.pdf>
- Ontario Ministry of Education. (2014). *Identification of and program planning for students with learning disabilities* (Policy/Program Memorandum No. 8).  
<https://www.idaontario.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/Ontario-PPM8.pdf>
- Ontario Ministry of Education. (2017). *Special education in Ontario (Draft Version, 2017): Part E: The Individual Education Plan (IEP)*.  
[http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/document/policy/os/2017/spec\\_ed\\_6.html](http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/document/policy/os/2017/spec_ed_6.html)
- Ontario Ministry of Education. (2019). *The Ontario Curriculum, Grades 1–8: Health and Physical Education*. Queen's Printer for Ontario.  
[http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/curriculum/elementary/2019-health-physical-  
education-grades-1to8.pdf](http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/curriculum/elementary/2019-health-physical-education-grades-1to8.pdf)
- Ontario Ministry of Education. (2020). *High-impact instructional practices in mathematics*. Queen's Printer for Ontario.  
<http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/teachers/high-impact-instruction-math.pdf>
- Ontario Ministry of Education. (2021). *2021-22 Education funding: A guide to the special education grant*. [http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/funding/2122/special-  
education-guide-2021-22.pdf](http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/funding/2122/special-education-guide-2021-22.pdf)
- Ontario Public Service. (2016). *Anti-Racism Directorate*. Government of Ontario.  
<https://www.ontario.ca/page/anti-racism-directorate>
- Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development. (2012). Does money buy strong performance in PISA? *PISA in Focus*, 13, 1–4. OECD Publishing.  
<https://doi.org/10.1787/5k9fhmfzc4xx-en>
- Parekh, G. (2013). *Structured pathways: An exploration of programs of study, school-wide and in-school programs, as well as promotion and transference*

- across secondary schools in the Toronto District School Board (Report No. 13/14-03). Toronto District School Board.  
<https://www.tdsb.on.ca/Portals/research/docs/reports/StructuredPathways.pdf>
- Parekh, G. (2014). *Social citizenship and disability: Identity, belonging, and the structural organization of education* [Doctoral dissertation, York University]. YorkSpace. <https://yorkspace.library.yorku.ca/xmlui/handle/10315/28217>
- Parekh, G. (2019). *Transformative action towards equity: Strategic remodeling of special education programming to support students' academic and social development*. York University.
- Parekh, G., & Brown, R. S. (2017). *Research advocating for greater inclusion in the TDSB*. Toronto District School Board.  
<https://www.tdsb.on.ca/Portals/research/docs/reports/HSPInclusionFactSheet20Jun17.pdf>
- Parekh, G., & Brown, R. S. (2019). Changing lanes: The relationship between special education placement and students' academic futures. *Educational Policy*, 33(1), 111–135. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0895904818812772>
- Parekh, G., & Brown, R. S. (2020). Naming and claiming: The tension between institutional and self-identification of disability. *Canadian Journal of Disability Studies*, 9(5), 347–379. <https://doi.org/10.15353/cjds.v9i5.701>
- Parekh, G., Brown, R. S., & Robson, K. (2017). The social construction of giftedness: The intersectional relationship between whiteness, economic privilege, and the identification of gifted. *Canadian Journal of Disability Studies*, 7(2), 1–33. <https://doi.org/10.15353/cjds.v7i2.421>
- Parekh, G., Brown, R. S., & Zheng, S. (2018). Learning skills, system equity, and implicit bias within Ontario, Canada. *Educational Policy*, 35(3), 395–421. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0895904818813303>
- Parekh, G., & Underwood, K. (2015). *Inclusion: Creating school and classroom communities where everyone belongs. Research, tips, and tools for educators and administrators* (Report No. 15/16-09). Toronto District School Board.  
[https://www.tdsb.on.ca/Portals/research/docs/reports/Inclusion\\_Creating%20Classroom%20and%20School%20Communities.pdf](https://www.tdsb.on.ca/Portals/research/docs/reports/Inclusion_Creating%20Classroom%20and%20School%20Communities.pdf)
- Pichette, J., Deller, F., & Colyar, J. (2020). *Destreaming in Ontario: History, evidence and educator reflections*. Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario.  
<https://heqco.ca/pub/destreaming-in-ontario-history-evidence-and-educator-reflections/>
- Piepzna-Samarasinha, L. L. (2018). *Care work: Dreaming disability justice*. Arsenal Pulp Press.
- Podlucká, D. (2020). Transformative anti-ableist pedagogy for social justice: Charting a critical agenda for inclusive education. *Outlines. Critical Practice Studies*, 21(1), 69–97. <https://tidsskrift.dk/outlines/article/view/118234>
- Provincial Advocate for Children and Youth. (2016). *We have something to say: Young people and their families speak out about special needs and change*. Office of the Provincial Advocate for Children and Youth.

<https://youthrex.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/We-Have-Something-To-Say-Report-EN.pdf>

- Redding, C., & Grissom, J. A. (2021). Do students in gifted programs perform better? Linking gifted program participation to achievement and nonachievement outcomes. *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis*, 43(3), 520–544. <https://doi.org/10.3102/01623737211008919>
- Reid, D. K., & Knight, M. G. (2006). Disability justifies exclusion of minority students: A critical history grounded in disability studies. *Educational Researcher*, 35(6), 18–23. <https://doi.org/10.3102/0013189X035006018>
- Reid, L., Bennett, S., Specht, J., White, R., Somma, M., Li, X., Lattanzio, R., Gavan, K., Kyle, G., Porder, G., & Patel, A. (2018). *If inclusion means everyone, why not me?* Community Living Ontario. [https://communitylivingontario.ca/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/If\\_Inclusion\\_Means\\_Everyone\\_Why\\_Not\\_Me\\_FINAL\\_s.pdf](https://communitylivingontario.ca/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/If_Inclusion_Means_Everyone_Why_Not_Me_FINAL_s.pdf)
- Reid, L., Parekh, G., & Lattanzio, R. (2020). A relic of the past: Identification, placement and review committees in Ontario's education system. *Canadian Journal of Educational Administration and Policy*, 194, 51–63. <https://journalhosting.ucalgary.ca/index.php/cjeap/article/view/69850>
- Rix, J., & Ingham, N. (2021). The impact of education selection according to notions of intelligence: A systematic literature review. *International Journal of Educational Research Open*, 2(2), Article 100037. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijedro.2021.100037>
- Robertson, E. L. (2016). Cultural approaches to evaluating Indigenous early intervention programs: A case study of Aboriginal Head Start [Doctoral dissertation, University of Alberta]. ERA: Education and Research Archive. <https://doi.org/10.7939/R3NC5SJ23>
- Robinson, K., Hendry, M., Eysers, K., Reble, L., & Bagg, K. (2012). The development of special education programs in the province of Ontario: 1950–2012. [https://www.curriculumhistory.org/Select\\_Subjects\\_in\\_the\\_History\\_of\\_Ontario\\_Education\\_files/The%20Development%20of%20Special%20Education%20Programs%20in%20the%20Province%20of%20Ontario%20-%201950%20-%202012.pdf](https://www.curriculumhistory.org/Select_Subjects_in_the_History_of_Ontario_Education_files/The%20Development%20of%20Special%20Education%20Programs%20in%20the%20Province%20of%20Ontario%20-%201950%20-%202012.pdf)
- Rountree, J., & Smith, A. (2016). Strength-based well-being indicators for Indigenous children and families: A literature review of Indigenous communities' identified well-being indicators. *American Indian and Alaska Native Mental Health Research*, 23(3), 206–220. <https://doi.org/10.5820/aian.2303.2016.206>
- Rubinoff, T. S. (2017). Reimagining teacher education's response to disability: From summer courses in auxiliary education to disability studies [Doctoral dissertation, York University]. YorkSpace. <https://yorkspace.library.yorku.ca/xmlui/handle/10315/33583>
- Samuels, E. (2014). *Fantasies of identification: Disability, gender, race*. New York University Press.
- Sapon-Shevin, M. (2014). How we respond to differences—and the difference it makes. In D. Lawrence-Brown & M. Sapon-Shevin (Eds.), *Condition critical:*

*Key principles for equitable and inclusive education* (pp. 29–45). Teachers College Press.

- Senior, S. (2013). “Traditionally, disability was not seen as such”: Writing and healing in the work of Mohegan medicine people. *Journal of Literary and Cultural Disability Studies*, 7(2), 213–229.
- Shah, V. (2018). Different numbers, different stories: Problematizing “gaps” in Ontario and the TDSB. *Canadian Journal of Educational Administration and Policy*, 187, 31–47.  
<https://journalhosting.ucalgary.ca/index.php/cjeap/article/view/43198>
- Shapiro, J. P., & Stefkovich, J. A. (2016). *Ethical Leadership and Decision Making in Education: Applying theoretical perspectives to complex dilemmas* (4<sup>th</sup> Edition). Routledge.
- Shifrer, D. (2013). Stigma of a label: Educational expectations for high school students labeled with learning disabilities. *Journal of Health and Social Behavior*, 54(4), 462–480. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022146513503346>
- Shifrer, D. (2016). Stigma and stratification limiting the math course progression of adolescents labeled with a learning disability. *Learning and Instruction*, 42, 47–57. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.learninstruc.2015.12.001>
- Sider, S., Maich, K., Morvan, J., Villella, M., Ling, P., & Repp, C. (2021). Inclusive school leadership: Examining the experiences of school principals in supporting students with special education needs. *Journal of Research in Special Educational Needs*, 21(2). <https://doi.org/10.1111/1471-3802.12515>
- Skiba, R. J., Arredondo, M. I., & Williams, N. T. (2014). More than a metaphor: The contribution of exclusionary discipline to a school-to-prison pipeline. *Equity & Excellence in Education*, 47(4), 546–564.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/10665684.2014.958965>
- Skiba, R. J., Arredondo, M. I., & Williams, N. T. (2017). In and of itself a risk factor: Exclusionary discipline and the school-to-prison pipeline. In K. J. Fasching-Varner, L. L. Martin, R. W. Mitchell, K. P. Bennett-Haron, & A. Daneshzadeh (Eds.), *Understanding, dismantling, and disrupting the prison-to-school pipeline* (pp. 111–130). Lexington Books.
- Skiba, R. J., Poloni-Staudinger, L., Gallini, S., Simmons, A. B., & Feggins-Azziz, R. (2006). Disparate access: The disproportionality of African American students with disabilities across educational environments. *Exceptional Children*, 72(4), 411–424. <https://doi.org/10.1177/001440290607200402>
- Sloan, K. (2013, May 9). *The fallacy of intelligence and genetic determinism*. The Center for Bioethics and Culture Network. <https://www.cbc-network.org/2013/05/the-fallacy-of-intelligence-and-genetic-determinism/>
- Smylie, J., & Adomako, P. (Eds.). (2009). *Indigenous children’s health report: Health assessment in action*. Centre for Research on Inner City Health.  
[https://epub.sub.uni-hamburg.de/epub/volltexte/2011/8981/pdf/indigenous\\_children.pdf](https://epub.sub.uni-hamburg.de/epub/volltexte/2011/8981/pdf/indigenous_children.pdf)

- Snoddon, K. (2020a). The social and epistemological violence of inclusive education for deaf learners. *Canadian Journal of Disability Studies*, 9(4), 185–213. <https://doi.org/10.15353/cjds.v9i5.695>
- Snoddon, K. (2020b). Sign language planning and policy in Ontario teacher education. *Language Policy*. Advance online publication. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10993-020-09569-7>
- Snoddon, K., & Murray, J. J. (2019). The Salamanca Statement and sign language education for deaf learners 25 years on. *International Journal of Inclusive Education*, 23(7–8), 740–753. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13603116.2019.1622807>
- Steenbergen-Hu, S., Makel, M. C., & Olszewski-Kubilius, P. (2016). What one hundred years of research says about the effects of ability grouping and acceleration on K–12 students' academic achievement: Findings of two second-order meta-analyses. *Review of Educational Research*, 86(4), 849–899. <https://doi.org/10.3102/0034654316675417>
- Strong-Boag, V. (2007). “Children of adversity”: Disabilities and child welfare in Canada from the nineteenth to the twenty-first century. *Journal of Family History*, 32(4), 413–432. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0363199007304511>
- The Associated Press. (2021). *The APStylebook*, 55<sup>th</sup> Edition. The Associated Press.
- Tomlinson, C. A., & Imbeau, M. B. (2010). *Leading and managing a differentiated classroom*. ASCD. <http://www1.kdsi.org/strategiccpd/wp-content/uploads/2014/09/Differentiated-Classroom.pdf>
- Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada. (2015). *Honouring the truth, reconciling for the future: Summary of the final report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada*. [https://ehprnh2mwo3.exactdn.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/Executive\\_Summary\\_English\\_Web.pdf](https://ehprnh2mwo3.exactdn.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/Executive_Summary_English_Web.pdf)
- Underwood, K. (2010). Involving and engaging parents of children with IEPs. *Exceptionality Education International*, 20(1), 18–36. <https://doi.org/10.5206/eei.v20i1.7655>
- Underwood, K. (2013). Everyone is welcome: Inclusive early childhood education and care. In *Think, feel, act: Lessons from research about young children* (pp. 31–38). Ontario Ministry of Education. <https://files.ontario.ca/edu-think-feel-act-lessons-from-research-about-young-children-en-2021-01-29.pdf>
- Underwood, K., Frankel, E., Spalding, K., & Brophy, K. (2018). Is the right to early intervention being honoured? A study of family experiences with early childhood services. *Canadian Journal of Children's Rights*, 5(1), 56-70. DOI: 10.22215/cjcr.v5i1.1226.
- Underwood, K., Frankel, E., Parekh, G., & Janus, M. (2019). Transitioning work of families: Understanding trans-institutional power in early childhood programs and services. *Exceptionality Education International*, 29(3), 135–153. <https://doi.org/10.5206/eei.v29i3.9391>

- Underwood, K., Ineese-Nash, N., & Haché, A. (2019). Colonialism in early education, care, and intervention: A knowledge synthesis. *Journal of Childhood Studies*, 44(4), 21–35. <https://doi.org/10.18357/jcs444201919209>
- Underwood, K., Smith, A., & Martin, J. (2019). Institutional mapping as a tool for resource consultation. *Journal of Early Childhood Research*, 17(2), 129–139. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1476718X18818205>
- United Nations. (1989). *Convention on the rights of the child*. Treaty Series, vol. 1577, p. 3. <https://www.refworld.org/docid/3ae6b38f0.html>
- United Nations. (2007). *Convention on the rights of persons with disabilities: Resolution adopted by the General Assembly*. A/RES/61/106. <https://www.refworld.org/docid/45f973632.html>
- United Nations. (2016). *Convention on the rights of persons with disabilities, general comment no. 4. Article 24: Right to inclusive education*. Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD). <https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/HRBodies/CRPD/GC/RighttoEducation/CRPD-C-GC-4.doc>
- World Health Organization. (n.d.). Disability [https://www.who.int/health-topics/disability#tab=tab\\_1](https://www.who.int/health-topics/disability#tab=tab_1)
- Winton, S. (2018). Challenging fundraising, challenging inequity: Contextual constraints on advocacy groups' policy influences. *Critical Studies in Education*, 59(1), 54–73. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17508487.2016.1176062>
- Yau, M., O'Reilly, J., Rosolen, L. & Archer, B. (2011). *Census portraits: Understanding students' ethno-racial backgrounds: Aboriginal students*. Toronto District School Board. <https://www.tdsb.on.ca/Portals/research/docs/reports/PortraitsAboriginal.pdf>
- Yau, M., Rosolen, L., Archer, B., & Kozovski, K. (2014, June). TDSB Students (Grades 7-12): School and Community. *Facts: 2011-12 Student & Parent Census 7*. <https://www.tdsb.on.ca/Portals/research/docs/2011-12CensusFactSheet7SchoolSafety02Jun14.pdf>
- Yau, M., Rosolen, L., & Archer, B. (2015). *Census portraits: Understanding our students' backgrounds: Students with special education needs report* (Report No. 14/15-25). Toronto District School Board. [https://www.tdsb.on.ca/Portals/research/docs/reports/Portrait\\_Census2011-12\\_StudWithSpecEdNeeds\\_FINAL\\_report.pdf](https://www.tdsb.on.ca/Portals/research/docs/reports/Portrait_Census2011-12_StudWithSpecEdNeeds_FINAL_report.pdf)

## Legislation

- Anti-Racism Act*, S.O. 2017, c. 15. <https://www.ontario.ca/laws/statute/17a15>
- Human Rights Code*, R.S.O. 1990, c. H.19. <https://www.ontario.ca/laws/statute/90h19>
- Ontario Education Act*, R.S.O. 1990, c. E.2. <https://www.ontario.ca/laws/statute/90e02>



## **Cases**

*B.C. v. Durham Catholic District School Board*, 2014 HRTO 42 (CanLII) at para 224.

*J.B. v. Toronto District School Board*, 2011 HRTO 1985 (CanLII) at para 41–43.

*Moore v. British Columbia (Education)*, 2012 SCC 61, [2012] 3 S.C.R. 360 at para 28.

*Moore v. British Columbia (Education)*, 2012 SCC 61, [2012] 3 S.C.R. 360 at para 33.

*WS v. Ottawa Catholic School Board*, 2019 HRTO 619 (CanLII).

## **Cited Organizations**

Bodies in Translation <https://bodiesintranslation.ca/>

Canadian Research Center on Inclusive Education

<https://www.inclusiveeducationresearch.ca/>

Coalition for Alternatives to Streaming in Education <https://www.endstreaming.org/>

Community Living Ontario <https://communitylivingontario.ca/en/>

Council of Canadians with Disabilities <http://www.ccdonline.ca/en/humanrights/>

Dawn Canada <https://dawncanada.net/>

Disability Justice Network of Ontario <https://www.djno.ca/>

Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario <https://heqco.ca/>

Inclusive Education Canada <https://inclusiveeducation.ca/>

Lead to Include <https://www.leadtoinclude.org/>

Ontario College of Teachers <https://www.oct.ca/>

Ontario Human Rights Commission [OHRC] <http://www.ohrc.on.ca/en>

Parents of Black Children <https://parentsofblackchildren.org/>

Sins Invalid <https://www.sinsinvalid.org/>

Tangled Art + Disability <https://tangledarts.org/>

## **Reviewers**

This document was distributed across Ontario for broad consultation with key stakeholders. With immense gratitude, we would like to thank the over 40 reviewers, many of whom are named below, who took the time to provide us with their valuable feedback.

Alison Morse	Senior Manager - Advocacy, Easter Seals
Alison Smith	PhD Candidate, Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, University of Toronto
Anamika Baijnath	Senior Advisor, Ontario Association of Social Worker
Andrea McAuley	Superintendent, Durham District School Board
Angela Nardi-Addesa	Superintendent of Special Education and Inclusion, Toronto District School Board

Arlene Haché	Executive Director, Keepers of the Circle
Claudette Rutherford	Co-Founder, Parents of Black Children
Clovis Grant	Co-Founder, Black Parent Support Group; President, 360 Kids
Dagney Gardiner	Vice-Principal, Toronto District School Board
Deborah Terrance	Mohawks of Akwesasne, Independent First Nations (IFN)
Iyanuoluwa Akinrinola	Elementary Teacher, Equity Advocate, Education Team Member-Parents of Black Children (PoBC)
Jack Nigro	Superintendent, Durham District School Board
Jacqui Getfield	PhD Candidate, University of Toronto
Jeff Hall	Vice-Principal, Peel District School Board
Juliet Robinson	Vantage Point Consulting
Letitia F. Taylor	Special Education Advisory Committee Member
Lindy Zaretsky	PhD, President of Reaching Education Resolutions Inc.
Lorie Laroche	University of Ottawa
Maria M. Peixoto	MSW RSW, Toronto Catholic District School Board
Mia Francis	Provincial Policy Analyst, Mohawks of Akwesasne, Independent First Nations (IFN)
Monday Gala	PhD; Principal, Toronto District School Board
Nicole West-Burns	Educational Consulting
Patricia Codner	Remote Student & Parent Support Lead, SMHO
Patty Douglas	Associate Professor, Brandon University
Sherri Kabatay	Education Director, Grand Council Treaty #3
Sherron Grant	Co-Founder, Black Parent Support Group
Stephanie Van Egmond	Toronto District School Board
Steve Sider	Faculty of Education, Wilfrid Laurier University
Tracey Grose	Culturally Responsive Practices Lead, School Mental Health Ontario
Vidya Shah	Assistant Professor, Faculty of Education, York University

## **Writing Team**

Author: **Dr. David Cameron**

Institution: Toronto District School Board

Bio: David Cameron is the Senior Manager of the Research and Development Department in the Toronto District School Board. He is an educator and education policy sociologist with research interests in school change and the interrelationship between educational policy intentions or design and peoples' experiences within policy frameworks. David has twenty years of experience working in the school systems of Ontario, the US, and the UK. Most recently, David worked as a Director of Research for People for Education, a non-governmental organization think tank

that advocates for public education. David believes that societal health and human rights depend on an enriched and vibrant public education system.

**Author: Alison Gaymes San Vicente**

Institution: Toronto District School Board

Bio: Alison Gaymes San Vicente is currently a superintendent who works to disrupt educational practices that continue to disadvantage historically underserved students. Her disposition, anchored in critical pedagogy, has led to a secondment at York University's Faculty of Education and her previous role as a Centrally Assigned Principal for Principal Coaching, Equity & School Improvement with the Toronto District School Board. Her passion has also been the impetus for her work in the areas of girls' mentorship, Black Student Excellence, and challenging educational streaming in the elementary and secondary panel.

**Author: Angelique Gordon**

Institution: York University

Bio: Angelique Gordon is a PhD candidate in the Graduate Program in Critical Disability Studies at York University. Her research interests include Blackness, disability, education, and student wellbeing. As a teaching assistant in the School of Health Policy and Management, Faculty of Health, York University, Angelique has taught undergraduate students statistics, mathematical concepts, research design, and research methodology. In addition, Angelique's background in the fields of social work, biology, and psychology further facilitates her multi-disciplinary approach to critical disability studies work and scholarship.

**Author: Nicole Ineese-Nash**

Institution: Ryerson University

Bio: Nicole Ineese-Nash is an Assistant Professor cross-appointed to the schools of Early Childhood Studies and Child and Youth Care at Ryerson University. As an Anishinaabe (Oji-Cree) researcher and educator, Nicole's work focuses on Indigenous experiences of social systems, understandings of land knowledge, and community-based research. Through an interdisciplinary Indigenous lens, Nicole's research explores Indigenous youth and child experiences in various educational contexts including land education programs, disability services, schools, and community settings. Nicole is particularly interested in supporting Indigenous youth to connect with their ancestry, land, and cultures as a way to promote wellness and has founded Finding Our Power Together, a national non-profit organization, in order to support Indigenous youth in realizing their own goals.

**Author: Dr. Carl E. James**

Institution: York University

Bio: Carl E. James holds the Jean Augustine Chair in Education, Community and Diaspora in the Faculty of Education, York University. He holds cross-appointments in the Graduate Programs in Sociology and Social and Political Thought. He has

published extensively on the ways in which race and its intersection with gender, class, citizenship, and other identify constructs – mediated by accessible and equitable opportunities – account for the lived experiences and educational outcomes of racialized people, and Black youth particularly. One of James’s recent publications is *Colour Matters: Essays on the Experiences, Education, and Pursuits of Black Youth* (2021).

**Author: Karen Murray**

Institution: Toronto District School Board

Bio: Karen Murray is the Centrally Assigned Principal for the Centre of Excellence for Black Student Achievement in the Toronto District School Board. Karen leads initiatives on Black Students’ Success and Excellence from K–12 and most recently was appointed by the Ontario College of Teachers to lead the development of an Additional Qualification on Addressing Anti-Black Racism. In 2020, Karen became one of the 100 Accomplished Black Canadian Women.

**Author: Dr. Gillian Parekh**

Institution: York University

Bio: Dr. Gillian Parekh is an Assistant Professor and Canada Research Chair in Disability Studies in Education (Tier 2) within the Faculty of Education at York University. Gillian is cross-appointed with York’s Graduate Program in Critical Disability Studies and holds a status appointment within the Department of Social Justice Education at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, University of Toronto. As a previous teacher in special education and research coordinator with the Toronto District School Board, Gillian has conducted extensive system and school-based research in Toronto in the areas of structural equity, special education, and academic streaming. In particular, her work explores how schools construct and respond to disability, as well as how students are organized across programs and systems.

**Author: Luke Reid**

Institution: University of Toronto

Bio: Luke Reid is a human rights lawyer and a social worker who has spent his career serving clients with disabilities. Previously, Luke led ARCH Disability Law Centre’s education law practice and is currently in private practice representing students with disabilities in conflicts with school boards. Luke has represented clients in numerous fora including the Human Rights Tribunal of Ontario, the Canadian Human Rights Tribunal, the Superior Court of Justice, and the Supreme Court of Canada. He has led multiple law reform and research projects on disability-related issues in the education system and has significant expertise in human rights, education, and accessibility law. Luke has recently returned to complete his PhD in Social Work at the University of Toronto and is conducting research on the human rights issues that students with disabilities confront in the education system.

Author: **Jason To**

Institution: Toronto District School Board

Bio: Jason To is a secondary mathematics and science educator who has challenged the practice of academic streaming and promoted greater inclusion at the school and system levels in the Toronto District School Board since 2014. Jason has created videos and written articles on destreaming and has also presented in provincial mathematics conferences and to leadership in numerous Ontario school boards on destreaming in secondary mathematics.

Author: **Kathryn Underwood**

Institution: Ryerson University

Bio: Kathryn Underwood is a Professor in the School of Early Childhood Studies at Ryerson University. Through critical disability theory, Kathryn investigates how society responds to and constructs childhood in social institutions. Her interests are in human rights and education practice, particularly with regard to disability rights and inclusive education. The focus of her research has been on institutional constructions of disability in education and early childhood programs, the work of families to engage with disability service systems, and the intersectional identities of all disabled children. Recently, Kathryn has led a ten-year multi-sectoral research partnership conducting a longitudinal analysis of family experiences and the work of families who have disabled children.

### **Coordinating Support**

**Kim Tran**

Bio: Kim Tran is a Master of Education candidate at York University, the Project Coordinator for Critical Transitions, and an Occasional Teacher for the Toronto District School Board. Her research interests include Indigenous conservation, experiential education, place-based learning, and equity/policy issues in education. Kim continues to learn and unlearn as a new educator and as a settler, and she is passionate about furthering the ongoing equity work needed in education.

### **Data Visualization Support**

**Firrisaa Abdulkarim**

Bio: Firrisaa Abdulkarim is currently a PhD student in the Sociology Department at York University. He previously completed his BSc in psychology at York University, with a minor in economics. Throughout his educational journey, Firrisaa's research interest has always revolved around the intersection of inequality and race, particularly within the educational system. He has experience in community development, including international experience, and has been a part of several projects that tackle the issues that youth from marginalized communities face.

Copyediting services provided by **The Editing Company**,  
Toronto, [www.theeditingco.com](http://www.theeditingco.com)

French translation services provided by **Wordfrog Inc.** <https://www.wordfrog.ca/>